

Council of Oman resolves disputed items of 3 laws

Our Correspondent
Muscat

State Council and Majlis A'Shura convened a joint session on Monday to discuss reports of joint committees on disputed articles of drafts of the Bank Deposits Protection Law, Wildlife Trade Regulating Law and the Media Law. The session followed procedural guidelines for joint sessions as stipulated by Article 49 of the Oman Council Law.

In his speech, Hon Sheikh Abdulmalik bin Abdullah al Khalili, Chairman of State Council and Chairman of the Joint Session, said that the session continued ongoing collaborative efforts and the cooperative spirit between the two councils when dealing with draft laws referred by the government, aiming to achieve a unified vision that enhances joint efforts.

Hon Sheikh Khalili underscored the coordinated efforts among State Council, Majlis A'Shura and Council of Ministers, emphasising the collaborative and constructive approach of these to serve the nation effectively.

State Council and shura had earlier deliberated on several draft laws, including the Bank De-



Hon Sheikh Abdulmalik al Khalili



Hon Khalid bin Hilal al Ma'awali

posits Protection Law, the Wildlife Trade Regulation Law and the Media Law, when they found common ground on several articles. However, there were certain articles where differences in viewpoints and opinions arose.

"To address these differences, joint committees comprising esteemed members from both councils were formed. These committees successfully resolved all disputed articles."

Khalid bin Ahmed al Saadi,

Secretary-General of State Council, informed that the joint committee reached a consensus on the Bank Deposits Protection Law following unanimous approval by both councils without any objections to 11 articles.

He added that members of both the State Council and shura voted overwhelmingly - exceeding 90% - in favour of the joint committee's recommendations on the Wildlife Trade Regulation Law.

All disputed articles of the Media Law draft were resolved unanimously in favour of the joint committee's recommendations.

According to Sheikh Ahmed bin Mohammed al Nadabi, Secretary-General of Majlis A'Shura, the joint session was conducted based on provisions of the Council of Oman Law. A joint committee was convened in the presence of members from both councils specialising in legislative and legal affairs.

Nadabi added that the joint committee reviewed all disputed articles between the two councils before reaching consensus. Subsequently, a vote was conducted during Monday's session on all articles recommended by the joint committee.



Majlis al Jinn to be developed into adventure tourism hub

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MHT) and Omran Group have signed a usufruct agreement to develop Majlis al Jinn cave in Quriyat on Monday.

The agreement aims to establish an eco-tourism project

and implement necessary facilities for adventure tourism, including safety equipment and operational services.

The usufruct contract was signed by H E Salim Mohammed al Mahrouqi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism, and Dr Hashel bin Obaid al Mahrouqi, CEO of Omran Group.

Under the agreement, Omran will manage operational aspects such as appointing and training guides, protecting the local wildlife and environment, and collaborating with specialised operators to develop a sustainable long-term plan for the site.

Omran will initially focus on organising adventure pro-

grammes for visitors to Majlis Al Jinn. Subsequent plans will include setting up an information centre, reception facilities and eco-lodges in later phases.

Majlis al Jinn is renowned as one of the largest subterranean caves globally, boasting dimensions of 310m in length, 225m in width and a floor spanning 58,000sqm.

HIJRI NEW YEAR HOLIDAY ON JULY 7

Muscat - Sunday, July 7 has been announced as an official holiday for employees of the public and private sectors on the occasion of the Holy Prophet's Hijri Anniversary and the advent of the new Hijri year 1446 AH.

The Ministry of Labour 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.



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EA begins Phase 1 of ban on plastic shopping bags

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Environment Authority (EA) began the first phase of enforcing a ban on single-use plastic shopping bags thinner than 50 micrometres.

The authority issued a decision (No 8/2024) in January this year to ban the use of all kinds of plastic shopping bags by January 2027 in a phased manner.

An EA official said, "This decision follows comprehensive studies conducted in collaboration with various public and private bodies. A well-planned



transition period preceded the enforcement to ensure smooth implementation."

Starting Monday, July 1 the initial phase targets pharmacies, hospitals and clinics.

The second stage, effective from January 1, 2025, will extend the ban to textiles and fabric stores, clothing outlets, tailors, eyewear shops, mobile phone vendors and repair services, watch shops, furniture retailers, and suppliers of household goods.

The EA official highlighted the decision's importance in protecting Oman's environment and wildlife. Aimed at manag-

ing plastic products and waste, it aligns with Oman's sustainable development goals outlined in national action plans and Oman Vision 2040.

The decision also supports international initiatives such as the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management and agreements like the Stockholm and Basel Conventions.

Under Article 3 of the decision, administrative fines ranging from RO50 to RO1,000 will be imposed for violations, with penalties doubling for repeat offences within a month of the earlier fine.

Warning of mercury touching 50°C in next 2-3 days

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Directorate General of Meteorology has warned of high temperatures reaching 50°C in the next two-three days.

In a statement, Oman Met said it expects a significant rise in temperatures starting Monday and extending until Wednesday. 'The temperature will range between late 40°C to 50°C, especially in the desert and some coastal areas along the Sea of Oman.' The highest temperature recorded during the last 24 hours were in Maqshin and Haima, reaching 47.2°C.

With rising temperatures posing significant risks, particularly for those engaged in outdoor and field activities, Civil Aviation Au-



thority emphasised the need for proper measures.

Key recommendations include organising work schedules to incorporate rest periods during peak heat, avoiding direct sun exposure during midday, ensuring adequate hydration, and training workers and supervisors on managing high temperatures.

"These measures are crucial for safeguarding the health and well-being of employees exposed to extreme heat," it stated.

NASA confirms documentation of Northern Lights in Omani skies

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman Astronomical Society (OAS) has obtained its first scientific documentation from NASA of observing the phenomenon of the aurora borealis in the sultanate's skies.

The Northern Lights - aurora borealis - appear in clear night skies as swirling rivers of greenish-blue light. These move and dance unpredictably; sometimes barely perceptible, then suddenly growing vivid. The auroras can be explained as an interaction of solar winds and the Earth's magnetic field.

In a statement, OAS said a team of photographers from the society observed unusual coloured lights on the night of May 12 following a strong solar



storm that impacted the Earth, leading to appearance of the aurora borealis.

The team captured images from Jabal al Sarat in the Al Hajjar al Gharbi Starlight Reserve. Subsequently, they contacted NASA specialists to verify that their ob-

servations were the first scientific documentation of this phenomenon in Oman's skies.

Qasim bin Hamad al Busaidi, Vice-Chairman of Community Communication Committee in OAS, said that coloured lights resembling the aurora borealis,

caused by solar storms, were observed in the images captured.

After extensive research and verification, it was confirmed that on that particular night, the aurora borealis was at peak intensity across various parts of the Earth. This observation

marks the first scientific documentation of this phenomenon in skies of the sultanate.

These lights were also visible in countries where they hadn't been seen for many years, including Iran, Algeria, Libya and Morocco, despite their significant distance from the poles.

Ali bin Rabiah al Kindi from the OAS photography team informed that weather conditions were highly favourable to observe the sky on May 12. The monitoring location, situated in an area far from light pollution and among the highest points in Oman, provided optimal conditions. "At approximately 3:15am, we successfully photographed what scientific evidence confirms to be the aurora borealis phenomenon from the north."

Issa bin Salem al Sheikh, a member of the Board of Directors of OAS, confirmed that following communication with Dr Elizabeth McDonald, a space physics expert at NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center, there was extensive discussion to document observations of the aurora borealis from various global locations. The aim was to validate the observations, verify the equipment used for photography, and confirm the precise location coordinates and timing of the captures.

"The consensus reached was that the phenomenon observed in the skies of Oman strongly resembles the aurora borealis. Further research and discussions are ongoing to definitively confirm the documentation of this rare occurrence," Sheikh added.

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Ministry of Economy unveils guide to help frame public policies

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Ministry of Economy released a guide and conducted an introductory workshop on preparing public policies based on it on Monday. The workshop was attended by representatives of 46 institutions.

The *Public Policy Preparation Guide* provides policymakers with a roadmap for drafting public policies. It covers the stages of preparing, analysing, implementing, reviewing and assessing public policies. These steps are based on principles, methodologies, technical tools and frameworks necessary for ensuring the soundness, applicability and effectiveness of public policies.

The guide targets senior public sector managers and experts tasked with developing and framing policies, in addition to researchers, analysts, and all those interested in the process of public policy-making.

H E Dr Said Mohammed al



(Supplied photos)



H E Dr Said Mohammed al Saqri

Saqri, Minister of Economy, stressed the significance of framing public policies in a manner that keeps pace with rapid developments in economic, social, political and security spheres in countries around the world.

"The overall objective of government institutions (when drafting public policies) is to improve the economy, enhance performance, channel develop-

ment efforts and achieve balance, sustainability and optimisation of resources and capabilities," the minister explained.

Ministry specialists made a visual presentation to introduce the rationale of public policy, as well as salient features and methodologies of writing the script of public policy, the cycle of endorsement and models of policy papers.

RO10.3mn Khasab aquaculture project begins operations

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources (MAFWR) announced the commencement of operations of a new fish farming project in Khasab, Musandam on Monday.

Valued at RO10.3mn, the project underscores the ministry's commitment to enhancing Oman's aquaculture sector.

Implemented by Musandam Global Investment Company, the project is spread over 32.76 hectares and employs floating



cages to farm European sea bream, with expected annual production capacity of 3,500 tonnes.

MAFWR has designated suitable sites for fish farming projects and is providing essential technical and administrative support to facilitate implementation. It has established an ad-

vanced and sustainable framework for the fish farming sector aligning with international best practices.

Musandam Global Investment started deployment of floating cages for the project in the Al Harf area of Khasab in February 2024.

According to a company official, a total of 32 floating cages were deployed in eight phases.

"This project aims to contribute significantly to Oman's national income, with the first harvest anticipated in the third quarter of 2024," the official added.

Technical camp for youth kicks off in Muscat

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Sayyid Saud bin Hilal al Busaidi, Governor of Muscat, presided over the launch of the fourth technical camp under the 'Dot-NxtJadeer' programme on Sunday.

To be held till July 10, the programme aims to enhance the capabilities of Omani youth in technical entrepreneurship, while also preparing higher education graduates to meet labour market demands.

Additionally, it aims to prepare Omani youth for global market competitiveness, while



(Supplied photo)

supporting national initiatives for entrepreneurship and technical innovation in alignment with Oman Vision 2040.

