



Royal Order enhances diabetes care among school children

Our Correspondent
Muscat

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq has issued a Royal Order for the allocation of an annual budget to the Ministry of Health aimed at providing insulin pumps and electronic sensor devices to monitor glucose in diabetic children, marking a notable advancement in paediatric diabetes care in the sultanate.

The budget is marked for acquisition of these critical healthcare devices for children of school age, including those in pre-school and kindergarten and Omani students under 18 suffering from Type 1 diabetes. The state-of-the-art glucose monitoring sensors represent a leap forward in technology, offering precise control and management of diabetes symptoms and preventing the onset of severe complications.

Acknowledging the absence of a definitive cure for Type 1 diabetes, the initiative underscores the importance of modern medical technologies in managing the condition effectively. By mitigating serious complications, these interventions aim to improve the quality of life for affected children, enabling their active participation in school and social activities without the constant

burden of the disease.

Dr Hilal bin Ali al Sabti, Minister of Health, said the Royal Order reflected His Majesty the Sultan's ongoing commitment to elevating the standard of comprehensive healthcare for citizens. "This initiative significantly eases the daily challenges faced by children with Type 1 diabetes, ensuring a smoother coexistence with the condition and reducing the risk of life-threatening incidents caused by extreme blood sugar levels," Dr Sabti stated.

Annual budget allocated for insulin pumps, electronic sensors to monitor glucose in diabetic children

Introduction of electronic sensors and insulin pumps is heralded as a transformative step, not only facilitating a better management routine for diabetic children but also minimising the risk of long-term health issues affecting various organs, he added.

Echoing the view, Dr Madiha bint Ahmed al Shaibani, Minister of Education, described the Royal Order as a testament to His Majesty the Sultan's enduring concern for the well-being of Oman's children. "By providing these vital electronic sensors, we are not just offering a tool for health management but also ensuring that these students can pursue their education with dignity, peace of mind, and the full support of their families and school staff," Dr Madiha stated.

Isra'a Wal Miraj holiday on Thursday

Muscat - The Ministry of Labour has announced that Thursday, February 8, 2024 will be an official holiday for employees of units of the state's administrative apparatus and other legal entities, as well as establishments of the private sector, on the occasion of the blessed anniversary of Isra'a Wal Miraj. The ministry informed that employers may agree on terms to engage employees on the said holiday - if deemed necessary due to the nature of their work - provided they compensate the workers for the holiday.

5 stages, 868km, 17 teams

Battle-hardened favourites and up-and-coming cyclists to take part in 13th Tour of Oman starting Feb10

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The 13th Tour of Oman, scheduled for February 10 to 14, will serve up a five-course menu catering to all tastes, from sprinters and punchers to climbers. Its two iconic climbs - Eastern Mountain (Stage 3) and Green Mountain (Stage 5) - will be tough nuts to crack at this point of the season.

Battle-hardened favourites such as Adam Yates, Emanuel Buchmann and Jesús Herrada will have to keep a close eye on stars in the making such as the whiz kid Isaac del Toro and the new French kids on the block, Antoine Huby, Paul Magnier and Alexy Faure-Prost.

As preamble to the 868km Tour of Oman 2024, the big guns will fire the opening salvo on February 9 in the second edition of Muscat Classic, on a 174.3km course with an average gradient of 10% that is the perfect launch pad for a puncher to launch a searing attack, according to organisers.

Muscat Classic starts from Al Mouj and ends at Al Bustan Street taking riders through the climbs of Bausher-Amerat road and Hamriya.

Sprinters know well that their climber colleagues will have to wait for their day in the sun in the Tour of Oman. Alexander Kristoff, the most prolific stage hunter in the history of the race,



STAGE 1 FEB 10

Oman Across Ages Museum to OCEC - 181.5km

STAGE 2 FEB 11

Sifah to Quriyat - 170.5km

STAGE 3 FEB 12

Bid Bid to Eastern Mountain - 169.5km

STAGE 4 FEB 13

Rustaq Fort to Yitti Hills - 207.5km

STAGE 5 FEB 14

Imty to Jabal Akhdar - 139km



is determined to take his tally to ten victories, but he will have to contend with rivals such as Caleb Ewan, Fabio Jakobsen, Bryan Coquard and the precocious Paul Magnier, who let his raw speed do the talking in Spain in the first race of the season.

The Norwegian will have but one shot at this goal, considering that the summit finish of

Stage 2 to Quriyat, a 2.6km ascent at an average gradient of 7%, is probably more than he can handle.

In Stage 3, the finish on Eastern Mountain will take the riders over the 1,000m mark for the first time in the week and, perhaps, the season. The climbers will cross swords on this 4.6km ascent at 8.5%.

After this litmus test comes

the up-and-down profile of Stage 4, featuring the Yitti Hills, where Diego Ulissi will be coming back for seconds after his win in 2023. However, the moment of truth will come on the slopes of Jabal Akhdar, or Green Mountain, where Mauri Vansevenant came a single second short of taking the win from Matteo Jorgenson last year.

The Belgian is out to get his

own back, but he will be facing other rivals this time round. Adam Yates constitutes the main threat in his first participation in the race, but there are a host of riders eager to use the slopes as springboards to success: Emanuel Buchmann, Isaac del Toro, Louis Meintjes, Jesús Herrada, Cristian Rodríguez and Warren Barguil have also thrown their hats into the ring.

Oman expresses solidarity with Iraq, Syria

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Sultanate of Oman has expressed solidarity with Syria and Iraq for their security, sovereignty and territorial integrity following American attacks on sites in both the countries.

The US conducted airstrikes on 85 targets across seven locations in Iraq and Syria on Friday night. The retaliatory strikes - which lasted 30 minutes, according to the White House - was in response to a drone strike by Iran-backed

proxies on a US military outpost in Jordan on Sunday, which killed three US service members and wounded more than 40 others.

President Joe Biden said in a statement that the US military response "will continue at times and places of our choosing".

His added, "The United States does not seek conflict in the Middle East or anywhere else in the world. But let all those who might seek to do us harm know this: If you harm an American, we will respond."

H E Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidi, Foreign Minister,



H E Sayyid Badr al Busaidi

spoke over phone with Faisal Mekdad, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates of the Syrian Arab Republic, and Fuad Hussein, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs

of Iraq, on Saturday.

H E Sayyid Badr expressed Oman's solidarity with Syria and Iraq, their security, sovereignty and territorial integrity.

The ministers agreed on the importance of resorting to serious dialogue between all parties and containing escalation and conflicts in the region.

They stressed on the priority of stopping the ongoing Israeli war in Gaza and continuing international efforts to reach a complete and permanent ceasefire.

The Iraqi government said

'this aggressive strike will put security in Iraq and the region on the brink of the abyss' and denied Washington's claims of coordinating the air attacks as 'false' and 'aimed at misleading international public opinion'.

The Syrian Ministry of Defence slammed the 'aggression of the American occupation forces' as an attempt 'to weaken the ability of the Syrian Arab Army and its allies in the field of fighting terrorism', adding that the areas targeted were the same where the military is fighting remnants of the ISIS armed group.



NHI, Ecole Hoteliere de Paris to offer joint programmes



Dubai art show depicts anguish of people in Gaza

Plans to develop Duqm Airport in line with industrial growth

Our Correspondent
Duqm

Oman Airports has revealed plans to develop Duqm Airport in line with the industrial growth in Al Wusta governorate. These plans include expanding facilities and improving services to keep pace with the expected increase in passenger and freight traffic.

Hilal bin Hamad al Mujali, Director of Duqm Airport, Oman Airports, informed that the continued growth witnessed by the airport has led to an increase in the number of passengers from 12,663 arrivals and 11,706 departures in 2020 to 33,348 ar-



rivals and 31,514 departures in 2023. "The statistics reflect the efforts made to enhance air traffic and facilitate access to the region, which helps attract investments and stimulate

Oman Airports is committed to working alongside SEZAD and other stakeholders to ensure the continued success and prosperity of the airport

HILAL AL MUJALI

tourism in the wilayat of Duqm." Explaining that these improvements will contribute to making Duqm Airport a major air transport centre and a gateway for trade and tourism in the



region, he pointed out that Oman Airports is working to expand the network of flights to and from Duqm airport to include more local and international destinations. "Increased

air connectivity will enhance business opportunities and facilitate trade and cultural exchange, especially with the increasing movement of businessmen, investors and

tourists."

Since its opening five years ago, Duqm Airport has been an integral part of Oman Airports' strategy to enhance infrastructure and logistics services in the region, in close cooperation with Oman Airports Commercial Operations Unit, which is responsible for marketing and business development.

Mujali stressed that Oman Airports is committed to working alongside Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD) and other stakeholders to ensure the continued success and prosperity of the airport, thus contributing to the progress of the entire region.

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NHI teams up with French school for hotel management courses

Our Correspondent
Muscat

National Hospitality Institute (NHI) signed an agreement at its headquarters in Wadi Kabir on Thursday with the prestigious Ecole Hoteliere de Paris which will allow students from Oman learn directly from French hospitality sector experts.

The landmark agreement will open doors for Omani students to explore international opportunities.

One of the key features of this collaboration is the introduction of an international internship exchange programme enabling students from both institutions to gain hands-on experience in diverse cultural settings, broadening their perspective and en-



(Muscat Daily)

hancing practical skills in the hospitality sector.

"I am thrilled to be associated with one of the best hotel schools in France," said Robert Maclean, Principal of NHI, at the agreement signing. "This partnership will add tremendous

value to our students in Oman, not only by enhancing their academic journey but also by facilitating cultural exchange that goes beyond classrooms. Together, we are creating a dynamic environment that fosters innovation, global perspectives

and prepares students to excel in the evolving landscape of the industry."

The partnership aims to jointly issue completion certificates for specific programmes, providing graduates globally recognised qualification. A high-

light of the collaboration includes exclusive master classes conducted by seasoned Parisian professors. These classes promise to offer a unique and enriching learning experience, bringing the essence of French hospitality education to students in Oman.

On the occasion, H E Veronique Aulagnon, Ambassador of France to Oman, said, "I am proud to witness the collaboration between NHI and Ecole Hoteliere de Paris. This marks the first time such an alliance has been formed between one of the oldest schools in France and an educational institution in Oman. I anticipate that this will not only create more job opportunities for Omani students but also contribute to strengthening cultural ties between Oman and France."

Oman, China witness remarkable cooperation: Envoy

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ambassador of the People's Republic of China to the Sultanate of Oman, H E Li Lingbing, has stated that relations between the two nations have witnessed remarkable development in various fields.

At a media briefing held by the Chinese Embassy in Muscat on Wednesday, H E Lingbing said, "I would like to briefly summarise the cooperation between the two countries since the establishment of diplomatic relations 45 years ago, especially in 2023. The friendly relations between China and Oman are



H E Li Lingbing

deeply rooted in history. The stories of Zheng He and Abu Obeid are well-known in both coun-

tries. The sailing ship *Sohar* in front of the Council of Oman building and the Zheng He monument by the seaside in Salalah are the perfect symbols of the two countries' friendship."

She informed that by the end of 2022, bilateral trade had totalled US\$40.45bn. "China stands as Oman's largest trade surplus contributor and the third-largest trade and investment partner."

Detailing areas of cooperation during the past year, H E Lingbing said the Chinese company Bestong signed an agreement with Salalah Free Zone for an investment of US\$230mn in the first phase of the project, includ-

ing establishment of a ferrosilicon alloy project (annual production capacity of 90,000 tonnes), a packaging paper manufacturing project (annual production capacity of 300,000 tonnes), and a marine water desalination project (annual production capacity of 2.2mn tonnes).

She informed that there are many areas of joint cooperation between the two friendly countries currently, including the field of renewable energy, as Oman enjoys unique geographical advantages and good natural resources for wind and solar energy. China is working on complementary advantages and

continuing to expand cooperation in the fields of green hydrogen, wind energy, photovoltaic energy and electric cars.

"In the past year, with the joint efforts of both sides, China-Oman relations and practical cooperation have achieved fruitful results, besides many other existing partnerships. China has always regarded Oman as an important partner in jointly building the 'Belt and Road' and is willing to continuously consolidate the China-Oman strategic partnership and deepen exchanges and practical cooperation in various fields. In the new year, we will make greater efforts to this end," H E Lingbing stated.

Jindal Shadeed Iron & Steel (JSIS) Awarded Great Place to Work® Certification

MUSCAT, January 29, 2024 – Jindal Shadeed Iron & Steel (JSIS), a leading player in the steel industry, proudly announces its certification by Great Place to Work®, a globally recognized accolade based on feedback from current employees. The certification underscores JSIS's commitment to fostering a workplace culture that is unparalleled in its positive impact on employee experience.

The certification from Great Place to Work®, known for its expertise in workplace culture, employee experience, and leadership behaviors, is a testament to JSIS's dedication to creating an environment that drives revenue, enhances employee retention, and fuels innovation.

Sarah Lewis-Kulin, Vice President of Global Recognition at Great Place to Work, remarked, "Certification as a 'Great Place to Work' is a distinguished honor that reflects the tireless efforts put into building an exceptional employee experience. This recognition is exclusively earned through genuine, real-time feedback from employees, signifying JSIS's position as one of the most esteemed employers, with a resolute commitment by its senior management."

JSIS actively participated in the Great Place to Work® Middle East Trust Index survey and recognition process in November 2023, following a prior pulse survey in April 2023. This ongoing endeavor aimed to elicit invaluable insights and feedback from employees, enabling JSIS to tailor its organizational strategies and practices to exceed employee expectations continually.

The extraordinary response from JSIS employees underscores the orga-

nization's unwavering dedication to transparency and continuous improvement. With an increase in the engagement score from 77% in April 2023 to 82% in November 2023, JSIS has achieved the esteemed status of being recognized and certified as a Great Place to Work®.

Harsha Shetty, Chief Executive Officer of JSIS, expressed his enthusiasm, stating, "We are delighted to attain the Great Place to Work® Certification as we prioritize the employee experience each day. The unwavering dedication of our employees has been instrumental to our ongoing success. We extend our sincere appreciation for their enthusiastic and productive participation, as well as our collective effort in establishing a thriving ecosystem at JSIS, where employee well-being, trust, pride, and enjoyment are paramount. Congratulations and heartfelt thanks to our entire team."



By earning the Great Place to Work® Certification, Jindal Shadeed Iron & Steel demonstrates its steadfast commitment to nurturing a workplace culture that is both inspiring and rewarding for its employees. This prestigious recognition underscores JSIS's

ongoing efforts to cultivate a workplace culture that prioritizes the well-being and success of its employees.

Dr. Sanjeev Dixit, Chief Human Resources Officer at JSIS, emphasized, "The cornerstone of any organization's success lies in its people. Their

collective energy, dedication, and commitment propel us forward. We are unwavering in our goal to enrich employee engagement by embodying our core values in both words and actions. By addressing areas for improvement and leveraging our strengths, we are dedicated to ensuring a fulfilling and thriving workplace for all. Our aim is to make our employee experience and culture programs shine as exemplars, reflecting the values and aspirations that define us as a great workplace. We celebrate and extend our heartfelt thanks to our exceptional team whose contributions have made this remarkable recognition possible. As we continue to pursue our vision of being world-class employers, we are dedicated to building world-class teams led by world-class leaders."

The Great Place to Work® certification signifies a significant milestone

for JSIS, reinforcing its position as a leading employer dedicated to nurturing a workplace where employees thrive, grow, and take pride in their contributions.

Saif Albusaidi, General Manager – Human Resources & Corporate Affairs, further emphasized, "Jindal Shadeed has a winning team of passionate, dedicated, compassionate, diverse, and inclusive human capital, united by a common goal – to make JSIS an employer of choice by creating an inspiring ecosystem. The Great Place to Work certification serves as further validation of this commitment and spirit."

JSIS's achievement of the Great Place to Work® certification reflects the organization's unwavering dedication to transparency, continuous improvement, and fostering a workplace culture that is both inspiring and rewarding for its employees.



Advertorial

Dhahirah announces major initiatives to boost tourism sector

Our Correspondent

Muscat

In a major push to invigorate the tourism sector with vibrant entertainment hubs, the Dhahirah governorate has announced the launch of a series of projects confirming the development of Itlatat Ibri, Itlatat Yanqul, and Itlatat Dhank.

These projects were taken up to improve hospitality, camping, and recreation facilities in the governorate, while showcasing the natural beauty of the areas to encourage tourism.

An official from the Dhahirah governorate revealed that tenders for Itlatat Yanqul and Itlatat Dhank have been floated, with a submission deadline set for March 18. "Our goal is to accentuate the scenic allure of these locations and bolster tourism," the official stated.

In alignment with the objectives of Oman Vision 2040, Dhahirah has outlined an ambitious plan of 15 projects for the 2023-24 period, aimed at stimulating the economy and enhancing recreational amenities.

"The projects include the con-



struction of walkways in Hamra al Drooa and Al Nahda in the wilayat of Ibri, along with an integrated station on the Empty Quarter Road," the official elaborated.

Additionally, Dhahirah is advancing its digital transformation efforts with the implementation of an electronic portal, electronic inventory services, streamlined procedures, and geographic information systems.

The development blueprint also encompasses the establishment of a commercial area in the wilayat of Dhank, a municipal market, roundabouts in Ibri, and a youth village in Celebrations

Square in Ibri.

"We are also focusing on the construction of the Ibri Public Park to beautify the vicinity of Ibri Fort, and initiating Phase 1 of the public street in Ibri, extending from Al Qurain roundabout to the Dhahirah Governorate Police Command," the official added.

Plans to organise tourism and cultural festivals across all wilayats in the governorate are in the final stages of preparation.

The official also disclosed plans for a dedicated motorsports area for drifting in Ibri, underscoring the governorate's commitment to diversifying its recreational offerings.

ASMED announces initiative for SMEs to be taken up in Q2

Our Correspondent

Muscat

With an aim to support the growth and development of small and medium enterprises (SMEs), the Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises Development (ASMED) has taken up a new initiative set to commence in the second quarter this year.

An ASMED official outlined the objectives, which include sponsoring and supporting the activities of SME owners, entrepreneurs, and craftsmen.

To ensure the effective implementation of this initiative, a committee has been formed to study and analyse potential sponsorships for events, activities, and programmes aligned with specific principles.

The initiative's goal is to foster a culture of entrepreneurship



and innovation. It encompasses organising exhibitions, seminars, and conferences to enhance the visibility and promotion of SMEs.

ASMED has established participation criteria for this programme. These include the requirement for events to be innovative, well-planned, aligned with ASMED's objectives, and provide clear details on the number of beneficiaries.

The sponsorship programme is scheduled to support events between April 1 and June 30 this year. In addition to this, ASMED is encouraging entrepreneurs to register for the Jahiziah programme. Targeting Omanis interested in establishing SMEs and startups, this programme requires applicants to have financing and land available for their proposed projects.

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Tender Announcement

Al Maha Petroleum Products Marketing Company SAOG invites Bidders to submit their proposal for the below detailed tenders:

Tender No.	Description	Tender Fee (Nonrefundable) OMR	Tender Purchase deadline	Clarification deadline	Tender Submission Date
TENDER /2024/01/ENG/003	Construction of a New Filling Station at Al Bashair in Wilayat Adam in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate	100/-	11.02.2024	13.02.2024	18.02.2024
TENDER /2024/01/ENG/004	Construction of a New Filling Station at Al Waqbah in Wilayat Yanqul In Al Dhahirah Governorate	100/-	11.02.2024	13.02.2024	18.02.2024
Bank Name & Account Number		Bank Muscat (0423005687760617)			

The Conditions:

- 1- **Collection of Tenders:** Interested, specialized companies and establishments registered under grade 3 and above (in C.R) with minimum of 3 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**
- 2- **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.
- 3- **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.
- 4- **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.
- 5- Any bid received after the specified date or if it does not meet the conditions will not be considered.
- 6- Each bid shall be signed and stamped with the signature of the authorized person.
- 7- Al Maha Petroleum Products Marketing Co SAOG reserves the right to accept, reject or cancel the tender without giving any reasons.
- 8- Al Maha Petroleum Products Marketing Co SAOG reserves the right to add or cancel some of the works mentioned in the tender if necessary.
- 9- Al Maha Petroleum Products Marketing Co SAOG is not bound to accept the lowest bid or any other bid without giving any reasons.
- 10- For any enquiry email us at (**procurement@almaha.com.om**) or by calling **24610289/24610287/24610355**

The image is a full-page advertisement for PKEXCHANGE, divided into two horizontal panels. The top panel features a warm-toned photograph of the Statue of Liberty against a hazy New York City skyline at dusk. In the upper left corner of this panel is a circular badge with a crown icon and the text "TRUSTED SINCE 1920". To its right is another circular badge with a shield icon and the text "OMAN'S 1st EXCHANGE". Centered below these is the headline "SEND USD WORLDWIDE FOR BUSINESS, EDUCATION, FIXED DEPOSITS & MORE" in bold white capital letters. Below the headline is a black rectangular button with the text "OMR 4 SERVICE FEE" in white. At the bottom of the top panel, the words "SIMPLE | SECURE | SWIFT" are displayed in white, separated by vertical bars. The bottom panel features a similar warm-toned photograph of the Burj Khalifa and Dubai skyline at dusk. It also includes a "TRUSTED SINCE 1920" badge in the top left and a headline "SEND MONEY TO ANY BANK ACCOUNT IN UAE FOR CORPORATES AND INDIVIDUALS" in bold white capital letters. Below the headline is a black rectangular button with the text "OMR 2.5 SERVICE FEE" in white. At the bottom of the bottom panel, the words "SIMPLE | SECURE | SWIFT" are displayed in white, separated by vertical bars. A dark blue horizontal bar spans the entire width of the image at the very bottom. On the left side of this bar, the company name "PURSHOTTAM KANJI EXCHANGE" is written in white, with "PURSHOTTAM KANJI" above "EXCHANGE". Next to it is a stylized logo of a person standing. To the right of the logo, the company name is written in Arabic: "شركة برشوتم كانجي للمرافعة". Further right is a square QR code. To the right of the QR code are five social media icons: Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, WhatsApp, and YouTube. Below these icons are the phone numbers "+968: 91767829 | 99849289 | 91767829" and the website address "www.pkexchange.com" at the bottom right.

Oman crude achieves strong growth in trading at DME

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Dubai Mercantile Exchange (DME), the premier international energy futures exchange in the Middle East, announced on Thursday that it recorded impressive growth in total trading volume and physical delivery of Oman crude in 2023 compared to the previous year. This development solidifies Oman crude's position as the main crude oil benchmark in the East of Suez market.

DME is home to the DME Oman Crude Oil Futures Contract (known as DME Oman or Oman crude), which generates the world's largest amount of physically delivered crude oil. The DME Oman contract serves as the third-most important crude oil benchmark globally, used by five national oil companies based in the GCC countries.

DME's front-month trading volume in 2023 surged to 800mn barrels, surpassing the 2022 figure of 752mn barrels and reaching the highest levels since 2018, according to a DME statement.

Similarly, the physical delivery volume for 2023 rose to 210mn barrels from the 2022 count of 181mn barrels, achieving another high since 2018. Furthermore, DME's total physical exposure in 2023 rose to 262mn barrels from 214mn in 2022.

The remarkable performance during 2023 has strengthened



Remarkable performance during 2023 has strengthened DME's standing on the global level, with its flagship Oman crude contract now representing 36% of the Middle Eastern crude heading to the Asian market

DME's standing on the global level, with its flagship Oman Crude Oil Futures Contract now representing 36% of the Middle Eastern crude heading to the Asian market - a phenomenal growth from just an 8% share in 2007.

Commenting on the exceptional growth in DME Oman's trading volumes, Raid al-Salami, Managing Director of Dubai Mercantile Exchange, said, "In 2023, we experienced a dynamic period marked by notable achievements in business perfor-

mance and strategic collaborations. These successes have significantly strengthened our market share and overall value."

"As we enter the new year, we remain confident in sustaining our positive momentum despite ongoing changes across regional and global energy landscapes. We will continue to set new benchmarks of excellence and deliver value to our stakeholders," he added.

DME's accomplishments in 2023 included key milestones such as delivering 3bn barrels

through the exchange mechanism since its inception and trading over 20bn barrels in total.

The exchange has recently entered a strategic partnership with the Saudi Tadawul Group (STG) in January 2024, enhancing its expertise and growth potential and opening promising opportunities. STG, a leading diversified capital markets group in the MENA region, entered into a binding agreement with existing shareholders of DME Holdings Limited to acquire a 32.6% stake in the Dubai Mercantile Exchange.

As a result of this agreement, STG has become the joint largest shareholder in DME Holdings alongside CME Group, with other shareholders including the Oman Investment Authority (OIA) and Dubai Holding, as well as global financial and commercial industry leaders.

Under the terms of the agreement, ensuring the integrity of the DME Oman contract has been of particular importance to all parties. It was agreed that no changes to any aspects of the DME Oman contract will result from the transaction contemplated by the agreement with STG. In addition, to avoid conflicts of interest and safeguard the twin imperatives of neutrality and price discovery, no Saudi Arabian crude oil contract will be traded, sold, or bought on, or indexed to, nor will Saudi crude be delivered against the DME Oman contract via DME.



Fitch Affirms Sohar International's ratings at 'BB'

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Fitch Ratings has affirmed Sohar International Bank's Long-Term Issuer Default Ratings (IDRs) at 'BB' with a stable outlook. Fitch has also upgraded Sohar International's Viability Rating (VR) to 'bb' from 'bb-' and removed it from Rating Watch Positive (RWP).

The upgrade of Sohar International's Viability Rating reflects the positive impact on its credit profile from its merger with HSBC Bank Oman, Fitch said in its rating action statement.

HSBC Bank Oman was dissolved, and all of its assets and liabilities were transferred to Sohar International on August 17, 2023.

Fitch has upgraded Sohar International's Long-Term IDR (xgs) to 'BB(xgs)' from 'BB-(xgs)' in line with the VR upgrade, affirmed its Short-Term IDR (xgs) at 'B(xgs)', and withdrawn both ratings, as they are no longer considered relevant to the agency's coverage.

The rating agency mentioned

that Sohar International's Long-Term IDR is driven by its 'bb' VR and underpinned by potential support from the Omani authorities, as reflected in its 'bb' Government Support Rating (GSR).

"The Viability Rating balances the bank's improved business profile, expanded deposit franchise, and adequate capitalisation against moderate but improving profitability and stabilising asset quality," the rating agency noted.

Fitch further stated, 'Sohar International's franchise strengthened considerably by becoming Oman's second-largest bank, with a market share of 16% by total assets at the end of Q3 2023. This will translate into increased pricing power and a stronger footprint in lower-risk segments, particularly in large multinational corporates, where HSBC Bank Oman used to be well-established.'

Sohar International's stronger branch network will boost its loan-distribution and deposit-collection capabilities, the rating agency noted.

GCC banking sector relative bright spot among EMs: S&P

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The banking sector in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) stands out as a relative bright spot among emerging markets (EMs) in 2024, according to S&P Global Ratings.

According to a new report released on Thursday, S&P anticipates that GCC banks and banking systems will display broad stability across key metrics in 2024. The rating agency forecasts that credit growth and profitability will remain strong for most GCC banks, although it expects a slight softening from 2023 levels.

"In general, the region's banks will continue to stand out as being well-capitalised, profitable, well-provisioned, and, for the most part, liquid," S&P said.

The UAE and Saudi banking systems are expected to lead growth in the region, with strong credit demand driven by a dynamic non-oil sector and economic diversification



programmes. S&P also foresees robust credit growth in Oman.

However, the rating agency noted key risks to the outlook, including a potential worsening geopolitical environment, exposure to higher-risk jurisdictions such as Egypt and Turkey, oil price volatility, and real estate exposure.

S&P regards asset quality in the GCC banking sector as relatively strong, with not much expected deterioration, thanks to high levels of precautionary provisioning.

"Leverage is contained, but still-high rates will keep the cost of risk elevated, particularly in banks with larger exposure to

entities that do not depend on government cash flows," the agency noted.

According to S&P, the capitalisation levels of GCC banks will continue to support their creditworthiness in 2024.

"Banks are predominantly funded through strong local deposit franchises, especially in countries like the UAE, Kuwait, and Oman. However, in Oman, one-third of customer deposits come from the government and their related entities. Liquidity strains could emerge in externally leveraged systems like Qatar and could rise where domestic funding is growing slower than credit," S&P added.

Dentons advises joint lead managers on Omantel's \$500mn debut sukuk

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Global legal advisory firm Dentons served as Oman counsel to the joint lead managers on the debut issuance of \$500mn trust certificates due in 2031 by OTEL Sukuk Limited, a special purpose vehicle issuer incorporated in the Cayman Islands.

The transaction, settled on January 24, represents the inaugural international sukuk issuance by Omantel (as trustee). Omantel's obligations were guaranteed by Oztel Holdings SPC Limited, a DIFC-incorporated entity.

The trust certificates were assigned a rating of BB+ by Fitch Ratings Ltd and a rating of Ba2 by Moody's Investors Service. The transaction is listed on Euronext Dublin, and the trust certificates were offered to sophisticated investors outside the US in reliance upon Rule 144A and Regulation S under the US Securities Act of 1933. The proceeds of the issuance will be used to settle existing financings and for general corporate purposes.



In a press statement, Ghassan al Hashar, Chief Financial Officer of Omantel, said, "We are proud of a very successful issuance of sukuk to our international investors. The sukuk was significantly oversubscribed, and Omantel managed to obtain very favorable pricing. We thank all of our partners, and in particular, Dentons who acted as advisors for the joint lead managers."

Dentons Partner Sadaf Buchanan said, "We are thrilled to have worked with the joint lead managers and the Omantel teams once again in supporting the delivery of this successful debut sukuk issuance for Oman-

tel. This was a landmark transaction not only for Omantel and Oman but also for the wider region. The transaction is groundbreaking due to its use of broadband data services as the basis for the Shariah-compliant structure."

"This is a first in the region for a capacity-based structure using this asset and may form a blueprint for other telecom issuers internationally when considering tapping the international capital markets for their funding needs. We were pleased to be able to provide the critical Oman law structuring support in relation to the regulatory and

broader aspects of the transaction, acting for the international and regional joint lead managers," Buchanan added.

According to Buchanan, the transaction was eight times oversubscribed at its peak, securing more than 130 regional and international investors and achieving a profit rate of 5.375%. "The transaction sets a strong benchmark, and we look forward to supporting other issuers also coming to the market."

The team was led by Sadaf Buchanan, working with Associate Shireen al Busaidi and Senior Legal Consultant and Telecoms Specialist Simon Topping.



UAE most popular destination for global workers

Dubai, UAE - The global HR platform, Deel, recently unveiled the findings of its Annual Global Hiring Report, disclosing that the UAE has secured the top spot as the most sought-after destination for international talent seeking employment visas. Following closely behind are the Netherlands, France, the United Kingdom, and Singapore.

Deel's latest Global Hiring

Report is based on data and insights collected from hundreds of thousands of global contracts across 160 countries, revealing an upward trend in hiring by UAE-based companies. Notably, France, the UAE, India, Turkey, and the United Kingdom emerged as the top destinations for UAE recruiters. This trend underscores the UAE's commitment to cultivating a diverse and

vibrant multinational workforce.

The report also sheds light on the most popular industries driving this growth. Financial services, IT & services, computer software, management consulting, and marketing & advertising emerged as the leading industries attracting international talent to the UAE.

In a press release, Tarek Salam, Head of Expansion at

Deel, said, "The findings from our latest Global Hiring Report are a testament to the UAE's remarkable transformation into a global business hub. The country's commitment to talent, innovation, and a dynamic business environment is clearly resonating with international professionals, solidifying its position as a top hiring destination." He added, "The UAE's

diverse and multicultural workforce is its greatest asset. By attracting and retaining international talent, the country is positioning itself for continued economic growth and success in the global marketplace."

The annual report also highlighted how UAE professionals are increasingly making their mark on the international employment market.

US Fed says rate cut in March unlikely

Washington, US – The US Federal Reserve isn't ready to stop pushing back inflation with high interest rates – and may not be by its next meeting in March, as financial markets had anticipated.

As widely expected, the Federal Reserve on Wednesday held its key fed funds rate steady at a 22-year high of a 5.25%-5.50% range Wednesday. The Fed said it is looking for more progress in lowering inflation before cutting rates.

The high inflation that inspired the rate-hike campaign has fallen considerably since it spiked nearly two years ago, leading the Fed's policy committee to indicate it could begin to cut interest rates at some point. While the Federal Open Market Committee added language to its official statement Wednesday referring to rate cuts, it said it was too soon to make them.

In a post-announcement press conference, Federal Reserve chair Jerome Powell pushed back against market expectations of a rate cut early in the year.

"I don't think it's likely that the committee will reach a level of confidence by the time of the March meeting," he said.

"Inflation is still too high, ongoing progress in bringing it down is not assured and the path forward is uncertain," Powell said. "The committee does not expect that it will be appropriate to reduce the target range until it has gained greater confidence that inflation is moving sustainably toward 2%."

While the FOMC's official statement didn't commit to either cutting or holding the rate steady, it did abandon the idea of raising it again. Wednesday's



Fed Chair Jerome Powell addresses press conference

statement was the Fed's first since March 2022 to lack any language suggesting that more rate hikes are on the table.

The decision to keep the rate steady for now keeps interest rates on mortgages, credit cards, auto loans, and other credit at their highest in decades. Household budgets and the broader economy are feeling the pinch from those high rates, which are intended to quell inflation by discouraging borrowing and spending.

Financial markets are anticipating the Fed's next move, and investors were closely watching what Powell said for clues about whether the central bank will cut the fed funds rate at its meeting in March.

Before the release of the Fed statement, markets were pricing in a 56% chance of that happening, according to the CME Group's FedWatch tool, which forecasts interest rate movements based on fed funds futures trading data. By the time the press conference ended, markets were pricing in just a 36% chance of a rate cut in March.

The Fed also continued using the other major weapon in its anti-inflation arsenal: selling its assets, mainly mortgage-backed securities, to take money out of financial markets – a policy known as quantitative tightening.

Tightening has gone hand-in-hand with interest rate hikes, reversing the quantitative easing that the Fed did during the pandemic when it bought trillions of dollars of securities to flood markets with money and support the economy through the COVID-19 recession.

The Fed's future decision on the benchmark rate will hinge on whether inflation stays as tame as it has been in recent reports, Powell said. The Fed's preferred measure of inflation showed prices growing 2.6% over the year in December after having spiked to over 7% in June 2022, well on its way down to the Fed's goal of 2%.