Youth will participate in specialised training across various fields, including artificial intelli-

gence, finance, investment, entrepreneurship, leadership, creative arts and more. Participants will have the opportunity to attend courses conducted by local and international experts, earning accredited certificates.

RECALL

RECALL DATE: 2ND JULY, 2024

MAZDA CX-60

BRAND OF COMMODITY	YEAR OF PRODUCTION	NUMBER OF AFFECTED COMMODITIES
MAZDA CX60 (2.5L)	2023	48

RECALL CONSEQUENCE

Due to inappropriate clutch control during deceleration, the clutch may be released with delayed timing, or engaged at unintended timing while decelerating. The engine speed may decrease during deceleration and in the worst case, result in engine stall at low speed. Once the vehicle power is switched OFF, the engine can be restarted.

RECALL ACTION

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TO CHECK THE SERIAL NUMBERS OF THE AFFECTED COMMODITIES, PLEASE VISIT THE WEBSITE FOR RECALLS & WARNINGS: [HTTP://RECALL.PACP.GOV.OM](http://RECALL.PACP.GOV.OM)

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Nasdaq Dubai welcomes \$400mn Sukuk listing

Dubai, UAE - Nasdaq Dubai has welcomed the listing of US\$400mn Sukuk by Arada Developments LLC, a UAE-based master developer.

This marks Arada's second listing on Nasdaq Dubai and its first under their newly developed US\$1bn Sukuk programme.

The five-year fixed-rate Sukuk attracted strong demand from regional and international investors. The offering was oversubscribed by 3.5 times, drawing interest from a diverse group of investors worldwide, including Europe, the Middle East and Asia, with significant participation from institutional investors, fund managers, high-net-worth individuals (HNWIs), and banks.

This listing reinforces Dubai's position as a premier global hub for Sukuk listings, bringing the total value of Sukuk issuances to US\$93bn.

Local issuers contribute 44% of this value, while foreign issuers make up the remaining 56%. Nasdaq Dubai boasts a total value of US\$129bn in listed bonds and Sukuk.

To mark the listing, Ahmed Alkhoshaibi, Group CEO of Arada, rang the bell at the market-opening ceremony at Nasdaq Dubai, along with Hamed Ali, CEO of Nasdaq Dubai and DFM.

Alkhoshaibi said, "We're pleased to be returning to Nasdaq Dubai to list our second Sukuk after the strong success and increased investor interest that followed the listing of our debut issuance a year ago. Over the past 12 months we have again delivered record results in terms of new project launches, sales and deliveries, all of which have contributed towards the significant worldwide interest in our new Sukuk programme."

Hamed Ali added, "We welcome Arada's successful listing on Nasdaq Dubai. The robust demand for this listing reflects the strong confidence that global investors have in the UAE's Islamic finance market and broader capital markets. This listing further solidifies Nasdaq Dubai's status as a leading market for Sukuk issuances."

Iranian undersecretary calls on Omani counterpart in Muscat

Muscat - H E Dr Saleh bin Said Masan, the Undersecretary for Commerce and Industry in the Ministry of Commerce, Industry, and Investment Promotion, met with H E Mehdi Dehghani, the Undersecretary of the Ministry of Industry, Mines, and Trade of Iran, at the Kempinski Hotel in Muscat on Monday.

During the meeting, they discussed various aspects of joint collaborations, including increasing trade relations and exchanging goods between the Sultanate of Oman and the Islamic Republic of Iran.

The meeting was attended by Mousa Farhang, the Iranian Ambassador to Oman, along with several officials from both sides.



Türkiye hopes to gain after removal from FATF grey list

Ankara, Türkiye - The removal from the Financial Action Task Force's (FATF) grey list will accelerate the inflow of resources to Türkiye, the country's treasury and finance minister said on Monday.

"It may accelerate," Mehmet Simsek told in a TV programme. "But I want to underline this, the inflow of resources to the country is already very strong... we are currently dealing with how to manage this inflow of resources."

According to the figures announced last week, gross reserves have already reached a historical high of approximately US\$147-148bn, he stressed.

Türkiye, which entered the grey list in Oct. 2019, where



easy to enter the grey list, but it is difficult to get out. There are countries like Bulgaria and Croatia that are members of the EU but are still on the list."

He said the decision to remove Türkiye from the list was unanimous, and even not a single country objected. "When I entered there before the meeting, many country representatives came and expressed their encouragement. Even the representative of our neighbour Greece said: 'We strongly support you'."

He stressed that Türkiye will significantly strengthen the administrative and technical capacity of the Financial Crimes Investigation Board.

Anadolu New



UAE explores ways to achieve 'Zero Bureaucracy' in financial sector

Abu Dhabi, UAE - The Central Bank of the United Arab Emirates (CBUAE) has launched its 'Zero Bureaucracy' initiative in the financial sector, aligning with the vision and objectives of the UAE Government's wider programme 'Zero Government Bureaucracy'.

The initiative aims to take a significant step in government procedures, simplifying people's lives and reducing unnecessary burdens on businesses and individuals in terms of time, effort, and resources.

The CBUAE, in cooperation with the Prime Minister's Office, organised a workshop to discuss the mechanisms for implementing the Zero Government Bureaucracy programme. The programme aims to eliminate at least 2,000 government procedures, minimise procedure times

by at least 50%, and remove all unnecessary processes and requirements.

During the workshop, participants discussed several initiatives and plans aimed at eliminating bureaucracy by simplifying and reducing procedures, expediting service delivery, and innovating new patterns of government procedures. The objective of these initiatives and procedures is to enhance operational efficiency and improve the quality of services provided to customers and partners in the financial sector.

Additionally, the CBUAE Youth Council and Happiness Committee are actively facilitating dialogue between the CBUAE's employees and various departments in order to share their viable ideas and proposals with the internal committee

overseeing the Zero Government Bureaucracy programme, in line with the vision and organisational values of the CBUAE.

The CBUAE also issued a notice to all licensed financial institutions encouraging their participation in the programme by taking and discussing steps in a workshop that will be organised by the CBUAE, with the objective of simplifying and expediting procedures related to services provided to customers and business sector in the financial industry.

"The Zero Government Bureaucracy programme captures our leadership's vision of developing an integrated, innovative, and forward-looking government ecosystem," said Khaled Mohammed Balama, Governor of the CBUAE.

WAM

ADNOC Group saves \$500mn from implementing artificial intelligence

Abu Dhabi, UAE - Ibrahim al Zu'bi, Group Chief Sustainability & ESG Officer at ADNOC Group, said that ADNOC Group has been an early adopter of artificial intelligence techniques to achieve sustainability.

Last year, ADNOC implemented more than 30 artificial intelligence tools to improve the efficiency of its projects, resulting in savings of up to US\$500mn, in addition to reducing more than one million tonnes of carbon emissions.

In a statement to the Emirates News Agency (WAM) on the sidelines of the Global Sustainability Forum in Abu Dhabi on Monday, Zu'bi added that the forum witnessed the launch of a digital platform for startups working in the field of artificial intelligence and sustainability systems to accelerate the achievement of sustainable development goals, in partnership with the CEO Sustainability Network and the IBM, to accelerate the application of artificial intelligence technologies at government and private levels.

He pointed out that the digital platform will receive all ideas from companies and individuals that can be applied in the UAE and the region, and will work with partners to pilot the AI solutions offered and benefit from these experiences, noting that the current focus is on building young Emirati and Arab cadres, thus enhancing the UAE's position as a



Last year, ADNOC implemented more than 30 AI tools to improve the efficiency of its projects, resulting in savings of up to US\$500mn, in addition to reducing more than 1mn tonnes of carbon emissions

global beacon for the application of AI solutions in the field of sustainable development globally.

"The second edition of the Global Sustainability Forum, which kicked off today, witnessed the participation of more

than 460 participants and 85 companies from the UAE and around the world, compared to 85 participants and 23 companies in the first edition of the forum held during COP28," said Zu'bi, noting that the forum has

managed to achieve four times the targeted goals in one year.

The forum is an open platform to build on the momentum and achievements of the first Global Sustainability Forum, held on the sidelines of COP28 and hosted by the UAE. It is also an opportunity to support the realisation of the global climate change goals set out in the UAE Consensus and pave the way for more fruitful outcomes ahead of the upcoming COP29 climate change conference.

WAM

bp joins forces to explore green hydrogen development in Egypt

Cairo, Egypt - bp has entered into a Joint Development Agreement (JDA) with the existing consortium comprising of Masdar, Hassan Allam Utilities and Infinity Power to explore the potential development of a multi-phase green hydrogen (gH2) project in Egypt.

Under the JDA, bp will act as the main developer and operator of the project on behalf of the consortium. The partners are combining their respective gH2 projects in Egypt and will also explore the potential for a single large-scale, multi-phase project for the development of gH2 and its derivatives, with a focus on exports.

The newly formed consortium has signed a Framework Agreement (FWA) with the Egyptian government to start carrying out a set of studies and activities to evaluate the technical and commercial feasibility of the project.

The FWA agreement was signed on the sidelines of the Egypt-EU Investment Conference in the presence of Dr Moustafa Madbouly, Prime Min-



ister of Egypt, Dr Mohamed Shaker, Minister of Electricity and Renewable Resources, and Dr Hala el Said, Minister of Planning and Economic Development.

It was signed by Nader Zaki, bp's Regional President of the Middle East and North Africa; Andreas Bieringer, Director of

Green Hydrogen Business Development and Commercial at Masdar; Karim Hefzy, Chief Operating Officer of Hassan Allam Utilities; and Mohamed Mansour, Chairman of Infinity Power.

Commenting on the announcement, Zaki said, "We are pleased that the signing coincides with our celebration of 60

years in Egypt, which clearly reflects our ongoing commitment to the country.

"The diverse experiences of partners in energy projects present a great opportunity for regional cooperation and accessing global markets, fundamentally supporting Egypt's energy transition plans."

Mohammad Abdelqader el Ramahi, Masdar's Chief Green Hydrogen Officer, said, "We welcome the addition of bp to the consortium, building on the well-established existing relationship between our companies and supporting Masdar's ambition to drive the development of green hydrogen around the world. We

already have plans to develop green hydrogen projects in Egypt and this agreement reinforces Masdar and the UAE's commitment to Egypt to realize its massive clean energy and green hydrogen potential, alongside our Africa renewable energy champion IPH."

WAM

Oil prices up following weak US dollar, supply concerns

Ankara, Türkiye - Oil prices rose on Monday over a weak US dollar, uncertainties over the timing of the US Federal Reserve's interest rate cut, and the Israel-Palestine and Russia-Ukraine conflicts.