"So we're looking at continuation of the good data that we've been seeing," Powell said.

(Source: Investopedia)

US economy adds 353,000 jobs in January

Washington, US – The US economy added 353,000 jobs in January, much higher than market estimates, the Labor Department announced on Friday.

The market expectation for non-farm payrolls was to show a gain of 187,000 last month. Job additions for December 2023, meanwhile, were significantly revised up by 117,000 from 216,000 to 333,000, according to data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Nearly every industry added jobs last month. Health care added 70,000 jobs. Business services added 74,000. Even construction and manufacturing continued to hire in January.

The unemployment rate, however, remained unchanged at 3.7% in January for the third consecutive month, compared to the previous month.

Also, the number of unemployed people also remained mostly unchanged at 6.1 million, according to the Labor Department.

The job market has held up remarkably well, despite the Federal Reserve's effort to fight inflation with the highest interest rates in more than two decades.

Agencies

International Gas Union criticises US LNG pause

Istanbul, Turkey – The International Gas Union (IGU) expressed disapproval of the US decision to halt major LNG export projects, claiming that restricting gas supplies on the international market would have the reverse effect of reducing emissions.

The IGU said in a press release that the halt in the review of key US LNG export projects sends an unsettling signal to global energy markets, given the US's position as the world's largest LNG exporter.

LNG plays a key role in the reliability of the global energy system, keeping emissions in check and restoring the global LNG supply balance, the organization said, adding that energy security requires the current and forecasted shortfall to be addressed.

"The current dynamic we are seeing unfold is highly worrying. It is eroding these fundamental market principles and will harm global energy security and emission reduction," said Menelaos Ydreos, secretary general of the IGU.

The decision comes at a time when global gas supply remains tight and the market is vulnerable to more volatility and price escalation, according to the IGU.



'Despite a cooling of prices in Europe and Asia, they remain nearly double the pre-crisis levels. But the world is not yet through the crisis. Until new volumes of LNG come onstream, the global market will hang on a fragile balance of demand reductions and stability in the current supply level, especially when it comes to flexible LNG, which allows bringing gas to remote markets that need it,' it said.

'Limiting the supply of gas on the global market will not reduce emissions; it will do the opposite,' it said.

The IGU explained that over the last two years, high gas prices have led to gas-to-coal switching and to all-time high emissions from coal in line with record consumption.

This is despite record additions of renewables and the resurgence of nuclear in 2023, because the decade-long trend of coal having a 40% share of global power sector emissions is continuing.

It was noted that while natural gas will continue to play a pivotal role in the energy transition, facilitating the decarbonization of the global economy, the gas sector itself will also continue to undergo a process of decarbonization.

'This is imperative, and we call on policymakers and industry to find urgent solutions for accelerating the deployment of carbon capture, low-carbon, and renewable gases. We also stress that doubling down on eliminating methane emissions is required to make this transition possible,' it added.

Anadolu Agency

IMF says Asia on track to again deliver two-thirds to global growth in 2024

Washington, US – Asia is on track to again deliver two-thirds of global growth in 2024, as it did in 2023, said Krishna Srinivasan, Director of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) Asia and Pacific Department.

At a press conference on the Regional Economic Outlook, the IMF official said the news on the inflation front has also been mostly positive, thereby improving the prospects for a soft landing – after the Covid crisis.

For 2023, it estimated growth at 4.7%, compared to its 4.6% projection it had made in October.

China and India account for most of the upward revision. In India, strong domestic demand underpinned another increase in its growth estimate. In China, growth was supported by higher spending on disaster reconstruction and resilience projects.

It has also upgraded its regional growth forecast for 2024 to 4.5%, from 4.2% in October.

The firm growth projections in the region were part of the positive dynamic from last year carried over into 2024; demand for technology – computers, electronics, and optical products – has picked up in recent months,



IMF has also upgraded its Asia's growth forecast for 2024 to 4.5%, from 4.2% in October

which benefits economies such as Korea and Singapore; and countries like China and Thailand have announced sizeable policy stimulus.

On the other hand, it projected 3.1% growth for 2024 on a global level – the same growth rate as in 2023. For 2025, it anticipates a modest increase to 3.2%.

"The good news is that these

figures are somewhat better than the forecast we had in the October 2023 World Economic Outlook. The not-so-good news is that they remain significantly below the historical (2000-2019) average for global growth of 3.8%," Srinivasan said at the press conference.

Moving on to inflation, global inflation is projected to fall from 6.8% in 2023 to 5.8% this year and to 4.4% in 2025.

"Core inflation is also on a downward trend," he asserted. Core inflation is the change in the costs of goods and services, barring those from the food and energy basket.

"In Asia, post-COVID price

pressures were, on average, less intense than elsewhere to begin with. They are now receding rapidly. We estimate that average Asian inflation fell from 3.8% in 2022 to 2.6% in 2023, with particularly swift progress in emerging Asian economies. Many regional central banks are on course to reach their inflation targets in 2024. Provided policymakers hold steady until inflation is firmly re-anchored, scope for monetary easing may emerge later in the year," Srinivasan said.

The regional growth average, however, hides significant divergence between countries.

In Japan, it expects growth to remain above potential but to slow from about 2% in 2023 to about 1% in 2024, as one-off factors that supported activity last year fade—including a depreciated yen, strong tourism, and a recovery in business investment.

Growth in India, on the other hand, is expected to remain strong at 6.5% in both 2024 and 2025.

"For 2025, we project growth in the region to decelerate mildly to 4.3%, reflecting to a large extent China's growth slowdown," Srinivasan added.

ANI

Facebook-parent Meta's stocks jump 20% on strong fourth quarter earnings

Daniel Howley

Facebook-parent Meta Platforms' stock rocketed higher on Friday, climbing more than 20% after the company posted better-than-expected earnings and guidance and announced new shareholder return initiatives.

With Friday's rally, the company added nearly \$200bn to its market cap, a stock market record according to Bloomberg data. Meta shares were trading around \$475 on Friday; at its lows in 2022, the stock fell to as

low as \$90.

Meta's market cap now stands north of \$1.2tn.

For the fourth quarter, Meta reported adjusted earnings per share (EPS) of \$5.33 on revenue of \$40.1bn. Analysts were anticipating adjusted EPS of \$4.94 on revenue of \$39.01bn, according to Bloomberg consensus data. The company reported revenue of \$32.2bn in the same quarter last year.

The company also boosted its stock buyback authorization by \$50bn and initiated a quar-



Meta's market cap now stands north of \$1.2tn

terly dividend of \$0.50 per share. In the current quarter, Meta said it anticipates revenue of between \$34.6bn and \$37bn, surpassing analysts' expectations for revenues to tally \$33.6bn.

Meta's advertising revenue came in at \$38.7bn in the fourth quarter, beating expectations for \$37.8bn. The company also reported 2.11bn Facebook daily active users. Wall Street was anticipating 2.07bn.

The company reported ad impressions rose 21% over last

year during the period while the average price per ad fell 2%.

Meta's Reality Labs, however, continues to be a burden on the company. The division, which is tasked with turning Zuckerberg's vision of the metaverse into a reality, lost another \$4.65bn, up from the \$4.3bn the company lost on the endeavour in the same period last year. Still, the division beat expectations on revenue, topping \$1.07bn versus an anticipated \$812mn.

The launch of Apple's rival

Vision Pro headset could create a jump in consumer interest in AR/VR headsets and generate a knock-on effect for Meta's Quest line of headsets.

But Meta's Reality Labs efforts have taken a backseat in the minds of investors amid increased investments in generative AI. In January, Zuckerberg announced in an Instagram Reels post that the company's long-term strategy was to develop general artificial intelligence and make it open source.

(Source: Yahoo Finance)

Unified Municipal System's 1st meeting held

The team of the Unified Municipal System Project on Wednesday held an introductory meeting on the project for companies specialised in the field of information technology, in the grand hall of the Bait Al Falaj Hotel.

In continuation of the efforts based on digital transformation and enhancing the quality of public services, the meeting was held in accordance with the directives of the Executive Committee of the Unified Municipal System Project, a release stated.

The meeting began with an introduction to the project's nature and objectives, its importance in improving and developing the municipal sector's work system, the project's components and the number of services it includes. The meeting also introduced the structure and timetable of the tender.

Additionally, the scope of work expected to be implemented by the companies for the project, before issuing the tender brochure, which is expected to be presented this month.

Engineer Hoda al Afifi, the



project manager, indicated that this project is a national strategic project and it is expected that the implementation of the project will be entrusted to an alliance of several companies. Therefore, this introductory meeting came to clarify the project implementation requirements for companies, in addition to presenting the minimum requirements that must be met by the applying companies, whether from the Sultanate of Oman, the Gulf countries or internationally.

It is worth noting that the unified municipal system project is one of the ambitious national projects, which was launched last April. The project seeks to develop a road map for the governorates to create smart cities in line with Oman Vision 2040, by using modern technologies to enable services spatially.

Moreover, activating artificial intelligence tools, in an effort to create a central digital system to manage services provided by the municipal sector system.

Indian School Al Seeb scales new heights in excellence and unity

Indian School Al Seeb recorded a milestone event by achieving a historic feat with the unveiling of 'K-OIN' (Knowledge Collage of Oman and India) on January 26.

The School embarked on a flagship initiative under the distinguished CBSE campaign, *Ek Bharat Shrestha Bharat* Programme and gained entry into the Asia Book of Records on the occasion of Republic Day festivities. With an enthusiastic participation and contribution of more than 2000 students, the school co-ordinated a remarkable visual creation - the most extensive collage ever made. Encompassing nine distinct domains such as Culture, Film, Flora, Fauna, Performing Arts, Sports, Industry, Literature, and Tourism, this masterpiece showcased an astonishing 30,608 facts about Oman and India.

The students from Grade I to VIII contributed to this handwritten collage, which comprised 2326 charts spread over an expansive area of 1050 square metres. This initiative celebrated the vibrant essence of the two incredible nations, Oman and India.



Led by Principal Dr Leena Francis under the adept guidance of the Directors incharge Shameer P T K and Nidheesh Kumar P P, president Krishnan Raman, and other esteemed members of the school management committee, the initiative facilitated an entry of Indian School Al Seeb into the Asia Book of Records.

Spearheaded by event coordinators Tony Thomas, senior faculty Department of Physical Education; and Jidhesh T, head of the Department of Commerce and Humanities, this undertaking

- with the collaborative efforts of the dedicated academic team and class teachers from class I to class 8 and the admin team - culminated in the creation of a visually striking masterpiece.

The occasion was graced by the esteemed presence of H E Amit Narang, the Ambassador of India to the Sultanate of Oman, as the Chief Guest, adding prestige to the occasion.

Deepak Kumar, chairman of Balabel Group, entrepreneur, and philanthropist, lent his expertise as the adjudicator for the project.

The culmination of the event

reached its zenith as the Asia Book of Records certificate was presented to Krishnan Raman, president of the school management committee; and principal Dr Leena Francis.

K-OIN personifies the school's commitment and dedication, and aims to foster educational values, institutional values, and most importantly enhancement of Indo-Oman relationships. The triumph of this ambitious undertaking underscores the school's visionary ethos, where dreams seamlessly transition into concrete reality.

Karcher Center in Muscat marks milestone in cleaning solutions

The first Karcher Center in Oman was inaugurated at Ghala Industrial Area in Muscat on Wednesday, a media release stated.

The official ribbon-cutting ceremony was conducted in the presence of a number of Omani dignitaries and German officials, including H E Dirk Lölke, German Ambassador to the Sultanate of Oman, Sousann el Faksch, Head of Oman German Industry & Commerce Office (AHK).

Also in attendance were senior executives - Christian May, Deputy CEO and Chief Sales Officer; Alfred Kärcher, SE & Co KG; and Joe Lahoud, Regional President, Karcher - Middle East Region.

"Karcher is a family-owned enterprise with a heritage of 89 years in business. We firmly believe in values and relationships that stand the test of time," said Joe Lahoud.

"Our customers in Oman share much of the same values, and we are confident that the Karcher Center Muscat will send a clear signal of our commitment to work together to meet their needs."

Over the last 50 years, Karcher has built a loyal client-



base for its household and professional cleaning equipment across 14 countries in the Middle East. Oman is expected to be an important market for Karcher's ambitions for expansion in the region.

"The Karcher Center at Ghala will not only offer a comprehensive one-stop shop for innovative, high-quality products, it will also be a vital distribution and logistics hub for our dealers and retail partners across the sultanate," explained Joe Lahoud.

"Moreover, we have a full-fledged service center manned by highly trained Karcher technicians, and equipped to provide

best-in-class after-sales support to our Omani customers."

Karcher is a renowned brand in cleaning technology with a presence in 80 countries, a multinational team of 15,000+ professionals, a portfolio of 3000+ products and accessories, and a network of 50,000+ service centers worldwide.

The company's diverse product portfolio includes high-pressure cleaners, vacuum cleaners, steam cleaners, air purifiers, municipality sweepers, scrubber drivers, vehicle washing bays, dry ice blasters, watering systems, and drinking water dispensers.

Mall of Muscat all set to welcome Flawarma unique shawarma haven for foodies

Mall of Muscat, leading leisure and entertainment destination is all set to enhance its allure by welcoming Flawarma, an innovative shawarma outlet.

Poised to redefine the shawarma scene, Flawarma blends traditional Middle Eastern flavours with a modern flair, offering a culinary experience that stands unmatched.

The outlet promises a menu that is an amalgam of rich, savoury tastes, each bite taking patrons on a flavourful journey. From their signature chicken shawarma to a variety of other mouth-watering options, Flawarma is poised to be a gastronomic landmark for shawarma lovers.

Beyond shawarma, Flawarma's menu extends to include a range of enticing offerings such as varieties of shawarma, falafel, kebabs, kunafa, soups, and more, each dish crafted to transform the ordinary



into the extraordinary.

Patrons can also indulge in a fusion soft drinks, all part of Flawarma's commitment to delivering a culinary experience that beckons for repeated visits.

The outlet's dedication to quality and a pleasing ambiance ensures that each visit to Flawarma is more than just a meal, it is a delightful departure from the everyday.

A spokesperson for the Mall of Muscat expressed excitement about Flawarma's arrival, noting the popularity of shawarma in Oman. He said, "We can guarantee that Flawarma's shawarma experience will impress everyone."

Barceló Hotel announces 'romantic affair' on Feb 14

Barceló Hotel Group is inviting people to celebrate the most romantic day of the year with meticulously crafted Valentine's Day packages promising unforgettable moments.

'Guests can enjoy an array of culinary delights at Barcelo properties across the UAE and Oman, including Occidental Al Jaddaf, Barcelo Residences Dubai Marina, Occidental Sharjah Grand, and Dukes The Palm, a Royal Hideaway in UAE, as well as Barceló Mussanah Resort in Oman,' the group stated.

'Whether it's a luxe night at the beach, an indulgent romantic evening or getaway to remember, or a night of magic 'Under the Stars' - there's something for everyone this season of love.

Barceló Mussanah Resort promises a romantic escape for couples with half-board accommodations, including breakfast and dinner this Valentine's Day. Each guest's room will be embellished with beautiful romantic decorations, creating a cosy ambience. As an additional sweet



gesture, a special cake will be presented, adding a delicious touch to the romantic getaway. Nestled in the serenity of Mussanah, the atmosphere is tailored to evoke love, ensuring every detail contributes to an unforgettable stay.

A couple can book half board including breakfast and dinner at RO65, the group informed.

There is a 'Candle Light Dinner' option too.

'Guests are invited to delight in the romantic setting of a candlelight dinner, featuring a four-

course plated menu. A warm welcome awaits guests with a complimentary house beverage, allowing them to choose between alcoholic or non-alcoholic options,' Barceló Hotel noted.

The dining experience is enriched with a specially adorned

table, embellished with beautiful roses that design an atmosphere of love and elegance. To ensure a cherished evening, the group is encouraging reservations at least one day prior at RO30 per couple, or RO20 per couple with special price for HB and AI Guest.



Bank Muscat joins forces to plant 300 Olive Trees in Jabal Akhdar

In line with its commitment to social responsibility and community service, Bank Muscat, the leading financial service provider in the Sultanate of Oman, signed a partnership agreement for planting 300 Olive trees in the village of Manakhir in Jabal Akhdar.

The plantation project will be implemented across different phases over a period of eight months. The agreement was signed at the bank's Head Office by Talib bin Saif al Makhmari, Head of Community & Media Relations, Bank Muscat, Mahmood bin Salim al Tobi, the person responsible for endowments and mosques in Manakhir village, Jabal Akhdar, and Ishaq bin Nasser al Nabhani, the CEO of the company responsible for implementing the project.

The plantation project falls under Bank Muscat's CSR sustainable initiatives, set with the aim to support the community

and nurture the sultanate's economic growth through the launch of projects that have sustainable impact from the ecological, social, and economic perspectives. Bank Muscat's contribution to the project included providing financial support to foster a successful implementation process of planting the Olive trees.

Furthermore, the project will contribute to the sustainable development of the ecological system by widening the plantation areas in the village.

In fact, Olive trees are of economic value, since they can contribute to the realisation of good returns. Additionally, the Olive can be cropped in large quantities due to the nurturing climate conditions in Jabal Akhdar. The Olive crops will be utilised for practicing various industries such as the crop pressing processes.

"We are proud of this partnership which emphasises the

bank's commitment to serving the society and supporting the sultanate's sustainable economy," said Talib bin Saif al Makhmari, head of Community & Media Relations of the bank.