International benchmark Brent crude traded at US\$85.66 per barrel at 10.35am local time (0735GMT), up 0.77% from the closing price of US\$85 per barrel in the previous trading session.

American benchmark West Texas Intermediate (WTI) traded at US\$82.22 per barrel, a 0.83% rise from the previous session that closed at US\$81.54 per barrel. Oil markets started the week on an optimistic upswing due to the falling value of the US dollar against other currencies, which lost 0.33% to 105.52, underpinning the rise in prices by making oil trade cheaper for other currency holders.

India to create a cross-border retail payment platform with four ASEAN countries

New Delhi, India - India has joined Project Nexus, a multilateral international initiative that aims to enable instant cross-border retail payments through interlinking payment systems of various countries.

Nexus was conceptualised by the Innovation Hub of the Bank for International Settlements (BIS) to connect the payment systems of four ASEAN countries (Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand) and India, who would be the founding members and first mover countries of this platform, Asian News International (ANI) reported on Monday.

As per a statement from the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), an agreement was signed on Sunday by the BIS and the central banks of the founding countries - Bank Negara Malaysia (BNM), Bank of Thailand (BOT), Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP), Mon-



etary Authority of Singapore (MAS) and the RBI, in Basel, Switzerland.

Indonesia, which has been involved from the early stages, continues to be involved as a special observer.

The RBI statement said that the platform may be extended to more countries in the future.

The platform is expected to go live by 2026. Once functional, Nexus will play a key role in making retail cross-border payments efficient, faster, and more cost-

effective.

RBI has been collaborating bilaterally with various countries to link India's digital public infrastructure - Unified Payments Interface (UPI) - with their respective counterparts for cross-border payments.

UPI is India's mobile-based fast payment system, which facilitates customers to make round-the-clock payments instantly, using a Virtual Payment Address (VPA) created by the customer.

Among others, a key emphasis of the Indian government has been on ensuring that the benefits of UPI are not limited to India only; other countries, too, benefit from it. So far, Sri Lanka, Mauritius, France, the UAE and Singapore, among others, have partnered or intended to partner with India on emerging fintech and payment solutions.

US Stocks - Futures rise as focus shifts to jobs data

New York, US - US stock index futures gained on Monday ahead of manufacturing PMI data, with focus also on labour market numbers later in the week for cues on the Federal Reserve's monetary policy path.

PMI, the Purchasing Managers' Index, is a measure of the prevailing direction of economic trends in manufacturing.

Reuters reported that Al chip firm Nvidia shed 1.0 percent in premarket trading, after choppy trade last week, along with some weakness in other semiconductor stocks. Megacaps such as Alphabet, Microsoft and Amazon.com were up between 0.4 percent and 0.9 percent.

Focus will be on ISM and S&P Global manufacturing PMIs later in the day. This follows Friday's personal consumption expenditures (PCE) price index, the Fed's preferred measure of inflation, which was unchanged in May



and underscored the narrative of slowing inflation and resilient economic growth.

Also scheduled for the week are JOLTS job openings data on Tuesday, and ADP employment, factory orders, ISM services PMI data and minutes of the Fed's latest policy meeting on Wednesday. Non-farm payrolls data is due on Thursday. Traders have largely stuck to their bets of around two interest rate cuts this year, starting from September, according to LSEG FedWatch.

Wall Street's upward trajectory

The Nasdaq and the benchmark S&P 500 notched their third straight quarterly gains on Friday, with the tech-heavy index doing so for the first time in three years. As the top few heavily weighted stocks have largely supported Wall Street's upward trajectory on optimism around artificial intelligence and interest rate cuts, the blue-chip Dow has lagged its peers with a quarterly decline.

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MG Motor and GKS Auto announce partnership

MG Motor has announced a new partnership in Jordan with GKS Auto, a subsidiary of the region's well-known GB Corp.

The partnership, which was announced during a ceremony at the Ritz Carlton Hotel in the capital Amman, brings a strategic business alliance to the Hashemite Kingdom, promising to elevate the Jordanian automotive market with unparalleled innovation and service excellence, a press release said.

During the ceremony, which was attended by VIPs, industry experts, thought leaders, customers, and media, MG Motor also announced the launch of four new models in the Jordanian market. These include the MG3, a stylish and compact hatchback perfect for urban driving, the MG Whale, an innovative and spacious SUV designed for family adventures, the MG7, a sleek and luxurious

sedan that offers both performance and comfort; and the MG Cyberster, an electrifying and futuristic sports car that redefines driving excitement.

Since MG Motor's entry into the Jordanian market in June 2020, the brand has experienced significant growth. In 2023, MG Jordan has seen a 99.6% increase in sales from 2022, resulting in a 10.3% market share, with models such as the MG 5, MG ZS and MG 4 gaining popularity among Jordanian customers. The new partnership with GKS Auto is expected to further elevate MG Motor's presence in the Kingdom and contribute to its ongoing success in the region.

As GB Corp marks its entry into the Jordanian market through its GKS Auto subsidiary, it brings over 80 years of automotive expertise to the country.

Sidrah 3.0 leadership programme for Omani women launched

Sidrah 3.0, the third edition of the leadership programme for Omani women, has launched, bringing with it much excitement and promise.

Building on the achievements of the last two years, where 106 women reached new heights in their professional journeys, Sidrah 3.0 aspires to shape entrepreneurial mindsets that resonate with Oman's evolving socio-economic landscape, a press release said.

Co-designed and co-run by Lahunna Oman and Outward Bound Oman, Sidrah 3.0 welcomes a diverse group of young women aged 20-35 from across the sultanate, including jobseekers, young professionals and entrepreneurs all united to learn, lead and innovate. This two-phased programme is crafted to endow participants with the entrepreneurial acumen, resilience, and leadership qualities essential for shaping the next generation of trailblazers and business leaders.

Through a blend of experiential learning, interactive workshops, mentorship, community building, and personalised coaching, Sidrah 3.0 kindles a lifelong passion for learning and growth, and forms a supportive community who will brighten Oman's future with their purpose and grit.

Over the 3-month programme, participants will be im-



mersed in simulations and role-plays which are designed to heighten self-awareness, perseverance, and effective collaboration. This holistic approach aims to release their sense of higher purpose and shape service-oriented mindsets, so they can make a meaningful impact within their communities and beyond.

Shatha Salim al Maskiry, founder of Lahunna Oman, said, "Following the success of our previous editions, we are privileged to provide Omani women with an enriching journey that inspires them to shape their own future with confidence. We have expanded the program to include

entrepreneurial skills, so they can participate and drive innovation in serving the national priorities of Oman's Vision 2040."

Richard Lewis, executive director at Outward Bound Oman, said, "Today, we embark on a new journey with the launch of the Sidrah 3.0 in collaboration with Lahunna Oman. Through our innovative Sidrah programme, we aim to empower young women by building their capabilities and expanding their professional horizons. Outward Bound Oman's renowned soft skills outdoor courses are at the heart of this initiative, providing unique opportunities for partici-

pants to develop leadership, resilience, and meaningful connections. By fostering the personal and professional growth of young women, we are contributing to the realisation of a diversified and sustainable economy, as envisioned in Oman Vision 2040."

The program includes sessions delivered by Protiviti Oman, IDENTITY in addition to online courses by Salalem, an AI-powered Learning Management System, group coaching sessions and one-on-one sessions by the International Coaching Federation (ICF) - Oman Chapter. Fostering empathy, active citizenship and social responsibility partici-

pants are mandated to volunteer and lend their time and support to address community needs.

Malak al Shaibani, general manager of Corporate Relations and ICV at Oman Shell said, "We have been a supporter for Sidrah since its inception, and it is evidently an initiative that has been successful in unleashing and transforming the potential of the young Omani women. We invest in youth, especially women to develop them as entrepreneurial leaders who will certainly contribute to the sustainable development of Oman. Women development is a key pillar of the Shell Powering Lives strategy."



Majid Al Futtaim launches Dreamscapes in Dubai

Majid Al Futtaim announced the finalists of 'Dreamscapes: Envisioning the Future of Dubai with AI', a design competition held in collaboration with the Dubai Culture and Arts Authority (Dubai Culture) and American University in Dubai (AUD).

The winning entries were revealed at a dedicated awards ceremony held at Distrkt located within Tilal Al Ghaf, the developer's flagship resort-style community in Dubai. Notable attendees included Ahmed El Shamy, CEO, Majid Al Futtaim Properties, Dr Saeed Mubarak bin Kharbash, CEO of the Arts

and Literature sector at Dubai Culture, and Dr Sabrina Joseph, Provost and Chief Academic Officer, American University in Dubai, alongside all participating students.

In line with the UAE's vision to establish a leading, proactive, and future-oriented educational model which provides an optimal learning environment supported by AI technologies, the competition was integrated into the students' studies and saw participation from over 150 AUD students, resulting in more than 250 futuristic artworks, a press release said.

The competition, aimed at fostering the next generation of design leaders, encouraged students to envision Dubai's over the next 10 to 15 years, utilising state-of-the-art technology and artificial intelligence to create artistic representations of the city's future.

The artworks highlighted themes of culture, sustainability, community, placemaking, and technology, showcasing elements of Dubai's success, including its rich heritage, commitment to environmental stewardship, inclusive spirit, innovative approach to living, etc.

Unlock rewards with NBO's 'Spend & Earn' campaign

Continuing its commitment to reward loyal customers, National Bank of Oman (NBO) has announced the launch of its new 'Spend & Earn' campaign for Badeel Prepaid Multi-Currency Travel Card during the summer travel season.

The first 250 winning cardholders get a chance to receive a cashback of RO50 when they spend RO500 or more in a month until September 4. This exciting new offer provides attractive cashback rewards and doubles the rewards on international transactions, reflecting NBO's dedication to innovation and customer satisfaction, a press release said.

Maha al Raisi, assistant general manager and head of Retail Products at NBO, said, "At National Bank of Oman, we are committed to providing novel solutions that meet the ever-changing needs of our customers. Our 'Spend & Earn' campaign gives our customers access to a host of exclusive perks that simplify their financial journeys.

"What sets it apart is its ex-



clusivity, as we are the sole provider of this innovative multi-currency prepaid card in the market and is available for all residents in Oman. Whether travelling for work or leisure, NBO's Badeel Multicurrency Travel Card offers a safe, easy, and cashless way to carry multiple foreign currencies in a single card. With this card, travellers can easily manage their finances, avoid currency exchange hassles, and enjoy peace of mind with enhanced security features making it their perfect travel companion."