"The project implemented in the well-conditioned agronomic areas in Manakhir will help in achieving the ecological, social, and economic goals set to support the people of the village, as the entire community will be supported by the returns realised. Bank Muscat, will uphold its pioneering role in supporting the society through the implementation of such strategic and sustainable plans to serve the needs of the local communities."

Makhmari added, "The bank is committed to supporting the local community in multiple areas that bring about great social impact, including education, youth, sports, health, SMEs, and environment."

ESO, Barka Desalination hold awareness campaign



The Environment Society of Oman (ESO) recently teamed up with the Barka Desalination Company SAOG and Omani Women's Association for an ambitious plastic awareness campaign that attracted hundreds of participants.

Held in four governorates in Oman and supported by Barka Desalination Company SAOG, Oman's largest seawater desalination plant, and its operator, Veolia Oman, the campaign aimed to encourage citizens to adopt more pro-environmental behaviours, sustainable practices and reduce plastic waste.

"We aim to raise greater public awareness of the scale of plastic pollution as its impacts are felt in a wide range of areas, includ-

ing biodiversity, climate change and our health. Single-use plastics and microplastics in products are among the biggest problems of our time, while we want people to realise that their everyday actions can support in making a real and long-term difference for Oman's environment and future generations," said Suaad al Harthi, Executive Director at Environment Society Oman.

"Together with our operator Veolia Oman, we wanted to support the Environment Society Oman in transforming the attitudes and behaviours of the general public around plastics. We need to reduce plastic consumption. Plus, we need to recycle the plastics we do use by treating

them as a useful resource instead of a disposable one," said Patrick Thienpont, Chief Executive Officer at Barka Desalination Company SAOG.

"We aim to create a circular economy for plastics, capturing their value by keeping them in the economy and out of the environment where they do a lot of harm. Plastic pollution within communities could even end in the long run by instilling a sense of responsibility and commitment."

The Plastic Awareness campaign involved presentations, problem-solving activities, and clean-up initiatives, while educational resources and information were circulated by the organisers to support participants in making

more informed choices toward a plastic-free future. At least 263 children received an activity booklet as part of children's engagement activities.

The total number of participants was 331, including 176 students from the areas, while at least 170 people participated in cleanups. The campaign covered Barka in South Batinah, Adam and Al Zahiya in Dakhliyah, Salalah in Dhofar, and Sur and Qurun in South Sharqiyah.

Barka Desalination Company selected these locations in line with Veolia's operations in Oman and to serve the communities in which they operate.

ESO aims to educate and raise awareness on environmental issues.

ahlibank elevates experience

Continuing its promising journey by providing the best services to its customers, ahlibank has enhanced its 'Pearl Points' rewards programme.

"Customers can relish an exceptional banking journey, with points seamlessly accruing upon completing day-to-day banking transactions," the bank stated.

Designed as an integral part of ahlibank's innovative suite of offerings, the Pearl Points programme redefines the traditional banking experience. Harnessing the power of state-of-the-art financial technology, this programme empowers ahlibank's esteemed customers to effortlessly accumulate points while conducting everyday transactions using their debit or credit cards.

OOC sends contingent to Arab Women's Club Games

Oman Olympic Committee (OOC) revealed the details of the participating athletes in the 17th edition of the Arab Club Games for Women, which began in Sharjah in the United Arab Emirates on Thursday.

Oman is participating in four departments such as, athletics, archery, fencing, and karate.

The OOC delegation includes the official and administrative Omani delegation, sports clubs and their technical and administrative bodies.

The delegation is being headed by Lujaina bint Mohsen al Zaabiya, a member of the committee's board of directors, this was revealed after an OOC meeting headed by Taha Sulaiman al Kishry.

"The female players were fully prepared to compete and achieve the desired results from participation," the officials said before the ten-day event commenced.

The technical and administrative staff of the athletics team consists of Shanouna bint Saleh



al Habsia, the team's coach, and Asaad bin Nasser al Battashi, the team's manager, in addition to 11 players: Azza bint Sultan al Yarbuiyah, Hana bint Juma al Qasimia, Woroud bint Khalfan al Nasiriyah, Khadija bint Sulaiman al Manjiya, Sheikha bint Rashid al Hinaiya, Alaa bint Abdullah al Zadjali, Naila bint Azzan al Sawafiya, Wahba bint Hamoud al Asimiya, Hana bint Saeed al Tawqiya, Duha bint Hamad al

Sanawi, and Faila bint Khamis al Aramiya.

The team will participate in the 100m, 200m, 400m, 800m, 1500m, 4x100m relay, 4x400m relay, long jump, high jump, javelin throw, shot put, discus throw, and hammer throw.

As for the shooting team, the technical and administrative staff consists of coaches Nasser bin Ali al Khatri, Allah Dad Balnour al Balushi, and the team adminis-

trator Muhammad bin Salem al Shaidi, while the list of female players consists of Suhair bint Salem al Jahmaniyah, Houria bint Ahmed al Yahya, Doha bint Naseer al Balushi, Al Anoud bint Abdullah al Khaliliyah, Amina bint Khamis al Tarshiyya and Siham bint Nasser al Hasaniiyya.

The team is participating in the 10m air pistol (teams) and 10m air rifle (teams) competitions.

The fencing team delegation consists of coach Hisham bin Ali Karshoud, and players Jana bint Muhammad al Sharjiya, Salma bint Saeed al Daghishiya, and Israa bint Saif al Siyabiyyah.

They are taking part in the epee competition (individual and team), and the foil competition (individual).

While the karate team consists of the main coach, Ali bin Talib, and the player, Hawra bint

Kamil al Lawati, who will participate in the individual kata competition.

The meeting highlighted other details related to participation; The technical details of the competitions, their schedule and venues, the requirements for the tournament, and the most important indicative procedures that will be implemented were discussed.

The tournament will witness the participation of more than 560 female players representing 63 teams from 15 Arab countries in 8 various sports: athletics, fencing, karate, archery, basketball, volleyball, table tennis, and bow and arrow.

The Supreme Organising Committee of the tournament announced the readiness of eight advanced sports facilities distributed in various locations in the cities and regions of Sharjah to provide the best conditions and services for Arab teams and players, taking into account the highest levels of safety and security.

Minor Hotels to expand Anantara portfolio with resort in Bandar al Khairan

Minor Hotels, an international hotel owner, operator and investor with more than 540 hotels in 56 countries in Asia Pacific, the Middle East, Africa, the Indian Ocean, Europe and the Americas, announced the continued expansion of its luxury Anantara brand in Oman with the upcoming development of a new resort in Bandar al Khairan, Muscat.

Located on the rugged Omani coast just 45 minutes from the capital, the new-build 121-key property is slated to launch in 2026.

The resort in Bandar al Khairan, to be operated by Anantara, will feature 51 guest rooms, 46 chalets, and 24 villas nestled along the mountain shoreline overlooking the crystal-clear water of the Gulf of Oman. Designed to offer contemporary luxury and set within a dramatic natural landscape, each gener-



ously sized guest room will be a stylish haven in the heart of the resort, while one and two-bedroom villas will be set separately among lush gardens for en-

hanced privacy.

A selection of units will include private pools for exclusive relaxation and additional comfort throughout Oman's hot sum-

mers. A dedication to gourmet dining will be found across five restaurants and bars including all-day international dining, a speciality restaurant, a beach

restaurant, a delicatessen café, and a rooftop bar with spectacular sea views.

The property will be owned by Musstir, the real estate acquisi-

tion and development arm of the MB Holding Company which also owns Al Baleed Resort Salalah by Anantara on Oman's south coast. This exciting new connection between Musstir and Minor Hotels to develop a second Anantara in partnership, marks a strengthened bond for two dynamic and forward-thinking groups and the next step in the continued evolution of Minor Hotels as a leading operator in this rapidly developing country.

Further premium facilities at the new Anantara resort in Bandar al Khairan will include an impressive infinity swimming pool and kids' splash pool, a kids and teens club lounge, meeting and events spaces, and a helipad. With a focus on wellbeing, the property will also feature an Anantara Spa and a fitness centre alongside a private stargazing majlis allowing guests to take in the beauty of the unspoiled night

sky. The property's stunning seafront location is perfect for leisure guests seeking a complete escape in a premier wellness and marine discovery destination, or as a tranquil sanctuary for hosting unforgettable events and business occasions.

"The timeless beauty of the Omani coast is a natural home for this upcoming new addition to our Middle East portfolio. Musstir are trusted partners who share our vision for the potential of this magnificent destination and our dedication to excellence across every element. Our team and I look forward to seeing this new Anantara come to fruition between the mountains and the sea," said Dillip Rajakarier, Group CEO of parent company Minor International.

"We are thrilled to grow our partnership with Minor Hotels," said Safana al Barwani, the Managing Director of Musstir.

4 years on, what has Brexit done for UK?

‘The uncertainties surrounding new trading arrangements cast a shadow over economic performance’

London, UK - As Britain marks the fourth anniversary of its departure from the EU, a spectrum of perspectives come out on Brexit’s impacts and implications, ranging from tempered optimism to deep-seated concern.

Anadolu delved into conversations with experts and everyday Brits to capture the nuanced sentiments surrounding this historic milestone for the country in what would have been a half century in the bloc had it not departed on January 31, 2020.

In an interview, the former head of the Brexit Unit at the Institute of Economic Affairs in London, Julian Jessop, offered a hopeful, yet cautious, take on Brexit’s long-term prospects.

Acknowledging its initial blows to the UK economy, he pointed to challenges in trade dynamics and diminished business investment.

“I’m actually an optimist about the long-term impact of Brexit. But even I recognise that the initial impact on the economy has been negative in two ways in particular one is, of course, it’s become harder to do trade with our biggest single trading partner, the rest of Europe,” he said.

“So our trade performance has been weaker than it would otherwise have been. But on top of that, business investment has been lower than it would otherwise have been as well,” explained Jessop. According to him, the uncertainties surrounding new trading arrangements cast a shadow over economic performance as businesses grapple with adjustments and hesitation.

‘Significant cost’
On the impending implementa-



Britain marks the fourth anniversary of its departure from the European Union

Joining the Customs Union might help in some ways, but it would come at a significant cost in terms of making free trade deals a lot harder

JULIAN JESSOP

tion of full border checks for imports from the bloc at the end of this month, Jessop downplayed their expected effect, which he argued would be ‘pretty small’.

Jessop also addressed the possibility of the UK re-joining the Customs Union as part of its

post-Brexit strategy.

Doing so is not only unlikely to reduce border frictions in a particularly significant way, it would also restrict the UK’s ability to negotiate independent trade deals with other countries, thus coming at a significant cost.

“There are essentially two parts of European membership: the single market and the Customs Union,” Jessop said. “Joining the Customs Union might help in some ways, but it would come at a significant cost in terms of making free trade deals a lot harder.”

Legal complexities
Alexander Turk, a professor of law at King’s College London, shed light on the intricate legal ramifications of Brexit, emphasising the hurried nature of treaty negotiations and unresolved is-

sues within trade agreements.

Key among these concerns is the dilemma surrounding Northern Ireland, where the imperative to preserve the absence of a hard border clashes with the region’s status as part of the UK. While recent developments offer glimmers of progress with Brussels under a deal dubbed the Windsor Framework, possible discord still looms large over Northern Ireland, casting a shadowing over the UK-EU relationship.

According to Turk, the eruption of conflict in Ukraine has underscored the need for Britain

and the EU to collaborate on security issues and navigate the complicated matter of sanctions on Russia.

However, he said that while strides have been made in security cooperation, trade remains a contentious arena, especially for UK companies grappling with supply chain disruptions and regulatory hurdles.

Turk highlighted the plight of small and medium-sized enterprises as they bear the brunt of complex rules governing tariff-free access to the EU market.

For these businesses, under-

standing and complying with regulatory frameworks pose significant challenges, amplifying costs and impeding smooth operations.

According to Turk, the delicate balance between regulatory autonomy and market access underscores the inherent trade-offs facing the UK as it navigates its post-Brexit identity.

While aligning with EU standards may facilitate trade, this comes at the cost of relinquishing control over regulatory frameworks - a conundrum emblematic of the broader Brexit discourse.

“This is a trade-off. The closer you have the relationship with the EU, the less autonomy,” he said, noting that one of the main reasons that the UK wanted to leave the bloc was to ‘re-assert autonomy over its own laws’.

“But if you want to have smooth access, the EU will actually say: ‘Well then you’re going to have to comply with our procedures and processes’. So, you will inevitably give up regulatory autonomy.

“There is a balance to be struck between how much regulatory autonomy you want and need and how smooth the access is going to be,” he explained.

But for globetrotters like Magdalena Williams, a 75-year-old Londoner, Brexit has come signify poignant disappointment in the direction the country has taken.

For her, departure from the EU severed cherished ties and ushered in economic hardships, while sentiments of nostalgia echo for a bygone era of prosperity and unity.

Anadolu Agency

Rail strikes cause disruption across UK

London, UK - British rail travel faces significant disruption as train drivers belonging to Aslef union embark on a series of 24-hour strikes and an overtime ban, impacting long-distance routes throughout the country.

Commuters and travelers alike are advised to brace for tumultuous journeys over the next four days.

Starting on Friday, the strikes, orchestrated by drivers affiliated with the Aslef union, will halt most London-Edinburgh trains along the East Coast mainline.

Limited service on select routes will be available for LNER and Greater Anglia on Saturday, although the disruption remains palpable.

Aslef has issued a stark warning, vowing to prolong the disruptive industrial action until there is progress on its pay demands.

The union dismissed an eight



Commuters and travelers alike are advised to brace for tumultuous journeys over the next four days

per cent total increase proposal, labelling it ‘risible’, particularly since some drivers have endured nearly five years without a pay raise amidst surging infla-

tion rates.

This industrial unrest is part of a protracted pay dispute involving all national rail operators contracted to the Department

for Transport. While the strikes directly impact firms based in England, cross-border rail services to Scotland and Wales will also experience disruptions.

Aslef union has issued a stark warning, vowing to prolong the disruptive industrial action until there is progress on its pay demands

In light of the ongoing turmoil, train operators nationwide urge passengers to verify travel arrangements before setting out.

The overtime ban, scheduled to persist until Tuesday evening, heightens the likelihood of short-term cancellations across the network, further exacerbating the situation for commuters and travelers alike.

Anadolu Agency

Axiom-3 mission’s return postponed

Istanbul, Turkey - The return of the Axiom-3 Mission crew from the International Space Station (ISS) was postponed until at least on Monday due to ‘unfavourable recovery conditions’, SpaceX announced early on Saturday.

“We are now targeting no earlier than Monday, February 5 for Dragon and the Ax-3 crew to undock,” the private space company said in an announcement on X about the return of the crew, including Turkey’s first space traveller Alper Gezeravci, on its Dragon capsule.

“Teams will continue to monitor weather ahead of the next undocking opportunity,” it added.

The Dragon capsule, which will carry Axiom-3 mission to the Earth, was expected to undock from the ISS at 6am Eastern Time (1100GMT).

The four-person mission was



launched from NASA’s Kennedy Space Center, Florida on January 19 on a SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket.

The Ax-3 space mission crew docked at the ISS on January 20.

Gezeravci and his three crewmates from Spain, Italy, and Sweden were responsible for carrying out over 30 experiments.

Anadolu Agency

Nayib Bukele on course for his 2nd presidential term in El Salvador

Bogotta, Colombia - Nayib Bukele, the president of El Salvador, is expected to secure a second term in office when the country votes on Sunday as 90 per cent of Salvadorans support him, despite a constitutional ban on reelection.

In 2021, however, the Supreme Court, composed of justices selected by Bukele’s supporters in Congress, ruled that the president could seek a second five-year term in this year’s elections.

President Bukele’s overwhelming popularity is attributed to an offensive against criminal gangs that have dramatically reduced homicide rates and restored security in what was one of the

world’s most dangerous countries, but transformed into one of the safest in the region.

In 2015, El Salvador faced 105 murders per 100,000 residents, but Bukele’s crime crackdown reduced this figure to 7.8 per 100,000.

“This security success catapulted Bukele into popularity,” says Luis Villaherrera, founder of TRACODA, an organisation that seeks to strengthen democracy in El Salvador. “The people who experienced constant gang violence and extortion on a daily basis, live in relative peace today.”

While Bukele’s anti-gang policies have improved security, they have raised concerns among



Nayib Bukele, the president of El Salvador

human rights groups and democracy advocates like Villaherrera. A state of emergency instituted in 2022 led to arrests without court

orders, arbitrary detentions, and abuses, raising international outcry and concerns about the violation of civil liberties.

Under Bukele, El Salvador has had one of the highest incarceration rates in the world, with an estimated two per cent of its adult population behind bars. According to government figures, more than 75,000 people have been arrested, while his administration opened a new mega-prison designed to house 40,000 people last year. About 7,000 detainees have since been freed for lack of evidence, but activists say many innocents remain behind bars.

“Human rights have been sacrificed for security,” says Villaherrera. “Some people have died inside prisons because they do not have the appropriate conditions to live inside, there are mass

trials that do not respect the individuality of each of the accused and the state of emergency is no longer the exception, but the norm and this leads to the systematic violation of human rights where any person can be taken to prison without due process.”

Villaherrera argues that these measures have expanded the powers granted to the military that belonged to the police, opening the door to civil liberty violations.

“There is a transfer of fear, perhaps not to the same extent, from the gangs to the militarisation of the armed forces because they manage part of public security that the police should be respon-

sible for.”

Some Salvadorans, like 70-year-old Uber driver Roberto Gonzalez, see Bukele’s methods as necessary for stability despite concerns about human rights violations.

“It may be true that there are some who unjustly went to prison but we have to pay a price for our stability,” says Gonzalez, an avid Bukele supporter. “Before President Bukele, it was difficult to go for a walk downtown San Salvador, you couldn’t even take your cell phone out, or travel throughout the country. Those of us who did not dare to go to some places can now go everywhere.”

Anadolu Agency

EU foreign policy chief likens Middle East to ‘boiler that can explode’

Ankara, Turkey - The Middle East is a ‘boiler that can explode,’ and everybody should try to avoid an escalation, the EU’s foreign policy chief said on Saturday.

EU foreign ministers will discuss the situation in Africa, Ukraine, the Middle East and the Red Sea, Josep Borrell told reporters at the doorstep of the informal meeting of foreign affairs ministers in Brussels.

He stressed Israel was continuing to push at least one million Palestinians toward the Egyptian border in the south.

“We have been repeating once and again that the Middle East is a boiler that can explode ... That is why we call everybody to try to avoid an escalation.

“We are living a critical situation in the Middle East... And as



European Union’s foreign policy chief Josep Borrell

far as the war in Gaza continues, it is very difficult to believe that the situation in the Red Sea will improve.”

Belgian Foreign Minister Hadja Lahbib said, for her part, that the ministers will also discuss the relations with Turkey.

She stressed that Turkey was an important partner within NATO.

“Turkey has played an impor-

tant role in the recent conflict when it comes about the Middle East but also, especially when it comes about the Russian aggression against Ukraine,” Lahbib noted.

The minister reiterated her country’s stance, which is to call for an immediate cease-fire in Gaza, respecting access to humanitarian aid, and efforts for a two-state solution.

“It is a real risk of spill-over of the conflict, that’s what we want to avoid absolutely,” the Belgian minister said.

The ministers gathered on Friday for a two-day informal meeting. EU-Africa relations, EU-Turkey relations, the situation in Ukraine and the Middle East are the main topics on the agenda.

Anadolu Agency

EU, ASEAN call for rapid, unimpeded access in Gaza



London, UK - The EU and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) on Friday expressed ‘grave concerns’ over developments in the Middle East, and condemned the attacks against civilians.

In a joint statement following the 24th EU-ASEAN Ministerial Meeting, the two regional blocs said they agreed to condemn all attacks against civilians, and ‘we noted the call of some of us for a durable ceasefire’ in Gaza.

“We called for rapid, safe and unimpeded humanitarian access to all those in need, including through increased capacity at border crossings and through a dedicated maritime route,” said the statement.

It called on all parties to the conflict to protect civilians, refrain from targeting them, and abide by international law, including international humanitarian law.

The EU and ASEAN also called for the ‘immediate and unconditional’ release of all hostages, especially women, children, the sick and the elderly, while ‘some of us’ raised the importance of release from arbitrary detention.

Although the statement did not specifically name which party is responsible for the ‘arbitrary detention’, Israel has long been accused by the international community of ‘arbitrary detention’ and ‘forced disappearance’.

The Geneva-based Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Monitor recently asserted that several Palestinians have been ‘tortured to death’ in Israeli army detention camps.

It said that preliminary estimates suggest that more than 3,000 Palestinians, including 200 women and young girls, have been detained by Israeli forces.

We called for rapid, safe and unimpeded humanitarian access to all those in need, including through increased capacity at border crossings

EU-ASEAN STATEMENT

The statement urged all parties to work towards a peaceful resolution to the conflict with a view to realising the two-state solution based on the pre-1967 borders in accordance with international law and the relevant UN Security Council (UNSC) resolutions.

“We took note, and some of us underlined the importance of, the order on provisional measures issued by interim ruling by

the International Court of Justice on 26 January 2024,” it added.

The joint statement said that the parties reaffirmed the importance of maintaining and promoting peace, security, stability, safety, and freedom of navigation in and overflight above the South China Sea, in accordance with international law.

“We reaffirmed the need to enhance mutual trust and confidence, exercise self-restraint in the conduct of all activities and avoid actions that could increase tensions and the risk of accidents, misunderstandings, and miscalculation, as well as to pursue peaceful resolution of disputes in accordance with the universally recognised principles of international law,” it noted.

On the war in Ukraine, the EU and ASEAN said most members

‘strongly condemned’ the war in Ukraine and stressed it is causing ‘immense human suffering and exacerbating existing fragilities in the global economy - constraining growth, increasing inflation, disrupting supply chains, heightening energy and food insecurity, and elevating financial stability risks’.

“There were other views and different assessments of the situation and sanctions,” it said, adding that they continue to reaffirm, as for all nations, the need to respect the sovereignty, political independence, and territorial integrity of Ukraine.

Also expressing ‘grave concern’ over the surge in North Korea’s intercontinental ballistic missile testing, the statement noted that it constitutes a ‘flagrant violation of the United Nations Security Council resolutions’.

Anadolu Agency



Palestinians inspect the debris of a building after Israeli airstrikes in the southern Gaza Strip city of Rafah, on Saturday (Xinhua)

Death toll in Gaza climbs to 27,238

Gaza City, Palestine - At least 107 Palestinians were killed and 165 others injured in the last 24 hours as Israel continues its onslaught on the besieged Gaza Strip, the enclave’s Health Ministry said on Saturday.

“The Israeli occupation committed 12 massacres against families in the Gaza Strip, leaving 107 martyrs and 165 injured during the past 24 hours,” the ministry said in a statement.

Despite a provisional ruling by the International Court of Justice last month, Israel continues its onslaught on the Gaza Strip, where at least 27,238 Palestinians have been killed, mostly women and children, and 66,452 injured since October 7, according to Palestinian health authorities.

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

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

Meanwhile, Israeli right-wing activists and relatives of hostages in Gaza obstructed humanitarian aid trucks from entering the enclave on Friday, according to the Israeli broadcasting authority.

“Protesters against the entry of aid into Gaza, including some family members of the hostages, closed the Nitzana crossing (in southern Israel), claiming that not a single supply truck for Hamas will pass from here,” it said.

‘Aid trucks destined for Gaza cannot enter through the Nitzana crossing’, but the outlet emphasised that ‘79 trucks entered through the Kerem Shalom crossing’ in southern Israel.

Israel decided last month to allow limited humanitarian aid to enter Gaza after they passed inspection at the Kerem Shalom and Nitzana crossings. Israeli media reported in January that the United States pressured Israel to allow more aid to pass through the Kerem Shalom and Nitzana crossings, which Israel closed after it began its war against Gaza.

Right-wing activists and relatives of hostages have been staging protests for more than one week on roads leading to the crossings to prevent humanitarian aid from getting into Gaza. The Israeli army declared the areas of the crossings ‘military closed’ in the last two days to prevent demonstrators from obstructing trucks, but protesters have continued to demonstrate on roads leading to the crossings to block the passage of humanitarian trucks.

Anadolu Agency

Israel’s forced starvation in Gaza affects both humans and animals

Gaza, Palestine - In the northern Gaza Strip, where the Israeli army has blocked humanitarian aid for around four months, animals are resorting to feeding on the deceased due to hunger.

Israel has been continuously attacking the Gaza Strip, home to 2.3mn Palestinians, for 118 days, blocking humanitarian aid, including food and medical supplies, to the besieged region.

In Gaza, under intense bombardment and a full blockade, Palestinians face difficulty securing basic food as they witness animals perishing due to both attacks and hunger.

Gaza City and the Jabalia Refugee Camp in the north,

severely affected by Israeli attacks, witness starving cats and dogs resorting to feeding on their own kind and other animals due to the inability to find food.

Palestinian Samih Zeyneddin, a resident of the Jabalia Refugee Camp, told Anadolu that Israel’s forced starvation policy has significantly impacted animals as well. Zeyneddin said that the carcasses of numerous animals have gathered near waste collection areas, with some already decaying.

He explained: “Due to the lack of sufficient food in the Jabalia Refugee Camp and the entire northern region, both people and animals have been starving, lead-



In Gaza, under intense bombardment and a full blockade, Palestinians face difficulty securing basic food

ing to the death of these animals over the past few weeks.”

‘People face starvation’

Another Gaza City resident, Esma en-Neccar, told Anadolu that a cat roamed around a nearby garbage container, stating that the hungry animal was trying to satisfy its hunger by eating the carcass of its own kind due to the inability to find food.

Neccar expressed concern about the widespread starvation among both people and animals, saying: “People are on the brink of starving to death; now think about the animals.”

It is indicated that starving an-

imals are turning to the corpses of people who died in Israel’s attacks but could not be retrieved from their locations.

Videos on social media also showed starving cats and dogs feeding on the corpses of Palestinians in Khan Yunis, where the Israeli army hindered ambulance access after their killings.

Palestinian veterinarian Aid Ebu Necm built a shelter for abandoned cats in southern Gaza’s Rafah.

Ebu Necm, stating that many cats have died either due to Israeli attacks or hunger, said: “The war Israel unleashed on Gaza killed not only people but also animals.”

Anadolu Agency

INDIA

BJP stalwart L K Advani to be conferred Bharat Ratna

New Delhi - Saffron stalwart and senior BJP leader L K Advani will be conferred the Bharat Ratna, the country's highest civilian honour, Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced on Saturday.

Taking to the social media platform, Modi said the former Union Minister's contribution to the development of India is monumental.

"I am very happy to share that Shri L K Advani Ji will be conferred the Bharat Ratna. I also spoke to him and congratulated him on being conferred this honour. One of the most respected statesmen of our times, his contribution to the development of India is monumental. His is a life that started from working at the grassroots to serving the nation as our Deputy Prime Minister. He distinguished himself as our Home Minister and I&B Minister as well. His Parliamentary interventions have always been exemplary, full of rich insights," the prime minister posted on X.

Born in Karachi, in present day Pakistan, on November 8, 1927, Advani through the years had served as the President of the Bharatiya Janata Party for the longest period since its inception in 1980. Capping a parliamentary career of nearly three decades, he was, first, the home minister and, later, the deputy



Veteran BJP leader Lal Krishna Advani and his daughter Pratibha Advani during a media interaction, at their residence in New Delhi on Saturday (ANI)

prime minister in the cabinet of Atal Bihari Vajpayee (1999-2004).

Advani is widely regarded as an individual of great intellectual ability, strong principles, and unwavering support for the idea of a strong and prosperous India. As confirmed by Atal Bihari Vajpayee, Advani has 'never compromised on his core belief in nationalism, and yet has dis-

played flexibility in political responses whenever it was demanded by the situation'.

The veteran leader's celebration of India's independence from the British in 1947 was sadly short lived as he became one of the millions to be torn from his homeland amidst the terror and bloodshed of the tragedy of India's partition. These events, however, did not

turn him bitter or cynical but instead spurred him on in his desire to create a more secular India. With this goal in mind he journeyed to Rajasthan to continue his work as an RSS Pracharak.

Through the latter half of the 1980s and the 1990s, L K Advani focused on the singular task of building the BJP into a national political force.

The results of his efforts were underscored by the 1989 general election. The party bounced back from its 1984 tally of 2 to achieve an impressive 86 seats. The party position moved up to 121 seats in 1992 and 161 in 1996. For the first time since independence, the Congress was dethroned from its preeminent position.

ANI

Jharkhand HC to hear Soren's petition against ED arrest

Ranchi, Jharkhand - The Jharkhand High Court has scheduled the hearing for the petition filed by former Chief Minister Hemant Soren on February 5.

Soren had challenged his arrest by the Enforcement Directorate in an alleged land scam case.

Earlier, Hemant Soren was sent to five-day custody of the Enforcement Directorate by the High Court on Friday in connection with an alleged land scam case.

The JMM chief was arrested by the ED after several summons were issued to him in the alleged land scam case and several hours of questioning on Wednesday night.

Meanwhile, amidst the political unrest in Jharkhand, Champai Soren took oath as the Chief Minister of Jharkhand on Friday at the Raj Bhavan in Ranchi.

The former CM on Friday moved the Supreme Court against his arrest, but the court refused to entertain his plea, challenging his arrest by the ED in the land deal case and asked him to approach the concerned High Court with his petition.

"We are not inclined to entertain the present petition," the court said adding

that it left open to the petitioner to approach the jurisdictional HC.

The top court also said that it is open for the petitioner to urge the high court to expeditiously decide the case.

The JMM chief was arrested by the ED after several summons were issued to him in the alleged land scam case

Soren challenged the ED's summons dated January 22, 2024, and January 25, 2024, purportedly issued under Section 50 of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act, 2002, as illegal, null, and void, and accordingly quash the impugned summons and all steps taken and proceedings emanating therefrom.

The JMM chief claimed that he has been facing constant harassment at the hands of the ED, alleging that the probe agency was misusing its authority and powers at the bidding of its political masters.

ANI

NICE TO SEE YOU



A girl interacts with a robot at the first ever Biswa Odia Bhasa Sammilani (World Odia Language conference), at Janta Maidan in Bhubhaneswar on Friday (ANI)

Interim budget is guarantee of empowering poor, says PM Modi

Sambalpur, Odisha - Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday said that the Interim Budget which was announced earlier this week guarantees the development of every section in the society adding that this budget further strengthens the government's policy in eradicating poverty in the nation.

Addressing a public meeting in Sambalpur, Prime Minister Modi said: "The country's new budget has come just two days ago. This budget further strengthens the policy following which 25 crore people of the country have come out of poverty in the last 10 years. The budget announcement is a guarantee of empowering the poor. Be it our youth, women, farmers, fishermen, this budget guarantees everyone's development. Guarantee of fulfilling guarantees is the meaning of Modi guarantee."

Stating that the BJP-led Cen-



PM Narendra Modi and Odisha CM Naveen Patnaik at the inauguration and laying foundation stone of 18 projects, in Sambalpur on Saturday (ANI)

tre has brought a new revolution in the usage of LED bulbs resulting in a reduction in the cost of electricity bills, Modi said: "In the last 10 years, we provided electricity even to those villages which were in darkness even after the independence of the country. Now our effort is that

the electricity bill of the poor of the country also becomes zero and in this budget, rooftop solar power scheme has been announced for 1 crore families."

Modi on Saturday inaugurated the permanent campus of the Indian Institute of Management (IIM) in Sambalpur.

He also laid the foundation stone of projects worth more than Rs 68,000 crore in Sambalpur, Odisha aimed at boosting the energy sector involving natural gas, coal and power generation apart from important projects of road, railway and higher education sector.

Modi underlined that the people of Odisha belonging to the poor section, labourers, working class, business owners and farmers among all other sections of society will reap the benefits of today's development projects.

He further added that it will also create thousands of new employment opportunities for the youth of Odisha.

The prime minister said that in order to make Odisha a hub of education, and skill development, continuous efforts have been put in by the Central government.

ANI

Pakistan: Imran Khan, Bushra Bibi sentenced to 7 years in 'un-Islamic nikah' case

Islamabad, Pakistan - A trial court has handed seven-year sentences each to former Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan and his wife Bushra Bibi in the 'un-Islamic nikah' case at the Adiala jail on Saturday, Pakistan-based Geo News reported.

The court has also asked Imran Khan and Bushra Bibi to pay a fine of Pakistani Rupees 500,000 each. The couple were present in the courtroom when the verdict was announced, according to Geo News report.

Senior civil judge Qudratullah announced the verdict on Saturday. The decision was announced a day after the hearing of the case was conducted inside

the jail premises for 14 hours. The court had reserved its decision after the arguments were completed on Friday.

The judge pronounced the court's verdict in a case related to the plea registered by Bushra Bibi's former husband, Khawar Maneka against what he refers to as an un-Islamic and illegal nikah with Imran Khan.

So far, cross-examination of the statements given by the four witnesses in the case has been completed, Geo News reported. The statements of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) founder Imran Khan and his wife Bushra Bibi under Section 342 have been recorded.



Bushra Bibi and Imran Khan

During the court's hearing on Friday, the complainant's lawyer Raja Rizwan Abbasi and Khan's lawyer Salman Akram Raja and Bushra Bibi's counsel Usman Gul also gave their final arguments.

In his petition, Khawar Maneka had called Imran Khan and Bushra Bibi's nikah 'fraudulent' and stressed that the marriage was solemnised during her iddah after her divorce from him.

The petition filed by Maneka reads: "That above said nikah and the marriage ceremony was neither legal nor Islamic as it was solemnised without observing iddah period," according to the Geo News report.