The theme of the campaign,

'Spend like a local, anywhere, anytime,' signifies the essence of simplicity, convenience, security, and flexibility that the NBO Badeel Prepaid Multi-Currency Travel Card offers. Whether it's shopping, dining, or exploring new destinations, cardholders can enjoy the same ease and convenience as they would at home, regardless of where they are in the world.

This card can be activated through digital onboarding, the NBO app, Badeel Prepaid App or a self-service kiosk. Additionally, customers can enjoy instant card issuance through self-service.

Historic night for UFC in Saudi Arabia

UFC made history with its first event in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia on an unforgettable night at the Kingdom Arena.

Fight fans in the capital had been treated to a host of UFC Fight Week activities, with Saturday night's spectacle living up to all expectations with a compelling lineup of matches, a press release said.

UFC President and CEO, Dana White, said, "It is all new, interesting, and fun, my first time here, and our first time here, we had over 12,000 people in the arena and it was a great experience."

In the main event, Australia's Robert Whittaker delivered a spectacular performance, stopping Russia's Ikram Aliskerov in the first round. Former champion and current No 3 middleweight Whittaker showed all his experience in finishing the highly touted Aliskerov, who had previously lost only once in his sixteen-fight professional career. Whittaker improves his overall record to 26-7 with eyes firmly on another title shot in the future.

Whittaker has spoken of his delight in making history in Riyadh, and the support he had received from local fans.

"I have been lucky enough to travel the world and fight in very exotic places and I have been able to tick off a lot of history. To be here for the first Saudi event in history, I am very lucky. It is always a little bit surprising to see that I have fans in different parts of the world, and how many fans I have," he said.

Tyreplus emphasises importance of summer tyre checks

As temperatures soar this summer, Tyreplus, a division of MHD ACERE, urges all motorists in Oman to prioritise the safety of their vehicles by conducting thorough vehicle checks.

With the extreme heat placing additional stress on engine and tyres, it is crucial to ensure they are in optimal condition to prevent accidents and ensure safe driving, a press release said.

Since its inception in 2002, Tyreplus has expanded to over 1600 franchises across 26 countries. In Oman, the brand boasts nine branches strategically located throughout the country to

serve customers effectively. These branches include four outlets in Muscat (Wadi Kabir, Al Khuwayr, Azaiba, and Mabela), as well as locations in Barka, Sohar, Nizwa, Khat Al Batinah, and Salalah.

To help ensure the safety of all drivers on the road this summer, Tyreplus recommends the following maintenance tips:

• **Engine Oil Change:** Regularly changing your engine oil is vital to keep your engine running smoothly. Fresh oil reduces friction, minimises wear, and prevents overheating, ensuring your engine performs efficiently.



• **Air Filter Check:** A clean air filter is essential for optimal engine performance and fuel efficiency. Inspect and replace your air filter if it is dirty or clogged to maintain proper airflow to the engine.

• **Coolant Level Check:** The summer heat can cause your engine to overheat. Checking and topping up your coolant levels will help regulate engine temperature and prevent overheating.

• **Brake Fluid Check:** Ensure your brake fluid is at the correct level and free of contaminants. Proper brake fluid levels are crucial for effective braking performance and overall safety.

• **Battery Check:** The extreme temperatures can affect your vehicle's battery life. Inspect your battery for signs of wear, corrosion, or weak charge, and replace it if necessary to avoid unexpected breakdowns.

• **Visual Check of Tyre Condition, including Spare Tyre:** Inspect your tyres for any signs of damage, such as cracks, bulges, or excessive wear. Ensure your

spare tyre is also in good condition and properly inflated.

• **Check of Brake Pads and Brake Discs:** Your brakes are the single most important safety feature on your car. Don't put yourself or your family at risk this summer by riding around on worn down or faulty brakes. Examine your brake pads and discs for wear and tear.

Mohsin Hani Bahrani, CEO MHD ACERE, said, "As temperatures rise this summer, ensuring the safety of your vehicle is more important than ever. At Tyreplus, we are committed to providing top-notch car care."

Saud Bahwan unveils next-gen Prado

Saud Bahwan Automotive recently hosted an exclusive event at the Grand Millennium Hotel to launch the highly anticipated all-new Toyota Prado.

Ahmed Mohammed al-Humaidi, Chairman of Muscat Municipality, graced the occasion as the guest of honour. The event also had Shunsuke Chijiwa, group manager, India and Middle East Division, Toyota Motor Corporation as the special guest alongside distinguished guests from various sectors.

The evening commenced with special highlights about the all-new Toyota Prado. The Toyota Prado is a legend in its own right. Its legacy, which began over seven decades ago with the introduction of the Toyota BJ, is marked by outstanding rough-road driving performance and ruggedness, famously demonstrated by reaching Mount Fuji's sixth station at an altitude of 2,700m.

Since then, the Prado has become synonymous with unparalleled off-road capability, inspiring performance, and legendary dependability. In Oman, its popularity continues to soar.

With each new introduction, the Prado not only proves its



pro prowess but also solidifies its place among true off-road enthusiasts.

Today, the all-new Prado features a striking retro design, ex-

hilarating performance and unmatched capability.

The all-new Prado builds on its legacy of strength and reliability, blending the legendary Land

Cruiser DNA with modern technologies to enhance both off-road and everyday performance. The vehicle continues to uphold Toyota's global reputation for

providing dependable transportation capable of tackling the toughest conditions.

Toyota's mission for the Prado has been to ensure safety

and reliability in even the harshest environments. Customer experiences worldwide have contributed to refining the Prado's reliability, durability, and

rough-road capabilities.

The all-new Prado retains its robust body-on-frame construction and adopts Toyota's GA-F platform, significantly enhancing off-road performance.

It is also designed for easy manoeuvrability and comfort in conventional on-road driving, showcasing Toyota's commitment to practicality and customer needs. This is the first Prado to feature an electric power steering (EPS) system, reducing kickback on rough surfaces and providing smoother, more direct steering and easier manoeuvrability at all speeds.

The all-new Prado will be available with a choice of 2.4 litre Turbo Petrol and 2.8 litre Turbo Diesel engines, paired with an 8-speed automatic transmission.

The interior offers seven-seat configurations, designed to evoke the strength and functionality of a true off-roader. The all-new Prado is equipped with the latest Toyota Safety Sense systems within a comprehensive Toyota T-Mate package of advanced safety features and technologies, reducing the burden on the driver. The all-new Toyota Prado is now on display at all Saud Bahwan Automotive showrooms.



MoE, Oman Shell recognise top NXplorers projects of 2024

Oman Shell and the Ministry of Education (MoE) recently awarded the outstanding Shell NXplorers projects developed by Shell NXplorers students from across Oman in a ceremony hosted in Muscat.

The event was held under the auspices of H E Majid Said al Bahri, Undersecretary for Administrative and Financial Affairs in the Ministry of Education.

With six years of successful collaboration with MoE, Shell NXplorers comes up as an innovative educational programme that equips young people with creative thinking tools and complex problem-solving skills needed to bring about positive change in challenges related to the food, water and energy nexus.

Since its inception in 2018, the programme has benefitted 2750 students from more than 33 schools across Oman. In 2024 alone, approximately 325 NXplorers Junior students from 17 schools and 469 Senior students

from 16 schools participated in Shell NXplorers training sessions.

To ensure programme sustainability, over 241 teachers have been equipped with essential skills to mentor Omani youth in Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) related fields of study in their respective schools.

As part of the programme's expansion plan, Shell NXplorers Pro was also launched during the award ceremony. NXplorers Pro introduces NXthinking - a new methodology which combines systems thinking, scenario planning and change management techniques to address complexity and foster sustainable solutions. This 'Pro' version of the programme aims to prepare aspiring future leaders to drive positive change while maintaining a focus on the big picture - the challenges of the future. Oman Shell will collaborate with Sultan Qaboos University to roll out the programme later this year.

GAC launches 'cool' summer campaign for customers of Mitsubishi Motors

General Automotive Company (GAC), the official distributor for Mitsubishi Motors in the Sultanate of Oman, is launching an exciting summer campaign, offering Mitsubishi vehicle owners the chance to enjoy fantastic rewards and exceptional discounts.

As Oman's scorching summer season gathers heat, GAC comes out with this cool promotion, through which it is not only encouraging customers to service their vehicles but also it is providing them with an opportunity to win an unforgettable vacation and enjoy attractive giveaways.

Customers who service their Mitsubishi vehicles at any GAC service centre during the campaign period will earn the chance



to win a luxurious five-night stay at a 5-star hotel in Thailand. This incredible prize includes air tickets and a complete holiday package, promising the ultimate summer getaway.

In addition to the grand prize, GAC is offering several exciting giveaways and they include: Two gift vouchers for a buffet at Shangri-La Barr al Jissah; two RO25 gift vouchers for Lulu Hypermarket; and two gift vouchers for free vehicle service.

Additionally, GAC is also announcing a 45% discount on parts for all Mitsubishi vehicles under the campaign, demonstrating its commitment to providing outstanding value, while maintaining the highest stan-

dards of customer satisfaction.

Commenting on the campaign, Manoj Ranade, General Manager of GAC, said, "Our summer campaign is designed to reward our loyal customers with more than just excellent service. We want to offer them unique experiences and significant savings."

"At GAC, we strive to exceed customer expectations and this campaign is a testament to our dedication to enhancing the ownership experience for Mitsubishi patrons in Oman."

To participate in the summer campaign, Mitsubishi owners simply need to bring their vehicles in for servicing at any GAC service centre.

Omantel offers comprehensive solution for Riyadh SMEs

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Oman registered with Riyadh now have a game-changing solution at their fingertips to propel their businesses forward.

Omantel is thrilled to introduce Aamali+, an all-inclusive bundle designed to enhance business efficiency and foster growth. Aamali+ is tailored to meet the diverse needs of SMEs, offering a comprehensive suite of essential services all in

one package. From fast fibre Internet connectivity to advanced communication tools and productivity-boosting solutions. Key features of Aamali+ include: **Lightning-fast fibre Internet** to keep businesses connected around the clock; **Mobile PBX** to seamlessly manage calls and stay in touch with clients and colleagues on the go. **Marketing SMS:** Targeted SMS campaigns and leverage location-based options to reach

your audience effectively.