Khawar Maneka accused

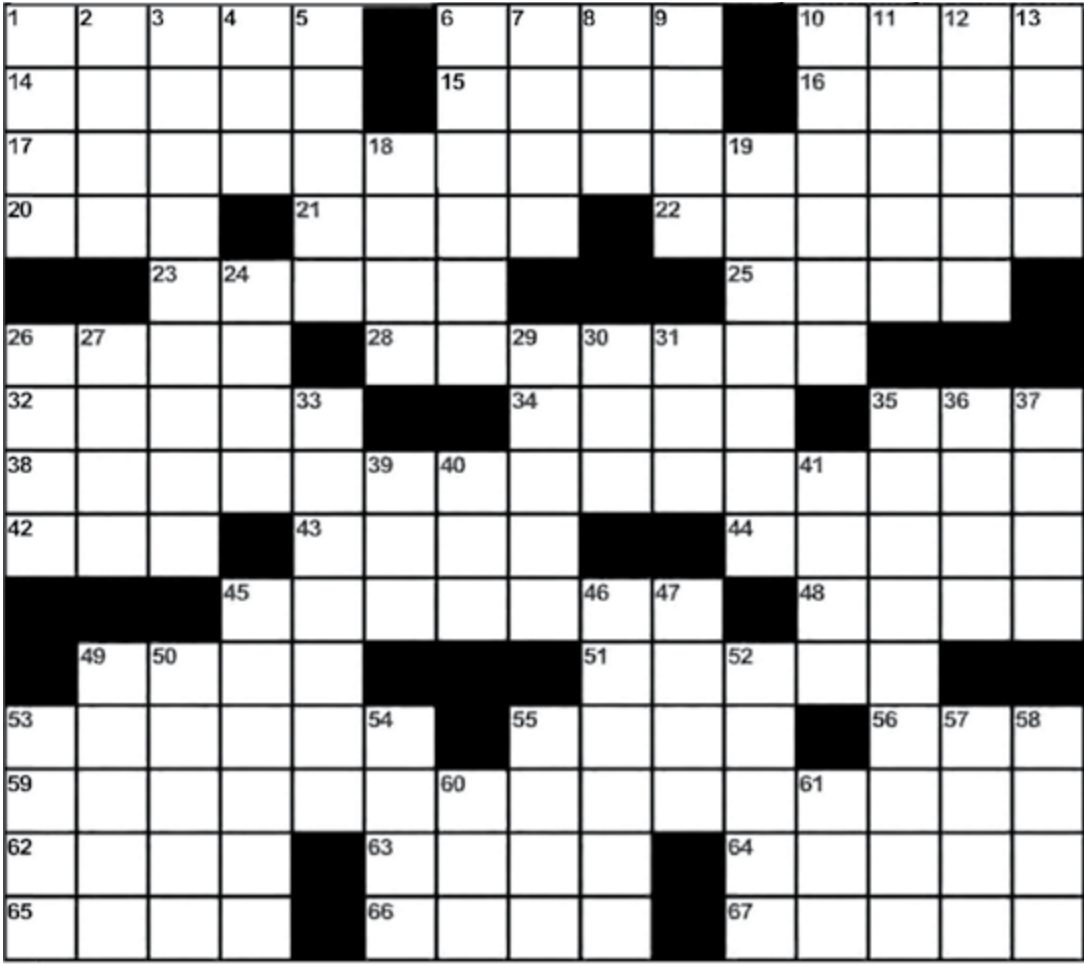
Imran Khan of ruining his entire life. In the petition, he mentioned that PTI founder 'stigmatised the complainant and his family just to achieve his unethical and immoral objects through intrusion in the complainant's peaceful marital life'.

He requested the court to summon Imran Khan and Bushra Bibi and punish them in accordance with the law.

"In light of the above, it is humbly prayed that respondents No.1 (Imran Khan) and 2 (Bushra Bibi) be summoned and punished strictly in accordance with law in the interest of justice," Maneka had requested the court.

ANI

DAILY CROSSWORD



ACROSS

- 1) Opening for an anchor cable
- 6) Cheater's sound at test time
- 10) Witchy crones
- 14) Enlightened Buddhist
- 15) Animal's abode
- 16) Parting notice, briefly
- 17) Two light chasers
- 20) Settled on a sofa
- 21) Abominable Himalayan
- 22) Hair slickener
- 23) Ceremonial elegance
- 25) Jeweler's collection
- 26) Diamond Head's locale
- 28) Makes operable again
- 32) Type of salad or tragedy
- 34) Collection of miscellaneous pieces
- 35) Beatty of TV and film
- 38) Three light chasers
- 42) Suffix for extremists
- 43) Part of a sacrifice, sometimes
- 44) Swiss border lake
- 45) Less acute
- 48) _bodied

- 49) Amos or Spelling
- 51) Titled peer of the realm
- 53) Does an IRS job
- 55) Itty-bitty bit
- 56) Be remorseful
- 59) Three light chasers
- 62) Black, in poetry
- 63) Utilized a doorbell
- 64) Bit of color
- 65) "Stop!"
- 66) "Cut bait" alternative
- 67) War horse
- DOWN**
- 1) Makes hesitant sounds
- 2) Length x width, for a rectangle
- 3) James Cagney film classic
- 4) Succumb to gravity
- 5) Alcohol type
- 6) River to the Mississippi
- 7) It's wrapped in India
- 8) Be in session
- 9) Excursion
- 10) Classic literary detective
- 11) Crosswise, on a ship
- 12) Encircles or fortifies
- 13) Eyelid affliction
- 18) Eye drop
- 19) Act of political

- backscratching
- 24) Signaled an actor
- 26) Shrek, e.g.
- 27) "Iliad" warrior god
- 29) Coastal cities
- 30) In the manner of
- 31) Due east on a grandfather clock
- 33) Make unwanted comments (var.)
- 35) Whom all contenders are chasing
- 36) And others, for short
- 37) Fraction of a newton
- 39) Cashew, e.g.
- 40) African antelope
- 41) Distribute cards
- 45) Familiarize
- 46) Just the right amount
- 47) Campus military org.
- 49) Engine supercharger
- 50) Ancient Greek theater
- 52) Thai bills
- 53) Lying under covers
- 54) Bondman of old
- 55) Charged particles
- 57) Encourage
- 58) _ out a living (just got by)
- 60) _ chi (martial art)
- 61) Punster's skill

NOTE PAD



YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE



ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

The morning might start slowly for you, but by the middle of the day you can expect a big burst of energy. Immediately, you'll want to rush ahead and do something. You will feel like you have everything you need to get stuff done but you really can't just yet. Someone is standing in your way. They're not trying to hold you up on purpose, but they will be an obstacle you won't be able to work around. But this pause in the action won't prevent you from having a good day.



LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

If you are trying to build your confidence, don't stress yourself out too much about it. You'll only make any growing doubts about your place in the world worse. Only insecure people base their self-image on what other people think, so the first thing you have to do is stop focusing so much on the opinions of other people. Stop trying to impress other people and start trying to impress yourself. Do something that will make you proud of yourself and your ego will grow taller.



SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

Start being more generous with your opinions, and you'll start making your relationships a lot more meaningful. You can't underestimate a person's ability to accept constructive criticism. They want to be told the truth just like you do. And few people are as good at couching their negative remarks with tact and charm as you. So don't hold back when saying what you really think about their project or idea. They're counting on you to give it to them straight, so don't let them down.



TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

There's quite a bit of fire in you today, and it could burst out when no one expects it. If someone opens their mouth and says something you don't like, watch out! There is never a good reason to tolerate someone who is arrogant toward other people. You can try to be forgiving, but when someone is rude they are rude. Ignoring them is the same as encouraging them. Folks might be surprised by your sass, but later they'll tell you how awesome you were.



VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

Several people want to spend a lot more time with you, and they are getting more and more bold about demanding it. These overbearing people might think they are making you happy by asking for time with you, but their actions might feel more overwhelming than flattering. It's time to take a step back and regain control over your own free time. It's yours to do with what you want. Just because you don't have plans doesn't mean you didn't plan it that way.



CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

Being diplomatic is nice, but you are better off being in control today. It is not an easy day for making compromises and seeing things from other people's points of view anyway, so no one is going to mind too much if you step up and take charge. They trust you more than you realize, and they have confidence that you will make the right decisions, so you should too. If you're surrounded by powerful people, don't get intimidated. Smart people admire other smart people.



GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

There is a distinct lack of intellectualism around you today, and you aren't going to find any scintillating conversations happening. If you have a strong urge to get philosophical, turn to one of your friends. New people are too afraid of going against the grain right now. They are going to be prone to just saying whatever they think you want to hear. Satisfy your intellectual hunger with a search on the topics that interest you. Be in charge of your own education.



LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

It's one thing to keep your hopes high, but it's another to be unrealistic about your chances. It's time for you to get real. It's important to challenge yourself, but if you keep setting your sights higher than you could ever reach, you're not challenging yourself. You're setting yourself up for failure. Pick one of your current goals and readjust it. Make it more accessible. Once you reach it, you'll have confidence to set the next goal a little bit higher. That's the right way to grow.



AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

If your romantic life is going through some drama right now, the best course of action is no action at all. Even if you are sure of what you want to happen next, you've got to wait a while and just let the dust settle. Let the other person be the next one to make a move. It's their turn, and if you act impatiently, they could feel like you are starting a power struggle. If things are meant to be, they are meant to be. You need to take this kind of attitude right now.



CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

It's time for you to get a bigger and better grip on the forces around you. There is no need for you to do what you are told when you don't like what you are being told to do. In short, fight back. Not only will the powers that be respect what you have to say, but they will gain a new appreciation for just what a tough customer you can be. Flexing your muscles feels good, and if you don't do it from time to time, your strength will atrophy.



SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

You have to just let this day happen in whatever way it wants to happen. Sure, you could push and push and try to force certain things to happen at certain times, but doing so is kind of a waste of energy, and it will only cause you to get stressed out, which certainly won't help things. There's a lot to be said for hanging loose. Let go of your desire for control. Let other people drive things for a while. Resign yourself to being more passive right now.



PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

You're happy about the recent success of a friend or family member, but don't start feeling bad about yourself if you feel some jealousy creeping into your heart today when they gloat a little bit longer than is absolutely necessary. You're only human. But focusing on what other people have is only going to give you license to throw a pity party for yourself. Instead, focus on being grateful for what you do have. Think in terms of satisfaction, health, and happiness.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

1. The fifth longest river in Africa, the Rhumel (or Amp-saga) River, runs through which country?

- A. Morocco
- B. Algeria
- C. Libya
- D. Mauritania

02. Oil from oil wells was first used for what?

- A. Evaporate brine to produce salt
- B. Fuelling railway engines
- C. Lubricating weaving machines
- D. Lighting

03. Which of these is the name for a textbook of magic spells?

- A. Omnibus
- B. Almanac
- C. Lexicon
- D. Grimoire

Answers: 1.B 2.A 3.D

KIDS COLOURING



BOGGLER

L	A	D	A
E	P	O	F
E	O	R	R
S	O	C	B

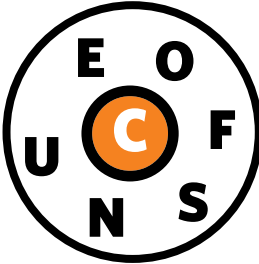
Each game will present you with a matrix filled with letters. The objective is to form words by linking adjacent letters - to the left, right, on top, bottom, or diagonal to each other. The Boggles Classic game uses a 4 x 4 matrix. Words are valued at one point for each letter in excess of two letters. 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

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

WORD BUILDER



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

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

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER

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

IN FULL SWING

Bumrah takes six wickets to blow England away after Jaiswal’s double hundred

Visakhapatnam, India - Jasprit Bumrah claimed six for 45 in a reverse swing masterclass to fetch India a handy lead on day two of the second test against England in Visakhapatnam on Saturday.

Replying to India’s 396 in the first innings, England were cruising at 114-1 batting with the kind of unbridled aggression, which has become the hallmark of the side under Ben Stokes.

Bumrah, armed with the reversing ball, then turned the match on its head and England were all out for 253 conceding a first-innings lead of 143.

India were 28 for no loss at stumps for an overall lead of 171.

Yashasvi Jaiswal, who smashed 209 in the first innings, was batting on 15 with skipper Rohit Sharma on 13 at the other end.

“If you want to take wickets as a fast in India, you have got to learn to use reverse swing because the new ball doesn’t do much,” Bumrah said of his bowling.

“Sometimes you can try and force the magical deliveries but it’s also about being patient and setting the batter up.

“You have to have a plan and use every delivery wisely. I was



India's Jasprit Bumrah celebrates after taking the wicket of England's Ollie Pope

very happy to execute it today and happy to contribute on that pitch.”

England got off to a strong start with Zak Crawley (76) and Ben Duckett (21) looking determined to make the most of the excellent batting conditions.

Crawley hit Bumrah for four fours in an over en route to a 52-ball fifty, a milestone he reached with a six off Kuldeep Yadav (3-

71).

The spinner broke the 59-run stand when he had Duckett caught at silly point but was denied a second wicket in that over when Srikar Bharat blew a stumping opportunity against Ollie Pope.

Crawley went run-a-ball but miscued his shot against Axar Patel and Shreyas Iyer took a spectacular tumbling catch running backwards to trigger a collapse.

With the ball reversing, Bumrah was recalled into the attack and the crafty seamer responded by getting Joe Root caught in the slip for five.

Bumrah’s mastery was on display again and this time Pope (23) nearly fell over trying to block a yorker that crashed through his defence and into the

base of his middle and leg stumps. Bumrah returned after the tea break to dismiss Johnny Bairstow (25) with England reeling at 159 with their top five batters back in the hut.

Yadav removed Ben Foakes and Rehan Ahmed before Bumrah returned to produce a stunning delivery to end Stokes’s brisk 47. Stokes dropped his bat and stood in disbelief after Bumrah

sent down a delivery that jagged back to flatten his off-stump.

Earlier, Jaiswal smashed his maiden test double hundred, which contained seven sixes and 19 fours, to provide the bedrock of the Indian innings where no other batter managed a fifty.

Seamer James Anderson, Shoaib Bashir and fellow spinner Ahmed claimed three wickets apiece for England.



Nasser Saleh al Attiyah

Hefty time penalty for Al Attiyah and Bernacchini in Qatar Rally

Lusail, Qatar - Nasser Saleh al Attiyah and co-driver Giovanni Bernacchini have incurred a time penalty that was ruined their chance of winning this year’s Qatar International Rally.

The Qatari was reportedly seen driving on the road section from the fourth stage to the service area and regroup in Lusail with only three rotating wheels on his Volkswagen Polo GTI after he had a puncture. Event Stewards met to discuss the matter in detail and determined that the multiple FIA Middle East Rally Champion was considered to have retired from the leg after stage four. The 30-minute penalty for missing the remaining three stages means that the French crew of Pierre-Louis Loubet and Loris Pascaud will now take a lead of 22.7 seconds over their SRT Škoda Fabia RS Rally2 teammates Mads Ostberg and Patrik Barth into the remaining six special stages.

Loubet was awarded a five-second penalty himself by the Stewards for crossing the finish line of stage four outside the yellow boards defining the beginning of the control zone.

Saudi Arabia closes in on deal to create new cycling league

London, England - An investment firm owned by Saudi Arabia’s Public Investment Fund (PIF) has emerged as a frontrunner to back a new cycling league, three people familiar with the matter told Reuters, the latest move by the kingdom to buy into global sports.

SRJ Sports Investments, founded last year, is in exclusive negotiations over a potential investment of around 250 million euro (\$270 million) in the venture being spearheaded by a number of major European cycling teams, one of the people said.

If successful, it would mark Saudi Arabia’s first significant involvement in cycling after pouring billions into other sports worldwide such as football, motorsports and martial arts. Sports is one of the pillars of the government’s Vision 2030 economic diversification plan that seeks to build new industries and create jobs. Some critics have called it an effort to distract from its human rights record.

SRJ is expected to finalise commercial aspects of a deal over the next two months after prevailing in an auction over other investors including private equity fund CVC, the person said.

Consulting firm EY had been seeking expressions of interest from investors for a new project, Reuters reported in October. Some top cycling teams are concerned that the lion’s share of profits from the main races, including the Tour de France, go to their organisers and a new league could be a way to recalibrate earnings, sources previously told Reuters.

The venture, which may amalgamate new and existing races, is being led by a handful of teams including Visma-Lease a Bike and billionaire businessman Jim Ratcliffe’s Ineos Grenadiers, those sources said.

The sources for this story, speaking on condition of anonymity, cautioned a deal may not be sealed and talks are ongoing.

EY and Ineos Grenadiers declined to comment. Representatives for SRJ did not respond to requests for comment.

“This idea is being explored, as many more ideas are being explored to come up with a sustainable business model for cycling in the future,” Visma-Lease a Bike told Reuters.

The talks do not involve Amaury Sports Organisation



The move will be Saudi Arabia’s first significant involvement in cycling

Wolff surprised by the timing of Hamilton’s Ferrari move

London, England - Mercedes Formula One principal Toto Wolff said Lewis Hamilton’s decision to move to Ferrari in 2025 took the team by surprise and revealed the seven times world champion announced the decision to him over breakfast at the boss’s home.

The move that rocked the sport was announced to the world by both teams on Thursday evening, a day after the Briton had informed Wolff.

The Austrian told reporters in a video call on Friday that while the switch to Ferrari was not a shock, as a topic discussed between them over the years, the timing came as a surprise.

“Formula One and my previous life have made me resilient to surprises. I’ve been confronted so many times in my life with black swans, but it was a surprise,” said the Austrian.

“We knew that maybe it could be a year, it could be two,” he said of the two year contract extension with a release clause that Hamilton and Mercedes signed only last August.

“The surprise was that I’ve heard the rumours a couple of days earlier but wanted to wait for the breakfast we had planned and that was Wednesday morning. This was when he broke the news.”

Wolff said Hamilton, 39, told him he needed a new challenge.

“He said to me that he has decided to race for Ferrari in 2025. And that was basically it. We had a good hour of conversation.



Toto Wolff (L) with Lewis Hamilton

I’ve been confronted so many times in my life with black swans, but it was a surprise

TOTO WOLFF

“How he framed it to me is perfectly understandable... that he was looking for a different environment and that it was maybe the last possibility to do something else.