Microsoft 365 to enhance productivity with access to a suite of powerful tools and applications; and **Domain Name & Webhosting** to establish a unique online identity with a .om domain, showcasing the brand to the world and host its website with reliability and security, ensuring a seamless online presence for your business.

All these essential services come together in one compre-

hensive package, starting from just RO30. Omantel has succeeded, through the integration of its operations, processes, and extensive expertise in the field of communications and digital technology, in establishing its position as a leading telecommunications company within Oman and beyond.

The company's innovative approaches have contributed to providing the latest solutions to various consumer and business

sectors. The company aims to deliver an unparalleled, exceptional experience to its subscribers and strives to always exceed their expectations.

Omantel works towards contributing to the achievement of Oman Vision 2040 objectives by investing in emerging technologies and providing cutting-edge solutions in modern technology, and information and communications technology.

Bank Muscat wins Best CX Innovation Award in CX Live Awards Middle East

Bank Muscat, the leading financial service provider in the Sultanate of Oman, was crowned with the Customer Experience Innovation Award at the CX Live Awards Show Middle East 2024, in recognition of its efforts in providing a distinctive experience to its customers through applying a comprehensive approach aimed at providing the best services to cater to their needs and aspirations.

Mohammed Sultan al Habsi, Chief Representative, UAE Representative Office, Bank Muscat, received the award on behalf of the Bank, during a glorious cere-

mony held in Dubai in the presence of a number of prominent industry figures from the Middle East and the world.

The award reflects Bank Muscat's commitment to providing high-quality services and products to valued customers, whether through the bank's branches spread all over the country or through mobile banking and Internet banking services.

Customer satisfaction is a key focus of the Bank's business as it is always keen to listen to customers' suggestions and opinions, aligning with its vision and strategy while ensuring a unique



and distinctive service.

Bank Muscat is also committed to developing its traditional and digital channels to enhance

financial inclusion and improve the customer experience. It always gives priority to data protection and privacy through

controlling the collection and use of data, ensuring confidentiality, information security support.

Bank Muscat strives to en-

hance its digital channels to deal with customers' feedback efficiently. These channels encompass Internet and mobile banking services, help desks, call centre and website.

Bank Muscat has a dedicated team working under the Customer Experience Department, which is aimed to support the bank's strategy of fostering a customer-centric culture by ensuring aligning its activities with the bank's values, strategic pillars and vision.

The department has a comprehensive workforce dedicated to overseeing all customer

touchpoints and continuously enhancing the overall customer experience.

By working on customer journey mapping, the department adopts proactive approaches to anticipate customer needs and close any experience gaps through quick wins, ensuring a seamless and satisfying banking experience. The bank also runs a robust Voice of the Customer (VOC) programme, gathering valuable insights to drive continuous improvements and innovation. Extensive collaboration is carried out among key departments within the bank.

Japan launches Earth observation satellite aboard H3 rocket

Tokyo, Japan - Japan successfully launched on Monday its new flagship H3 rocket carrying an Earth observation satellite from a space centre on a southwestern island, in a boost to the country's space aspirations following the vehicle's failed debut last year.

The domestically manufactured H3 rocket No. 3 lifted off from the Tanegashima Space Centre in Kagoshima Prefecture, releasing its first stage about five minutes later and separating the satellite about 17 minutes later as planned, Japanese news agency Kyodo News reported.

The launch of the rocket, the successor to the country's current mainstay H2A vehicle, comes as Japan seeks to gain a foothold in the increasingly competitive satellite-launch sector, with plans to launch H3 rockets six times a year.

The launch of the H3 rocket No. 3 was initially scheduled for Sunday but was put off due to expected bad weather.

Previous attempts

The launch of the maiden No. 1 vehicle ended in failure in March 2023. It was ordered to self-destruct minutes after launch due to its second-stage engine failing to ignite. The H3 rocket No. 2 in February was a success but carried a dummy satellite.

The No. 1 and No. 2 rockets were test rockets unlike the No. 3.



The launch of the rocket, the successor to the country's current mainstay H2A vehicle, comes as Japan seeks to gain a foothold in the increasingly competitive satellite-launch sector

The Advanced Land Observing Satellite-4 carried by the No. 3 rocket is expected to be used for observing disaster-hit areas and monitoring ground transformation caused by volcanic activity or an earthquake.

Through the use of radar, the satellite can acquire images even in bad weather and at night.

The liquid-fuel H3 rocket was developed by the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA) and Mitsubishi Heavy Industries Ltd. to serve as Japan's next-generation heavy-lift launch vehicle. The launch service price for the H3 is expected to be lower than that of the H2A, according to JAXA.

Global competition has intensified since SpaceX of the United States, which boasts revolutionary technology and a strong track record in rocket launches, entered the market.

Chinese rocket crashes during test

Meanwhile, a Chinese rocket crashed on Sunday after accidentally being launched during a test. Chinese commercial company Space Pioneer conducted what was supposed to be a static-fire test of the first stage of its Tianlong-3 launch vehicle at a test facility in Gongyi country in Henan province, the Space News website reported.

In a static-fire test, the stage is securely held in place while its engines are ignited to simulate launch conditions, it said.

The Tianlong-3 first stage was designed to burn for several minutes during an actual orbital flight.

Agencies



South Africa's Cyril Ramaphosa names Cabinet of national unity

Johannesburg, SA - South African President Cyril Ramaphosa announced his much anticipated Cabinet of the government of national unity (GNU) late on Sunday, retaining Paul Mashatile as his deputy.

Ramaphosa also appointed 40-year-old Ronald Lamola as the new minister of International Relations and Cooperation. Lamola, who was the former Justice and Constitutional Affairs Minister, is one of the youngest members of the Cabinet. He succeeded Naledi Pandor.

Ramaphosa also retained Enoch Godongwana as finance minister, with David Masedo and the Democratic Alliance (DA) party's Ashor Sarupen as his two deputies. "These men and women we have appointed to the executive are drawn from all corners of our country. None of the members of the National Executive has been appointed to serve the interests of a particular constituency, a particular party or a particular section of society,"

Ramaphosa said.

He also appointed his main political rival DA leader John Steenhuisen as Minister of Agriculture. A total of 11 political parties reached a deal to form the GNU after Ramaphosa's African National Congress party, which had ruled South Africa without a coalition for the past three decades, lost its majority in the national and provincial elections on May 29.

Ramaphosa's Cabinet announcement was delayed after intense bargaining and lengthy negotiations for Cabinet positions with 10 partners, particularly the second largest party DA.

Members of the South African parliament re-elected Ramaphosa, 71, on June 15 as president for a second term during the first sitting of the legislature. He was officially sworn in as the seventh democratically elected president on June 19 at a colourful ceremony in the capital Pretoria.

Anadolu Agency

US: Biden allies reject calls for him dropping out of 2024 race

Washington, D.C., US - While President Joe Biden was away at Camp David for a long-planned family get-together, key US Democratic leaders stood firmly behind him, rejecting the notion that he should end his 2024 campaign for a second four-year term in the White House because of his halting and disjointed debate performance last week against former President Donald Trump, reported Voice of America (VOA).

The Democratic allies of Biden readily acknowledged the 81-year-old Biden's shortcomings in the nationally televised 90-minute debate in which he struggled at times to complete sentences and at one point mistakenly said he had killed off Medicare, the government's health insurance programme for older Americans.

According to a new CBS-YouGov poll, Americans, by a 72-27 per cent margin, do not think that Biden has the 'mental and cognitive health to serve as president', a reading that was seven percentage points worse on the same question compared to three weeks ago, VOA reported.

However, national polling between Biden and Trump still showed the contest remains a dead heat.

Meanwhile, the key Democratic officials rejected the suggestion of some rank-and-file Democrats and editorials in The New York Times and The Atlanta Journal-Constitution that he drop out of the race for a younger candidate. "The unfortunate truth is that Biden should withdraw from the race, for the good of the nation he has served so admirably for half a century," the Atlanta



US President Joe Biden

According to a new CBS-YouGov poll, Americans, by a 72-27 per cent margin, do not think that Biden has the 'mental and cognitive health to serve as president'

Journal-Constitution said.

The Atlanta Journal-Constitution is the leading newspaper in the key southern political battleground state of Georgia.

"The shade of retirement is now necessary for President Biden," it added, according to VOA.

"Oh, absolutely not," Georgia

Democratic Senator Raphael Warnock told NBC's 'Meet the Press' programme. "Bad debates happen. The question is, 'Who has Donald Trump ever shown up for other than himself and people like himself?' I'm with Joe Biden, and it's our assignment to make sure that he gets over the finish line come November."

Representative Jim Clyburn of South Carolina, a prominent Biden supporter, told CNN's 'State of the Union' show: "I do

not believe that Joe Biden has a problem leading for the next four years because he's done a great job of leading for the last three-and-a-half years. I always say that the best predictor of future behaviour is past performance."

He contended that what happened at the debate was 'preparation overload', reported VOA.

Governor Wes Moore of Maryland said on CBS's 'Face the Nation', that 'the president had a difficult night just like every single one of us do' but that it should not force him out of the November 5 election.

"Joe Biden is not going to take himself out of this race, nor should he." Biden's campaign, in a Saturday night fundraising appeal, says replacing him as the Democratic standard-bearer would lead to weeks of chaos before the August national party convention to pick a new nominee and be 'a highway to losing' the national election.

Kate Bedingfield, a former Biden White House communications aide, told CNN that the Biden campaign had raised US\$33mn since the debate.

Reince Priebus, the former chairman of the Republican National Committee and once Trump's White House chief of staff, called Biden staying in the race 'just all downside for Joe Biden'.

"This is not a bad debate night," he said on ABC's 'This Week' show. "This was an incoherent, almost impossible mess."

Senator Lindsey Graham, Republican of South Carolina, said: "He's (Biden) a decent man. He's a failed president. He is compromised. That's the storyline here."

ANI

French PM calls for countering far right after its victory

Paris, France - France's prime minister called on Sunday for countering the far-right National Rally (RN) party after its victory in snap elections.

"Not a single vote must go to the RN," Gabriel Attal said in a live address to the nation after the preliminary results were revealed.

Attal, who is a member of President Emmanuel Macron's centrist alliance, stressed that the National Assembly, the lower chamber of the French parliament, was never under such a risk in its history.

"Our objective is clear: preventing the National Rally (party) from achieving an absolute majority in the second round, from dominating the National Assem-



bly," he added.

He noted that 'everyone understood' that the left-wing New Popular Front alliance would not have an absolute majority in the next round.

The second round of the elec-

tions will be held on July 7.

'End of Macron's bloc'

The far right hailed the victory against Macron's bloc following the preliminary results of the

snap elections.

French far-right leader Marine Le Pen hailed the 'end of Macron's bloc'.

"Democracy has spoken. The French have placed the National Rally and its allies on top and have practically erased the Macronist bloc."

"We need an absolute majority," she added.

RN President Jordan Bardella warned against a left-wing victory and vowed that he would be a prime minister of a coalition 'respectful of the Constitution and the president's function but uncompromising on the policy' that his party would implement.

The leading figure of the left-wing alliance the New Popular Front, Jean Luc-Melenchon, said

these polls 'inflicted a heavy and undeniable defeat' on President Macron.

Melenchon also called for countering the RN and said: "Nowhere will we allow the RN to prevail...Our instruction is simple, direct and clear. Not a vote, not one single more seat for the RN."

The RN got 33.5 per cent of the vote, according to exit polls, the daily Le Figaro reported.

The New Popular Front gathering the left-wing parties received 28.5 per cent and came in second for now, while the centrist Together for the Republic alliance backed by President Macron ranked third with 22.1 per cent.

Anadolu Agency

Mauritania: President Ghazouani re-elected

Nouakchott, Mauritania - The incumbent Mauritanian President Mohamed Ould Ghazouani won the presidential election with 56.12 per cent of the vote, while human rights activist Biram Ould Dah Abeid came in second with 22.10 per cent, the National Independent Electoral Commission announced on Monday morning.

Hamadi Ould Sidi el Mottar, leader of the opposition Islamist party National Rally for Reform and Development secured third place with 12.76 per cent of the vote, the electoral authority said, which

completed the count for the presidential election held on Saturday.

El-Aid Ould Mohamedan, an opposition lawyer and parliament member, finished fourth with 3.57 per cent of the vote, followed by politician Mamadou Boukari at 2.39 per cent and opposition leader Atouma Soumare at 2.06 per cent. Finance inspector Mohamed Lemine El Mourtaji El Wafi received only one per cent of the votes.

Mauritanians voted for a new president on Saturday, choosing from seven candidates.

Anadolu Agency

'Tried thrice by Israel, with no charges'

The director of Al-Shifa hospital in Gaza was in detention for over seven months and was released on Monday

Gaza City, Palestine - The director of Al-Shifa Medical Complex in Gaza City, Dr Mohammad Abu Salmiya, revealed on Monday that despite being tried three times during his over seven months of detention, Israel never charged him with any crime.

In a press conference held at the Nasser Medical Complex in Khan Younis, southern Gaza, just hours after his release, Abu Salmiya said: "Prisoners in Israeli jails endure different types of torture. The army treats them as if they were inanimate objects, and Israeli doctors physically assaulted us."

"The Israel Prison Service never presented a clear charge against me, despite three court trials," he added.

He explained that along with other prisoners, he faced 'severe



The director of Al-Shifa Medical Complex, Dr Mohammed Abu Salmiya, speaks to the press at Nasser Hospital in Khan Yunis on Monday

Prisoners in Israeli jails endure different types of torture. The army treats them as if they were inanimate objects, and Israeli doctors physically assaulted us

MOHAMMED ABU SALMIYA

torture and almost daily assaults inside the prisons and were denied medical treatments'.

Expressing his surprise at Israeli government officials' claims of ignorance about his release, Abu Salmiya emphasised that his release was conducted through official channels.

"No international organisation visited us in Israeli prisons, and we were prohibited from meeting any lawyers. Many detainees are still left behind in very poor health and psychological conditions," Abu Salmiya continued.

Abu Salmiya was arrested on November 23 along with several

medical staff while traveling through Salah al-Din Street from Gaza City to southern areas of the strip after the Israeli military attacked Al-Shifa Hospital.

On Monday morning, Israel released about 54 Palestinians, including doctors who were detained from Al-Shifa Medical

Complex and other hospitals in Gaza during separate military operations over the past months.

Death toll in Gaza rises to 37,900

At least 23 Palestinians were killed in Israeli attacks in the Gaza Strip, bringing the overall death toll to 37,900 since last October 7, the Health Ministry in the battered enclave said on Monday.

A ministry statement added that at least 87,060 other people have also been injured in the ongoing onslaught.

"Israeli attacks killed 23 people and injured 91 others in three 'massacres' against families in the last 24 hours," the ministry said.

Meanwhile, a Palestinian journalist died on Monday of wounds sustained in an Israeli airstrike in Gaza City, taking the death toll to 153 since last October, local authorities said.

Mohammad Mahmoud Abu Shareeah, a journalist with the local Shams News agency, was seriously injured in a strike targeting his home on Saturday and succumbed to his wounds on Monday, Gaza's government media office said in a statement.

The New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) said the war in Gaza has become 'the deadliest for journalists'.

Anadolu Agency

UN expert voices alarm over 'continuing torture in Syria'

Geneva, Switzerland - A UN expert on Monday urged Syria to implement the provisional measures ordered by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) and take steps to eradicate all forms of torture and ill-treatment in the country.

"I am alarmed about reports that indicate that torture is still being practiced on a large scale in Syria," said Alice Jill Edwards, the UN special rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. "This is despite the very clear order of the ICJ to end torture without delay," Edwards said, adding: "More than six months later, there is no sign at all that torture is being addressed in the country."

The top UN court issued provisional measures on November 16 ordering Syria to take all necessary measures to prevent acts of torture and other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment, while also instruct-



ing the government to ensure that no one under its control can commit such acts and that evidence related to torture allegations is preserved.

"Information available alleges that torture continues to be practiced widely in flagrant disregard for the lives, and the physical and psychological health, of thousands of individuals who are in detention centres operated by the Syrian Government," the expert said.

The ICJ provisional measures

were imposed following a joint application by Canada and the Netherlands against Syria before the court for alleged violations of and failure to apply the United Nations Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT), to which all three states are parties. The application, which is still under consideration by the ICJ, contains numerous allegations of inhuman treatment of detainees.

Anadolu Agency

Two more killed in West Bank raid

Ramallah, Palestine - A Palestinian woman and child were killed by Israeli army fire in a military raid in the West Bank city of Tulkarm on Monday, the Health Ministry said.

A ministry statement added that four other people were injured, without providing further details.

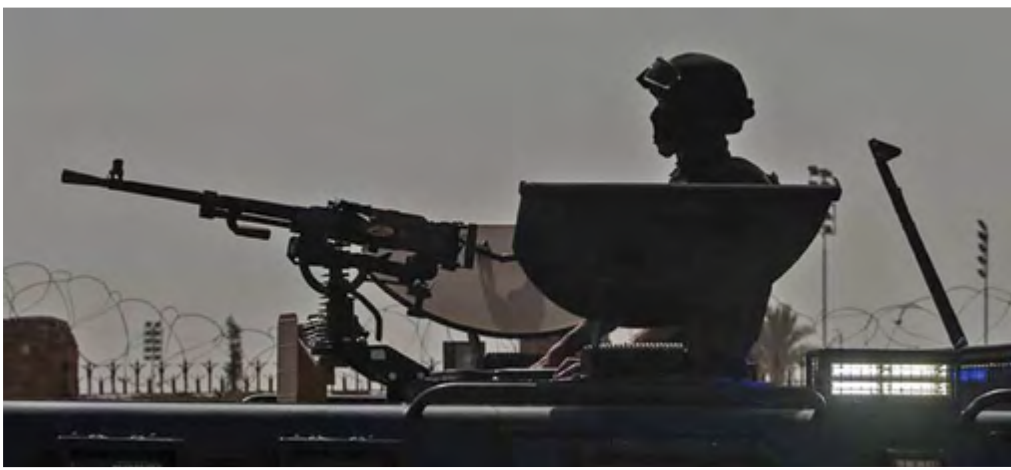
Israeli forces raided the Nur Shams refugee camp in Tulkarm amid clashes with armed Palestinians, according to witnesses.

"Israeli forces bombed a house near my home," Kamal Ahmed Jaber, a resident, told Anadolu.

"We heard gunfire. The house next to us exploded and nearby houses were damaged," he added.

The Israeli military has been regularly conducting raids in the West Bank over the past few years, which escalated with the start of the war on Gaza last October. Palestinians have also faced violent attacks from illegal settlers.

At least 554 Palestinians have since been killed, including 133



children and nearly 5,300 injured by Israeli army fire in the West Bank, according to the Health Ministry.

Indonesia slams Israel

Meanwhile, Indonesia on Monday slammed Israel's move to legalise Jewish settlements in the occupied West Bank of Palestine. 'Strongly' condemning the Israeli decision, Jakarta said: "Israel's settlement and continuous occupation in Palestine's territory are violations of interna-

tional law and relevant UN resolutions."

"Together with the international community, Indonesia will continue to demand Israeli accountability and to push for the implementation of the two-state solution," said the Indonesian Foreign Ministry in a statement on X.

The Israeli Cabinet last week approved steps proposed by Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich aimed at 'legalising' settlement outposts in the West Bank and imposing sanctions on the Pales-

tinian Authority.

Israel's official broadcasting authority KAN reported on Friday that the Security Cabinet approved Smotrich's plan to counter the Palestinian statehood recognition and actions against Israel in international courts.

The plan includes measures against the Palestinian Authority, the legalisation of five settlement outposts in the West Bank, and the issuance of tenders for thousands of new housing units in settlements.

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ITALIAN SHOW IN CANADA



Italian Air Force team Frecce Tricolori performs during the 2024 Quinte International Air Show in Quinte West, Ontario, Canada, on Sunday (Xinhua)

Pezeshkian, a reformist candidate running for Iran's presidency

Tehran, Iran - A seasoned Iranian lawmaker and former health minister, Masoud Pezeshkian, stunningly raced past his opponents in the snap presidential election on Friday, receiving the most votes.

According to the final results announced by Iran's Interior Ministry on Saturday morning, less than 12 hours after the voting lines closed, the reformist candidate received 10.4mn votes out of a total of 24.5mn votes counted.

Saeed Jalili, the former lead nuclear negotiator, came in second with 9.4mn votes and will face Pezeshkian in the run-off election on July 5.

A relatively low-profile political figure, Pezeshkian served as the health minister in the government of Mohammad Khatami (2001-2005) and has repre-



Masoud Pezeshkian

sented the northwestern city of Tabriz in the Iranian parliament since 2008.