“We totally respect that you can change your mind with different circumstances.”

Wolff, who addressed the team via video link on Thursday, said he had not tried to persuade Hamilton to change his mind.

He said Hamilton’s race engineer Peter ‘Bono’ Bonnington replied “Is it April 1?” when told the news. Wolff added that whether the engineer went with Hamilton to Ferrari was to be discussed.

China’s Lin beats Rodionova to make Thailand Open

Hua Hin, Thailand - Second seed Lin Zhu of China took another step toward defending her title at the Thailand Open by defeating Australian Arina Rodionova 6-3, 6-3 in a quarterfinal match Friday in Hua Hin.

Zhu had a 5-1 edge in aces and won 22 of her 29 first-service points (76 percent) to ease

into the semifinals. Her victory at last year’s tournament marked the first tour-level title of her career.

Her semifinal opponent will be unseeded countrywoman Yafan Wang, who rallied past American Katie Volynets 1-6, 6-3, 7-6 (4).

No. 3 seed Xinyu Wang

makes it a trio of Chinese players reaching the penultimate round, as she battled past Kazakh seventh seed Yulia Putintseva 6-1, 3-6, 6-3.

Xinyu Wang will now face Russian 19-year-old Diana Shnaider, who was a 6-2, 6-1 winner over Hungary’s Dalma Galfi.

Ostapenko wins

The top three seeds prevailed Friday to advance to the semifinals in Linz.

No. 1 Jelena Ostapenko of Latvia breezed past Brit Jodie Burrage 6-1, 6-2. No. 2 Ekaterina Alexandrova toppled fifth seed and defending champ Anastasia Potapova 6-2, 7-6 (8) in a battle

of Russians. And Croatian No. 3 Donna Vekic beat France’s Clara Burel 6-0, 7-6 (3).

The only upset of the day prevented the fourth seed from making the semifinals all chalk. Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova defeated Elise Mertens 6-3, 6-2, by converting four of her six break-point opportunities.



Lin Zhu of China defeated Australian Arina Rodionova in straight sets

Dortmund stumble to draw at Heidenheim

Berlin, Germany - Borussia Dortmund slipped up at Heidenheim on Friday for their first 0-0 draw in the Bundesliga since 2019 that kept them in fourth place in the standings.

After three league wins in 2024 the visitors, with close to 70% possession, could not crack open the Heidenheim defence and rarely managed to get into the box.

Donyell Malen had an effort ruled out for offside in the first half but Dortmund had no real attacking punch after the break despite three substitutions on the hour until Niclas Füllkrug's shot in the 86th minute that was palmed wide.

Heidenheim responded with a huge chance of their own in stoppage time when Kevin Sessa's header narrowly missed the target.

"We didn't play well," said Dortmund manager Edin Terzic after his side's first scoreless draw since October 2019.

"With the performance we delivered today, we didn't deserve more than a point."

The point meant Dortmund, whose last goalless draw was in October 2019 against Schalke 04, moved level on 37 points with VfB Stuttgart, who are ahead on goal difference in third place and face Freiburg on Saturday.

Nigeria beat Angola to reach Cup of Nations last four

Abidjan, Ivory Coast - Nigeria were the first side to book a semifinal berth at the Africa Cup of Nations after Ademola Lookman's first-half goal ensured a 1-0 win over Angola in the last eight on Friday.

Lookman finished off a flying run down the left by winger Moses Simon, who skipped the challenge of defender Kialonda Gaspar to break free and then teed up his team mate for his third goal of the tournament.

The 26-year-old's 41st-minute strike at the Felix Houphouët-Boigny Stadium was enough to set up a semifinal meeting on Wednesday against either the Cape Verde Islands or South Africa, who play their quarterfinal on Saturday.

Nigeria captain William Troost-Ekong urged his teammates to concentrate after making a clearance to deny Angola's Estrela an immediate response.

"I've had some experience now that I think the most crucial minutes are always directly after kick-off and after goals scored or conceded," Troost-Ekong said. "You just don't want to fall in the trap of working so hard to finally get a goal and then giving something away. We're learning, I think we're getting better and better,



Nigeria's Ademola Lookman celebrates after scoring against Angola on Friday

You just don't want to fall in the trap of working so hard to finally get a goal and then giving something away. We're learning, I think we're getting better and better...

WILLIAM TROOST-EKONG

more mature as well as a team."

Nigeria have now qualified for the semifinal in 13 of their last 15 Cup of Nations appearances and been elevated to the role of favourites at a tournament where almost all the heavy-weight contenders have been dumped out.

Angola had their chances, notably hitting the woodwork through substitute Zini in the 59th minute as he was put through by a clever defence-splitting pass, but Nigeria proved the superior side.

The Angolans, who have never been further than the last eight in previous Cup of Nations tournaments, came close to the lead inside four minutes. A cor-

ner was flicked on at the near post and Mabululu saw his shot from two yards brilliantly saved by Nigeria goalkeeper Stanley Nwabili.

Victor Osimhen had Nigeria's first real opportunity midway through the first half but his header was too close to Angola keeper Antonio Dominique.

It was a frustrating night for African Footballer of the Year Osimhen who headed home a 75th-minute freekick but it was disallowed after a VAR check.

Democratic Republic of Congo beat Guinea to reach semifinals

Abidjan, Ivory Coast - The Democratic Republic of Congo came from a goal behind to beat Guinea 3-1 in their Africa Cup of Nations quarterfinal at the Alasane Ouattara Olympic Stadium on Friday and join Nigeria in the last four.

Chancel Mbemba, Yoane Wissa and Arthur Masuaku scored the goals as the Congolese recovered from conceding an early penalty to secure victory and a semifinal berth for the first time since 2015.

Mbemba had given away a penalty when he shoved Mohamed Bayo in the box to allow the Guinea striker to score after 20 minutes but the Congolese captain made up for his error seven minutes later with an excellent left footed finish.

DR Congo then had a penalty of their own in the 65th minute which Wissa tucked away and Masuaku completed the victory by scoring directly from a free kick near the touchline eight minutes from time.

The audacious set-piece swung into the near post catching the goalkeeper out of position. Guinea, looking to make a first-ever semifinal appearance, might have had a first minute



Yoane Wissa (R) of Democratic Republic of Congo celebrates with teammates after scoring against Guinea

penalty as Mbemba appeared to handle the ball in attempting to clear the first attack of the game but their appeals were turned down by the referee.

However, Mbemba was not as fortunate when he shoulder-charged Bayo and handed Guinea the opportunity to take the lead.

Mbemba more than atoned, however, with a superb left footed finish at the back post, hit

from a tight angle as Guinea failed to clear a corner, for the equaliser.

Julian Jeanvier then fouled substitute Silas Katomba to offer the Congolese a penalty of their own which Wissa converted.

Masuaku's brilliant effort put the cherry on top of a convincing effort which came after four successive draws at the tournament in the Ivory Coast for the Congolese. They drew all three group

games but still finished second behind Morocco in Group F and then after a 1-1 stalemate with Egypt, won on post-match penalties in the last 16 at the weekend.

DR Congo, who won the last of two Cup of Nations titles in 1974 when they were still known as Zaire, now take on either hosts Ivory Coast or Mali in the semifinal in Abidjan on Wednesday.

Late goal helps Everton hold Spurs

Liverpool, England - Jarrad Branthwaite scored a 94th minute equaliser as relegation-threatened Everton rescued a point against Tottenham Hotspur with a 2-2 home draw on Saturday to move out of the bottom three in the Premier League table.



Jarrad Branthwaite

Richarlison, scored a brace of goals in the first half and looked to have won the game for the visitors, but Branthwaite headed in at the back post.

Jack Harrison also scored for Everton and after Spurs failed to kill the game, the battling Merseyside club always had hope they could take something from the match.



PSG's Kylian Mbappe celebrates after scoring against Strasbourg

Mbappe misses penalty but still guides PSG to win over Strasbourg

Strasbourg, France - Kylian Mbappe grabbed a goal and an assist as Paris St Germain secured a 2-1 victory at Strasbourg on Friday, extending their Ligue 1 lead to nine points.

PSG are top of the standings

If we analyse the match from the beginning, it's a good match against a strong rival

LUIS ENRIQUE

Following that, PSG earned a penalty minutes later due to a late tackle on forward Randal Kolo Muani by Lucas Perrin, with Strasbourg goalkeeper Alaa Bellaarouch saving Mbappe's attempt.

PSG broke the deadlock after 31 minutes when Bellaarouch's clearance was blocked by Marco Asensio before bouncing to Mbappe, who slotted it into the empty net. Four minutes into the second half, PSG doubled their lead as Mbappe manoeuvred down the left, delivering a cross into the box for the unmarked Asensio who shot into the far bottom corner.

Strasbourg reduced the deficit in the 68th minute when Dilane Bakwa volleyed in a cross at the back post. However, they couldn't beat Donnarumma, who made several saves, securing the win for the visitors.

"If we analyse the match from the beginning, it's a good match against a strong rival, in good form, especially at home," PSG manager Luis Enrique said.

Oman appoint Silhavy as new football coach

Muscat - The Oman Football Association (OFA) announced on Thursday the appointment of Czech coach Jaroslav Silhavy as the new head coach of the Oman national football team.

Silhavy, aged 62, takes over from Croatian Branko Ivankovic, who was dismissed by the OFA following the team's underwhelming performance at the

recent AFC Asian Cup in Qatar.

Salem bin Saeed bin Salem al Wahaibi, Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Oman Football Association, has officially signed a deal with Silhavy to lead the technical staff of the national team until 2026.

The contract signing ceremony, held at the Federation's headquarters, marks the begin-

ning of Silhavy tenure, effective this February.

The Association's Board of Directors has entrusted Silhavy with the crucial task of leading the national team through the upcoming challenges, including the Asian qualifiers for the 2026 World Cup finals and the 2027 Asian Cup.



Jaroslav Silhavy with Salem bin Saeed bin Salem al Wahaibi after the signing ceremony

IRAN ENTER SEMIS

Jahanbakhsh strikes late penalty to take Team Melli past Japan

Al Rayyan, Qatar - A late Alireza Jahanbakhsh penalty was the difference as Iran came from behind to defeat Japan 2-1 and book their place in the Asian Cup semifinals on Saturday.

The two teams had met in the semifinals of the previous edition, with Japan emerging 3-0 winners and they looked on course to repeat the win when they took the lead before the half-hour mark, but two second-half goals from Mohammad Mohebi and Jahanbakhsh turned things around for the Iranians at Education City Stadium.

Captaining Team Melli on the day in the absence of Ehsan Hajsafi, Jahanbakhsh nearly opened the Iranians' account in the 13th minute when he picked up Saeid Ezatolahi's pass down the left flank and curled a shot that nearly caught goalkeeper Zion Suzuki off-guard, but fizzed just over the crossbar.

The first test for Suzuki came after 18 minutes when Hidemasa Morita lost possession on the edge of the Japanese penalty box, allowing Ezatolahi to control the ball and hit with his left, but his shot was too central and the Japanese goalkeeper had no problems in dealing with it.

Morita more than made up for



Iran's Mohammad Mohebi celebrates after scoring against Japan on Saturday

his mistake 10 minutes later. The central midfielder embarked on a solo run to beat three Iranian defenders and arrive into the box before drilling an effort that made its way into the back of the net despite goalkeeper Alireza Beiranvand's best efforts to make the save.

Iran had a chance to equalise before the break but Saman Ghoddos' half volley narrowly missed the target.

Nine minutes after the restart, Team Melli were able to restore parity after a long pass from Suzuki was interrupted and the ball fell to Sardar Azmoun who supplied a through pass to Mohebi. The forward was left with just the goalkeeper to beat and coolly slotted into the bottom corner for the equaliser.

Iran thought they had completed their comeback in the 64th minute when Azmoun latched onto a long ball, dribbling expertly past two defenders and powering past Suzuki into the near post, but the AS Roma forward had strayed marginally off-side and the goal was overruled. The Japanese goalkeeper was called into action again to stop a spectacular Ezatolahi volley from the edge of the box and he confidently produced the save.

Deep into four minutes of added time, Iran got a golden chance to win the game when Ko Itakura brought Hussein Kanaani down inside the box. Jahanbakhsh stepped up and emphatically dispatched it into the top corner.



South Korea's Son Heung-min (L) celebrates with Hwang Hee-chan after scoring against Australia on Friday

Son takes South Korea to semis with extra-time winner against Australia

Al Wakrah, Qatar - South Korea advanced to the semi-finals of the Asian Cup with a 2-1 comeback win over Australia in extra time at Al Janoub Stadium on Friday after Son Heung-min scored the winner with a sublime free kick.

Australia had beaten South Korea by the same scoreline in extra time in the 2015 final to lift their first Asian Cup, but this time it was the east Asian team who prevailed after netting yet another goal in stoppage time to force extra time.

"Back in 2015 it was painful, but I wouldn't call it revenge. It's part of football and that result helped me mature as a player," said Son, who had scored in the 2015 final defeat.

South Korea play Jordan on Tuesday in the first semi-final after the Middle Eastern side beat Tajikistan 1-0 earlier on Friday. South Korea had grabbed a late equaliser in a 2-2 draw against Jordan in the group stage.

"Obviously it was another drama, we're extremely happy and thrilled to go through. It was a hard fight with Australia, we expected it. But to go 120 min-

utes again, I'm proud of this team and their spirit," South Korea coach Juergen Klinsmann said.

"We're in the semi-final now and we play Jordan. It speaks about how tough our group was with two teams in the semis."

Australia had taken the lead just before halftime when they cleverly switched flanks with neat passes in the box before Nathaniel Atkinson's cross found Craig Goodwin, who had time to set himself up for a volley into the bottom corner.

Martin Boyle could have made it 2-0 when he received a cross into the box but goalkeeper Jo Hyeon-Woo made two saves to deny him while Mitchell Duke's volley from the rebound went over the bar.

Klinsmann made a tactical change in the second half, pushing Son further forward and the strategy worked when the Tottenham Hotspur forward was fouled in the box by Lewis Miller in the fourth minute of stoppage time. Hwang Hee-chan stepped up and the Wolverhampton Wanderers forward took his time to calm his nerves before he fired his effort into the top corner.

Jordan edge Tajikistan to move into last four

Al Rayyan, Qatar - Jordan edged Asian Cup debutants Tajikistan 1-0 to move into the semi-finals of the tournament for the first time thanks to a second-half own goal at the Ahmed bin Ali Stadium on Friday.

The two teams had drawn a World Cup qualifier in November but it was Jordan who came out on top when Vahdat Hanonov put the ball into his own net from a set piece, ending Tajikistan's dream run in Qatar.

While Jordan's elated players celebrated in front of their fans, waving their country's flag in the air, members of the Tajikistan squad were inconsolable.



Jordan players celebrate after their victory against Tajikistan

Nevertheless, Tajikistan supporters who had flown in for the game gave their country's heroes - who had surpassed all pre-tournament expectations - a standing ovation.

"I think we gave everything and I must compliment Jordan. You deserve to win, you played a very good game," Tajikistan coach Petar Segrt told beIN Sports.

In a goalless opening half, Ehsan Panjshanbe came closest to scoring for Tajikistan when his effort hit the bar while Jordan forward Yazan Al Naimat failed to convert two difficult chances to break the deadlock.

Tajikistan also suffered a setback when striker Shahrom Samiev lasted 27 minutes before he was forced to come off in tears due to a hamstring injury.

Jordan finally found the breakthrough from a corner in the 66th minute when Abdallah Nasib's header went in via a deflection off the chest of Hanonov - their goalscorer from their last-16 win over the United Arab Emirates.

Tajikistan tried their best to score an equaliser, with Alisher Shukurov coming close when he tested keeper Yazeed Abulaila from distance with an effort that stung his palms, but Jordan managed to hold on for a famous win.

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LAVAZZA CALENDAR

THREE AFRICAN PHOTOGRAPHERS CELEBRATE THE BIRTHPLACE OF COFFEE IN THE LAVAZZA CALENDAR 2024

MORE THAN US

A giant coffee bean in the middle of a forest, a woman with flowers for eyes camouflaged against a patterned backdrop, and a group of women pulling leafy vines, symbolising a tug of war with nature, are featured among the images in Lavazza's 2024 calendar.