A cardiologist by training, Pezeshkian previously also headed the Tabriz University of Medical Sciences, one of the leading medical institutions in northern Iran.

His two previous unsuccessful bids for the presidency came in

2013 and 2021, respectively.

In 2013, he withdrew from the race in the later stages in favour of former President Hashemi Rafsanjani, and in 2021, his candidacy was rejected by the Guardian Council, the country's top vetting body.

As the only reformist candidate in the race this time, backed by the country's leading reformist coalition, Pezeshkian engaged in hectic campaigning in the past few weeks.

His campaign was bolstered by the presence of many former reformist politicians and ministers, including Javad Zarif, who served as Iran's foreign minister for two terms under former President Hassan Rouhani.

Pre-election opinion polls showed significant support for Pezeshkian.

Anadolu Agency

INDIA

PM Modi-Rahul Gandhi faceoff in LS

New Delhi - Lok Sabha on Monday saw an uproar over Rahul Gandhi's remarks pertaining to Hindu community with Home Minister Amit Shah saying that the Congress leader should apologise over his remarks.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi hit out at Rahul Gandhi over his remarks and said calling 'the entire Hindu community violent is a very serious matter'.

Participating in the debate on the motion of thanks on the President's Address, Rahul Gandhi targeted the BJP-led government and alleged there has been 'a systematic attack' on the idea of India.

"There has been a systematic and a full-scale assault on the idea of India, the Constitution and on the people who resisted the attack on the Constitution. Many of us were personally attacked. Some of the leaders are still in jail. Anyone who resisted the idea of concentration of power and wealth, aggression on poor and Dalits and minorities was crushed. ..I was attacked by the order of Government of India, by the order of the Prime Minister of India...The most enjoyable part of it was the 55 hours of interrogation by ED...", he alleged.

"Abhayamudra is the symbol of Congress...The Abhayamudra



Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi speak in the Lok Sabha during the ongoing Parliament session, in New Delhi on Monday (ANI)



There has been a systematic and a full-scale assault on the idea of India, the Constitution and on the people who resisted the attack on the Constitution

RAHUL GANDHI

is the gesture of fearlessness, is the gesture of reassurance and safety, which dispels fear and accords divine protection and bliss in Hinduism, Islam, Sikhism, Buddhism and other Indian reli-

gions....All our great men have spoken about non-violence and finishing fear...But, those who call themselves Hindu only talk about violence, hatred, un-truth...Aap Hindu ho hi nahi," the

Congress leader said.

BJP members took strong objection to Rahul Gandhi's remarks. Home Minister Amit Shah targeted Rahul Gandhi and said connecting violence with any religion is wrong.

"The Leader of Opposition has categorically said that those who call themselves Hindu talk of violence and do violence. He doesn't know that cores of people proudly call themselves Hindu. Connecting violence with any religion is wrong. He should

apologise," Amit Shah said.

Rahul Gandhi also said the BJP is not the entire Hindu society. "Narendra Modi is not entire Hindu society. BJP is not the entire Hindu society, RSS is not the entire society, this is not BJP's contract," Rahul Gandhi said.

Rahul Gandhi also alleged that ministers were scared of greeting him in the presence of PM Modi.

The Prime Minister took a dig at Rahul Gandhi over his remarks and said democracy has

taught him to take democracy seriously.

"Democracy and the Constitution have taught me that I need to take the Leader of Opposition seriously," PM Modi said.

Rahul Gandhi, who made his first speech as Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha, also attacked the government over the Agniveer scheme.

He also raised the issue of alleged irregularities in the National Eligibility-cum-Entrance

Test (NEET) examination and demanded a separate one-day discussion on the issue in the Parliament.

"A message is disseminated to the country, from Parliament. We want to send a message to students that NEET issue is important for the Parliament. So, to send this message, we want the Parliament to discuss this," the Congress leader said. Opposition MPs walked out of Lok Sabha as the Speaker refused Rahul Gandhi's suggestion.

Meanwhile in Rajya Sabha, Leader of Opposition Mallikarjun Kharge targeted PM Modi and the ruling BJP over various issues including the ongoing row over the NEET and arrests of Opposition leaders.

During his speech in Rajya Sabha on the debate on President Droupadi Murmu's address, Kharge said: "PM Modi embarrassed India. They used to call the Gamandiyaa alliance, they used to say if there is Modi, anything is possible. But the arrogance of BJP was broken after the 2024 Lok Sabha elections."

Kharge also hit out at PM Modi over his remarks during election rallies against Congress over redistribution of wealth, Mangalsutra, reservation and 'Mujra' among others.

ANI

Opposition MPs protest against central govt's 'misuse' of ED, CBI

New Delhi - Members of the opposition parties staged a protest on the Parliament premises on Monday against the central government's 'misuse' of central agencies including the Directorate of Enforcement (ED) and the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI).

Opposition MPs including Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi, Congress leaders Shashi Tharoor, K C Venugopal, Manish Tewari, K Suresh, Varsha Gaikwad, Benny Behnan and Anto Antony, Kerala Congress (M)'s Jose K Mani, Aam Aadmi Party's Sanjay Singh and Raghav Chadha, TMC MP Sagatika Ghosh, Shiv Sena (UBT) MP Priyanka Chaturvedi and CPI(M)'s John Brittas among others participated in the protest.

The leaders were seen carrying placards and posters that read 'Respect Opposition, Stop Intimidation!, Stop misusing



agencies to silence opposition, End the reign of fear, stop ED, IT, CBI misuse'.

The parties of the opposition have been targeting the central government alleging misuse of the central agencies 'to silence' the opposition. The arrests of Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, Delhi ministers, former

Jharkhand CM Hemant Soren, and TMC ministers by ED and CBI in various cases invited criticism from many sectors.

Hemant Soren, who was arrested by ED in connection with an alleged land scam was released on bail on June 29 after 149 days of custody.

Meanwhile, Kejriwal on

Monday approached Delhi High Court against his arresting by the CBI in Excise Policy case. He has also challenged the trial Court order of June 26, sending him to three days of custodial remand to CBI and observing his arrest legal.

The Rouse Avenue Court of Delhi on Saturday sent Kejriwal to Judicial custody in connection with Excise policy case.

The CBI alleged that during the police custody remand, the accused Arvind Kejriwal has been examined/ interrogated. However, he did not co-operate with the investigation and deliberately gave evasive replies contrary to the evidences on record.

On being confronted with the evidences, he did not give proper and truthful explanation regarding the enhancement of the profit margin for wholesalers under new Excise Policy of Delhi 2021-22, without any study or justification, said CBI.

ANI

First case under new criminal justice laws registered: Shah

New Delhi - Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Monday stated that the first case filed under new criminal justice laws was about a motorcycle theft registered in Gwalior in Madhya Pradesh at 10 minutes past midnight.

"...The first case (under the new laws) was registered at a police station in Gwalior. It was a case of theft, someone's motorcycle was stolen. The case was registered at 12.10am...As far as the case against a vendor (registered at a police station in Delhi) is concerned, there were provisions for the same earlier too and it is not a new provision. Police used the provision to review it and dismissed that case," Shah said while addressing a press conference here.

Shah's clarification came in response to a media query about the first case lodged under the new laws that have come into force beginning from Monday.



Union Home Minister Amit Shah addresses a press conference

Delhi Police had registered a case at Kamla Market Police Station in the national capital against a street vendor under the new laws.

"If the date of crime is before July 1, 2024, then it will be tried under old laws, if it is later, it will be tried under new laws," Shah said at the press conference on Monday.

The three new criminal laws - the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS), and the

Bharatiya Sakshya Adhiniyam (BSA), came into effect on Monday. Under this the Indian Penal Code (IPC) has been replaced with the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, the CrPC with Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita and the Indian Evidence Act has been replaced with the Bharatiya Sakshya Adhiniyam. These laws had received the assent by President Droupadi Murmu on December 25, 2023.

Detailing the new laws, the Union Minister said: "...First of all, I would like to congratulate the people of the country that about 77 years after independence, our criminal justice system is becoming completely 'Swadeshi'. This will function on Indian ethos. After 75 years, these laws were contemplated upon and when these laws are in effect from today, colonial laws have been scrapped and laws made in the Indian Parliament are being brought into practice."

ANI

Taliban applaud US stance on Afghanistan

Doha, Qatar - The Taliban's interim administration in Kabul on Monday lauded the US, a rare acknowledgment after fighting its forces for nearly two decades, as well as other regional countries for 'pledging' to lift restrictions on Afghanistan's banking and economic sectors.

"Today's meeting is progressing very well, with most countries expressing support for Afghanistan's private sector. It was pledged that restrictions on banking and economic avenues should be lifted," Afghan interim administration's chief spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid said in a statement as

the two-day UN-hosted meeting on Afghanistan continued in the Qatari capital of Doha.

"The stances of Russia, China, Iran, Pakistan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, the United States, and the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation were commendable," Mujahid added.

This is the third such UN meeting that the Taliban have attended for the first time, as the international community has not recognised the interim administration in Afghanistan since their return to power in Aug. 2021.

Karachi reels under hottest period since 2015

Karachi, Pakistan - Pakistan's Karachi city sweltered under harsh weather conditions on Sunday for the eighth consecutive day as the temperature surged to 39.2°C, however, high levels of humidity made it feel like 55°C, Pakistan-based daily The Dawn reported.

Chief Meteorologist at Pakistan's Meteorological Department, Dr Sardar Sarfaraz told The Dawn that the city's monthly average temperature remained 4 degrees Celsius higher than average during the ongoing heatwave. High levels of humidity make weather 'very difficult to bear'.

"With 39.2°C on Sunday, feels like the temperature surges to 55°C at 5pm. The current weather conditions were the hottest since the 2015 heatwave," Sarfaraz said. When asked about the heatwave, he



said: "We are seeing a repeat of similar weather conditions after nine years. The deviation from monthly average temperature remained around or above four degrees Celsius in Karachi during the ongoing heatwave."

The Met department said that this year, the maximum temper-

ature recorded was 42 degrees Celsius. In 2015 and 2024, heatwaves were caused by low atmospheric pressure areas.

"What's specific to Karachi is high levels of humidity that makes hot weather very difficult to bear as it increases the feels-like temperature manifold. This

week, humidity has remained 50 per cent or above 50 per cent," he added.

He said that the minimum temperature of June this year had also remained high i.e. on an average of 29-30°C.

The ever-highest temperature of June in Karachi was 47°C,

The deviation from monthly average temperature remained around or above four degrees Celsius in Karachi during the ongoing heatwave

recorded on June 18, 1979. The highest temperature of May was 48°C, which was recorded on May 9, 1938.