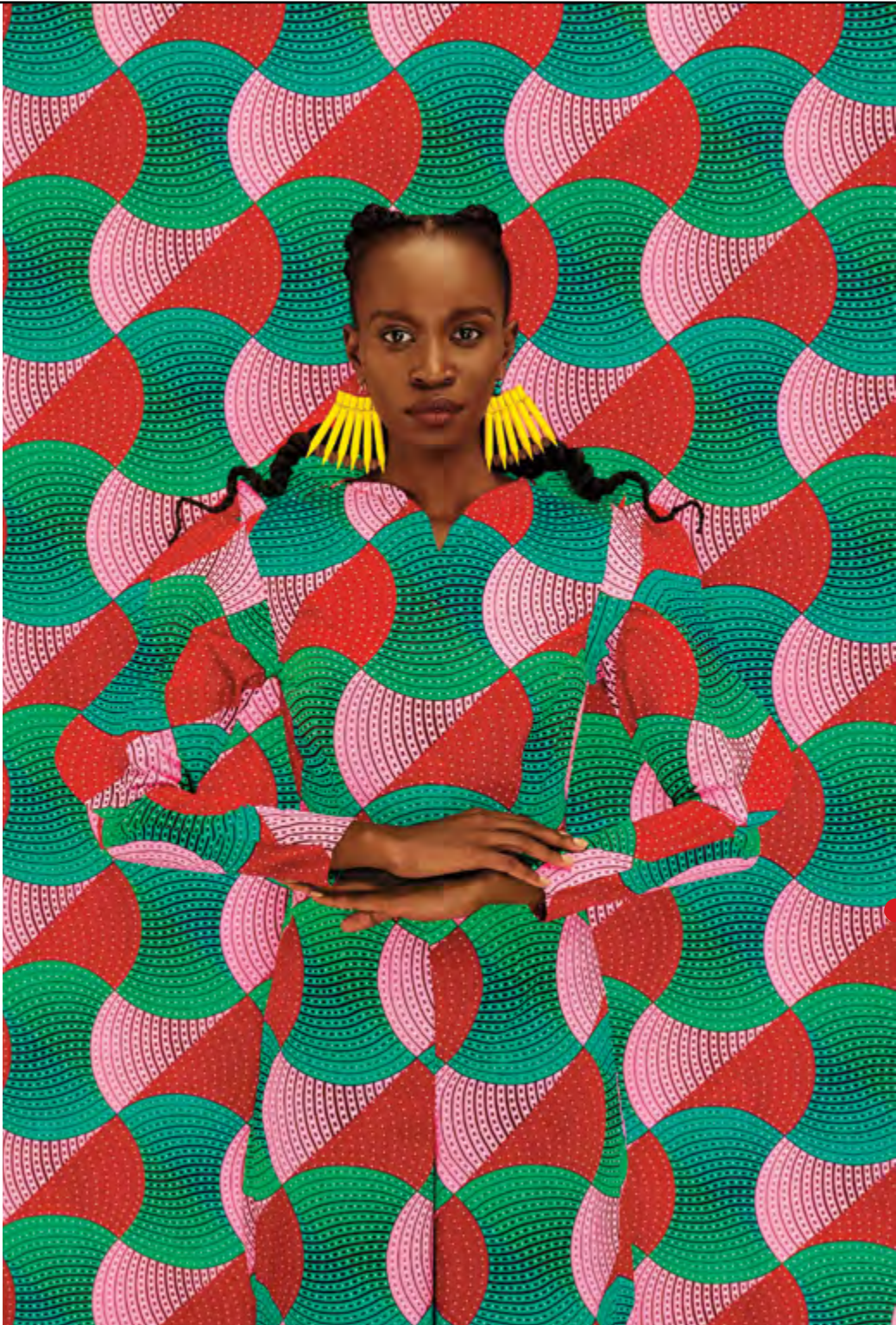
Every year since 1993, the Italian coffee manufacturer has produced a photography calendar, featuring images from the likes of Helmut Newton, David LaChapelle and Annie Leibovitz. This year's edition celebrates the African continent as the birthplace of coffee (widely considered to be Ethiopia).

Featuring the work of three African photographers, Thandiwe Muriu, Aart Verrips and Daniel Obasi, and themed 'More than Us', the 2024 calendar is dedicated to the 20th anniversary of the Giuseppe e Pericle Lavazza Foundation, a non-profit that supports international sustainability projects in coffee-cultivating countries.

"I am so excited by opportunities to provide conversation around Africa and this amazing continent. But the theme itself, for me, was so powerful," said 33-year-old Kenyan photographer Thandiwe Muriu. "I live in a very communal culture, and our way of life is 'More than Us' — you are always your neighbour's keeper, and I deeply connected with that."

Muriu was introduced to photography at 14 years old by her father, as part of a list of skills her parents wanted to teach her and her three sisters so they could be strong, independent women in an often-patriarchal society.

"When he put the camera in my hand, something happened," she said. "I always enjoyed art, but I could never draw. I always enjoyed music, but I could never sing. But the camera just felt right, and it was almost like one of those moments in a movie. Photography just became the voice that I had been looking for



to express everything that I was feeling and experiencing."

Since then, Muriu has been perfecting her craft - from watching YouTube tutorials and reading photography magazines as a teenager to meeting other photographers and learning from their experience while she studied for a marketing degree.

Today, Muriu's photographs focus on three ultimate truths about herself which she says shape how she views the world - 'I'm a woman, I'm African, and I love colour'. This informed her four photographs in the Lavazza calendar, focusing on female models, and creating colourful illusions that haven't been digitally enhanced.

"Beyond that, every work I produce is paired with an African

proverb," said Muriu. "I realised I come from a culture that historically was not one that did images. It recorded wisdoms, learnings, and lessons in words. So, this work in a way has become archival, an archive of proverbs that we don't use anymore that could be forgotten if I didn't bring them back into use in my work."

Thandiwe Muriu's image 'Our Powerful Truth' is inspired by the proverb 'Knowledge is like a garden. If it is not cultivated, it cannot be harvested'.

For 31-year-old South African photographer and filmmaker Aart Verrips, the Lavazza project, and its emphasis on Africa and African creatives, is a big step forward in terms of recognition. "Being African and being on

this continent, we are so many times deemed to be less a fit than someone that's coming in from Europe, just because of where we are from," he said. "So to be part of this is kind of amazing."

Verrips originally studied to be a chef, and was completing a pastry course in the French Alps 10 years ago when a friend introduced him to photography.

For him, 'More than Us' is about loyalty, and it taking a village to create something beautiful, just as each photograph has an entire team behind its creation, from stylists and makeup artists to assistants and agents.

"I brought that them into every kind of image (for the Lavazza calendar)," said Verrips.

"In 'The Vanguard,' which is the woman standing in the hand, that's the people elevating her to do what she can do best and fight for gender equality."

He says the giant tie worn by the model symbolises masculinity, while the leggings symbolise femininity.

The theme of togetherness is at the heart of every image produced for the calendar, but it is most obvious in Nigerian photographer Daniel Obasi's work. The intended meaning behind Obasi's images continuously evolves, but his interests are firmly centred on community, and creating work that offers an opportunity for people to come together.

"Responding to emotions, understanding them and giving them a form in my visual world is important," he said. "'More than Us' is unity. It's lending our hands and voices for a common goal."

Each of Obasi's images tackles a different issue that requires

a community to solve, including climate change, growth and development of the next generation, sexual violence against women, and innovating for the future of the planet.

Like Verrips and Muriu, Obasi picked up photography by chance, having first worked as a freelance stylist. He said a visual story-telling awakening happened when he travelled to Badagry in Lagos State, on a school exchange programme.

"I was very much obsessed with how the sky ran into the ocean, the way the sands felt and how the sun always fell right against people's skin as they passed me," said Obasi. "There was an overload of colours and beauty that I had to tap into it."

Obasi says the Lavazza project gave him an opportunity to tell beautiful and positive African stories, where he was in control of the narrative - that's something Kenyan photographer Muriu believes is essential.

Thandiwe Muriu's image 'Our Powerful Truth' is inspired by the proverb: Knowledge is like a garden. If it is not cultivated, it cannot be harvested

'The Vanguard', by Aart Verrips. He says the giant tie worn by the model symbolises masculinity, while the leggings symbolise femininity



"I think for many years as a continent, we've given away our stories, and we've not had the voice to tell our own stories," said Muriu, adding the project is "an opportunity for us on a global scale, to sing our own songs and not just tell our own stories, but tell them in our style, in our distinct visual language."

She sums up this sentiment with a single African proverb - 'Until the lion has his own storyteller, the hunter will always have the best stories.'

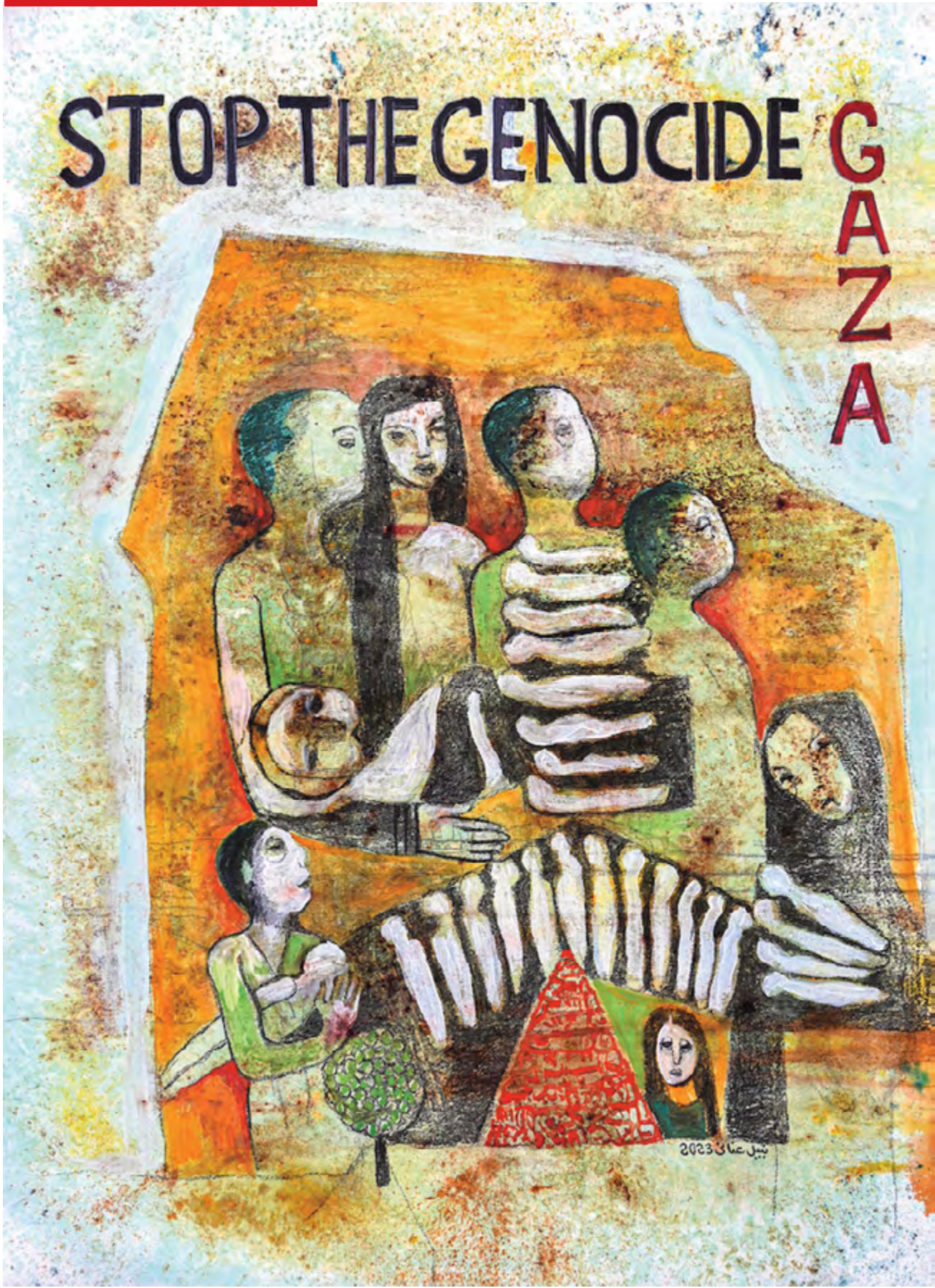
(Source: cnn.com)

This Image by Nigerian photographer and stylist Daniel Obasi, titled 'The Wonder' is based on a partnership between the Lavazza Foundation and NGO Sawa World to provide young people in Uganda with local resources needed to keep their family coffee farms up and running



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POSTERS FOR GAZA



played various digital design techniques.

Representing a long tradition in Palestinian history, political posters were produced extensively in the seventies and the eighties by the Palestinian Liberation Organisation, with the contribution of Palestinian, Arab, and international artists. Posters played a crucial

role then in supporting the justice of the Palestinian cause and promoting it globally, guided by the freedom, dignity, resilience, and the ongoing aspiration for independence sought by Palestinians.

The participating artists include Asad Azi, Aude Abou Nasr, Bashar Alhroub, Bashar Khalaf, Bashir Makhoul, Dyala Moshtaha, Fuad Alyamani, Haneen Nazzal, Hazem Harb, Hassan Manasrah, Hosni Radwan, Issam al haj Ibrahim, Jafar Dajani, Khaled el Haber, Mahdi

Baraghithi, Majdulin Nasrallah, Mohammed Joha, Nabil Anani, Rana Samara, Reda Alyasari, Saher Nassar, Sliman Mansour, Tayseer Barakat, Vera Tamari, Wadei Khaled and Yazan Abu Salameh.

This exhibition runs until 21 April 2024 and is a partner event in conjunction with Reel Palestine 2024.

Tapping into the posters' subjects, the themes vary, yet all the artists denounce the Israeli crimes, Western complicity, and call for humanity to prevail.

Themes that address human rights violations in Gaza, are evident in the works by Hosni Radwan, Yazan Abu Salameh, and Ekhtilal by Asad Azi. Artist Nabil Anani demands in his poster to Stop The Genocide and Sliman Mansour works on revealing the attempts to conceal the scenes of destruction, bombardment, and killings.

Gazan artist Mohammed Joha encapsulates anxiety and worries towards his family living in Gaza in his poster Sleepless. The heavy weight of grief and melancholy also manifests in Gazan artist Hazem Harb's poster.

Artists Aude Abou Nasr and Dyala Moshtaha express grief and anguish in different ways. The renowned Lebanese revolutionary singer Khaled El Haber participates with a sarcastic handwritten poster that reads, We are doing fine in Gaza... What about you?!

While Hassan Manasrah and Vera Tamari call for the freedom of Palestine, artists Mahdi Baraghithi, Rana Samara, Jafar Dajani, Saher Nassar, Haneen Nazzal, Issam al Haj Ibrahim and Majdulin Nasrallah use strong symbols of resistance and resilience in their posters to reflect that Palestinians will not leave their land and will continue the struggle.

Bashir Makhoul mourns thousands of children martyrs and their dreams in his poster Lost Words, and Gazan artist Tayseer Barakat chooses to work on the theme of memory where those atrocities are engraved.

The three artists - Bashar Alhroub, Wadei Khaled and Iraqi artist Reda Alyasari, focus on the warmth of family and motherhood, whilst Bashar Khalaf and Fuad Alyamani depict the lethal missiles dumped from the sky towards the 'safe homes' of Gaza.

GAZAN EXPRESSION

Mohammed Joha

Born in Gaza, Mohammed Joha, who lives and works between Paris and Marseille, has developed a unique expressionistic style of collage with a strong esthetical appeal and multi-layered narrative. Representing the chaotic and organic architecture in Gaza, destroyed, and rebuilt, devastated, rebuilt again with only cloth and whatever else



there is as building material, Joha tells the endless story of living in over generations of institutionalised confinement, under the ever-underlying threat of re-destruction, while the over densely populated area steadily grows in terms people living in it.

Hazem Harb

Born in Palestine in 1980, Hazem Harb is a visual artist who has lived in Gaza, Rome, and the UAE. Harb draws his subject matter from the history of Palestine: heritage and power dynamics. Intrigued by the complexities of memory: selective memory, lost and mutilated factualisation, the artist steers away from romanticism, favouring the sheer impact of truth-telling: knowing his homeland's important history is depreciated by fan-



Tayseer Barakat



Tayseer Barakat was born in Gaza in 1959 and completed his arts education in Alexandria, Egypt. Barakat is one of Palestine's preminent artists whose practice has drawn inspiration from the ancient past and from the oral traditions and cultural narratives that are intimately tied to life in Palestine. Working primarily in paint, inks, and dyes, he uses a colour palette that is often limited to monochrome tones, which imbues his works with a certain soberness. In Barakat's words, the dark colours he uses reflect the hardships of our time and our present life. I think the pressure on us makes us use dark colours.

Fayez Sirsawi

Fayez Sirsawi was born in Gaza in 1961. He graduated from the sculpture department at Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University In Istanbul. He taught in the UNRWA schools in Gaza and in the UNRWA Women Training Center in Ramallah and founded and supervised the visual art programme at the YMCA in Gaza. Since 1994, he has been working at the Palestinian Ministry of Culture. He participated in several exhibitions in Palestine and abroad with his paintings and sculptures. Fayez has created a number of memorial monuments and murals in Gaza, Haifa, and China. Some of his works are part of international and local collections.



ANGUISH IN ART

DUBAI'S ZAWYEH GALLERY HAS OPENED A NEW GROUP EXHIBITION ON JANUARY 26, TITLED 'POSTERS FOR GAZA', WITH THE PARTICIPATION OF 26 PALESTINIAN AND ARAB ARTISTS, INCLUDING FOUR GAZANS

'Posters for Gaza' - currently on at Zawyeh Gallery, Dubai - is not just an exhibition, it is an artistic testimony, expressed by Arab artists of diverse genres, of the anguish and atrocities faced by the people in the Gaza Strip.

The exhibition aims to shed light

on the ethnic cleansing and horrific massacres taking place in the Gaza Strip, demanding a cease-fire and the recognition of Palestinian rights to live freely on their land with dignity. Four participating artists are originally from the Gaza Strip, where they have lived and have families.

Uniformly sized and designed in a

simplified manner, the posters reflect uniqueness in terms of style, materials, and the underlying narratives. Steering away from the digital norm, participating artists poured their effort into producing those posters, utilising variety of materials, including acrylics, inks, charcoal, collage, and mixed media, while some artists em-