Dr Sarfaraz said: "Weather patterns have changed due to the warming world. Studies suggest that intense weathers would become more frequent, prolonged and violent as global temperature rises."

ANI

SPANISH SYMPHONY

Impressive Spain quell Georgia’s challenge to reach Euros last eight

Cologne, Germany - Three-time champions Spain survived the early scare of an own goal to beat a spirited Georgia 4-1 on Sunday and reach the last eight of Euro 2024, dominating in an exhilarating encounter that brought an end to the minnows’ fairytale run. La Roja will meet hosts Germany in the quarterfinals on Friday and sent a message of intent with a polished performance in the drizzling rain including superbly taken goals from Rodri, Fabian Ruiz, Nico Williams and Dani Olmo.

Spain had gone behind in the 18th minute against the run of play when Georges Mikautadze found Otar Kakabadze, who whipped in an early cross that struck Robin Le Normand and bounced into his own net, sending Georgian fans into a deafening frenzy.

Playing at their maiden Euros, Georgia were riding a wave of euphoria and seeking an unlikely Iberian double after last week’s staggering 2-0 win over Portugal sent them into the knockout rounds.

Georgia were spurred on by thousands of travelling supporters, who were wearing white and draped in national flags. The fans clapped, roared and chanted in unison to the beat of pounding drums. Spain came into the game after three group stage wins having not conceded a goal and coach Luis de la Fuente brought his first choice players back into the team.

Georgia stuck with a side that included the tournament’s joint



Spain's Nico Williams (R) celebrates with Lamine Yamal after scoring against Georgia in their last-16 match

top scorer Georges Mikautadze and its leading shot-stopper Giorgi Mamardashvili in goal.

Spain were mostly cool and confident, barely ruffled by the determination of the Georgians, with youngsters Williams and Lamine Yamal quick, inventive and unrelenting down the flanks.

“Against Germany we have to be at our best,” said player of the match Rodri. “We knew it was going to be a tough match. They put us in trouble. We had chances.

“It was a pity about the goal, but we showed character and pride to come back. We knew they were going to be a solid team.”

Spain took control from the start and almost went ahead after five minutes when Dani Carvajal’s cross from the right found Pedri, who forced an early save from Mamardashvili. Williams was the biggest threat in a pulsating game and came close soon after when his goal-bound effort from outside the area was deflected wide of the target.

Mamardashvili was called into action several times, with early saves from Dani Carvajal’s glancing header and a shot from the edge of the area by Fabian Ruiz.

Spain were untroubled after going behind and found their leveller in the 39th minute when Williams picked out Rodri, who fired low into the corner.

But Georgia never gave up, with Mikautadze and Khvicha Kvaratskhelia bursting out of their own half in pursuit of a goal that could have made history.



Willy Sagnol

We are sad, but we can look back with joy, says Georgia coach Sagnol

Cologne, Germany - Georgia failed to pull off more giant-killing against Spain on Saturday but once the disappointment of defeat lifts, they will be overjoyed at how Euro 2024 went, coach Willy Sagnol said.

“We’re a bit sad because we lost. But I’m sure in some days we will realise what we have done and I’m sure happiness is going to come back very quickly,” said the Frenchman after Georgia’s 4-1 defeat by Spain in the last 16.

The lowest-ranked team at the tournament, at their first major finals, defied all expectations to progress from their group after sparkling performances including a shock win over a Cristiano Ronaldo-led Portugal.

“You have to take some time to sit and look at what you have done. I think we can sit in peace and quiet and everyone can be very happy at the last year, because the evolution of the team, the squad, has been absolutely fantastic,” said Sagnol.

“I’m very proud of what the players have done in the last months. Now it’s the end of a journey, but I’m sure the next one will also be very exciting.”

Remarkably, Georgia went in front against Spain, ranked 66 places higher, when Robin Le Normand scored an own goal. However, Spain fought back and equalised before the

break.

“To take the lead, it was our first offensive situation, but I think if at halftime we had still led 1-0, we would have had a bit more energy for the second half,” he said, also lamenting an injury to talisman Khvicha Kvaratskhelia.

“But in the large spectrum, Spain deserved the win,

We are so happy and proud of what we have done in the last days, the last weeks ...

WILLY SAGNOL

there’s no doubt about it.”

When the dust settles, Georgia’s next focus will be on getting back to another big tournament, the coach said.

“I think it will take some days to realise because I think it was such a fantastic team and group performance ... We worked so hard to get here, we will try our hardest to come back to another major tournament,” he said.

“We are so happy and proud of what we have done in the last days, the last weeks ... Everything has been such a great experience. I think tomorrow morning everyone will want only one thing - to come back.”

Spain will be champions, says Mamardashvili

Cologne, Germany - A 4-1 defeat to Spain ended Georgia’s maiden participation in a major finals at the last-16 stage, and goalkeeper Giorgi Mamardashvili expects former champions Spain to go on to win Euro 2024 after a classy display on Sunday.

The Spaniards went behind due to an own goal in the 18th minute but never lost their composure, cantering into the quarter-finals thanks to goals from Rodri, Fabian Ruiz, Nico Williams and Dani Olmo.

“I think Spain are the favourites for this tournament



Giorgi Mamardashvili

and they will become champions. It’s a pity that we met this team, but it’s okay, it’s not the end. We will come back stronger,” Mamardashvili told reporters.

“Of course, it’s sad that we lost in the round of 16, but we should also be happy about it, because not long ago we couldn’t have imagined that we would reach this far,” he added.

The Georgians became one of the feelgood stories of the tournament by beating Portugal 2-0 in their final Group F game to make it to the knockout stages,

all while trying to play expansive football against more illustrious opponents.

Captain Guram Kashia said his side were disappointed to be heading home, and that the loss of leading striker Otar Kiteishvili to injury proved a big blow.

“We played well in the first half (against Spain), in the second, after we lost Kiteishvili, the game changed.

In the end, we conceded goals and said goodbye to the championship, but we are happy that we represented our country with dignity,” Kashia said.

Bellingham to the rescue as England edge Slovakia to book last-eight spot

Gelsenkirchen, Germany - Jude Bellingham rescued England from crashing out of Euro 2024 against Slovakia on Sunday with a stunning 95th-minute equaliser before Harry Kane’s early extra-time winner sent the below-par pre-tournament favourites into the quarterfinals.

England were once again poor, looking lethargic and unable to create clear openings, but a moment of magic from Bellingham, who fired home with a bicycle kick, kept them alive before

Kane’s header set up a clash with Switzerland in Duesseldorf on Saturday. Slovakia started far sharper than England and gave their opponents several warnings before Ivan Schranz placed a deft finish past goalkeeper Jordan Pickford in the 25th minute.

England, who had come back to win their last three Euro games in which they conceded first, including the last edition’s semi-final, thought they were level shortly after the break but Phil Foden was clearly offside before

tapping home.

Kane uncharacteristically headed a Foden free kick wide and Declan Rice hit the post as Slovakia were pinned deep in their own half late on, though England seemed to lack belief as their fans grew ever more frustrated. But Bellingham, a day after his 21st birthday, equalised with an incredible effort to take the game to extra time with England’s first shot on target.

“What an unbelievable goal, he’s kept our tournament alive,”

Kane told ITV, describing Bellingham’s goal as “one of the best in our country’s history”.

England took less than a minute of extra time to take the lead when Kane headed past the despairing Martin Dubravka from close range to complete a remarkable turnaround.

Slovakia had faded as the game drew on and went closest to an equaliser of their own just before halftime in extra time, when Peter Pekarik kneed a dangerous cross over the bar.



England's Jude Bellingham (R) celebrates with Harry Kane after scoring against Slovakia on Sunday



Gareth Southgate

Southgate happy with spirit but admits England have to be better

Gelsenkirchen, Germany - England manager Gareth Southgate is prepared for a negative reaction after another display of frustrating mediocrity as his side came back from the brink of elimination against Slovakia on Sunday.

“I can imagine how everybody’s going to react to that even

though we’ve won, but we’re still in there,” Southgate said. “We want to be better, I’m not going to hide from that. But the spirit and the character was there for everybody to see.”

Except that for 94 minutes on Sunday, the pre-tournament favourites looked destined to be eliminated by a team 40 places

below them on FIFA’s world rankings before their tournament was salvaged by a last-gasp bicycle kick by Jude Bellingham, and a header by Harry Kane early in extra time.

Southgate’s rigidity around substitutions was the most glaring question, particularly the introduction of Ivan Toney in the

94th minute. The Brentford striker looked furious with the manager as he prepared to come on. “I knew Ivan Toney had the hump with me, putting him on,” Southgate said. “But I said to him, ‘This could be the moment.’”

Toney eventually set up the winner as he headed the ball on for Kane’s goal.

Southgate compared his substitutes’ performances to England’s 1966 World Cup campaign when Geoff Hurst did not play until the quarter-finals but scored a hat-trick in their victory against West Germany in the final, a video of which was shown to England’s players ahead of Sunday’s game.

NO STOPPING VINOTINTO

Venezuela blank Jamaica to enter Copa last eight as Group B winners

Austin, US - Venezuela hammered Jamaica 3-0 in Texas on Sunday to seal top spot in Group B and set up a Copa America quarterfinal with Canada.

Goals from Eduard Bello and Salomon Rondon early in the second half, followed by a late strike from Eric Ramirez, ensured victory for the Venezuelan side.

Venezuela had already booked their spot in the last eight with wins over Ecuador and Mexico.

They needed just a point against already-eliminated Jamaica to clinch top spot and avoid defending champions Argentina in the next round.

Jamaica's best opportunity

Venezuela had already booked their spot in the last eight with wins over Ecuador and Mexico and needed just a point against Jamaica to clinch top spot and avoid defending champions Argentina in the next round

came in the 21st minute but Renaldo Cephas' diving header soared over.

Bello's powerful downward header put the South Americans in front in the 49th minute and Rondon doubled their lead seven minutes later with a scuffed effort past Jamaica keeper Jahmali Waite.

It was Rondon's 43rd international goal, extending his record

as Venezuela's highest scorer.

Ramirez added Venezuela's third on the breakaway in the 85th minute, sending a right-footed shot under the advancing Waite after a well-timed pass from Kervin Andrade.

Venezuela were joined in the last eight by Group B runners-up Ecuador, who qualified thanks to their superior goal difference after holding Mexico 0-0 in the other match, with both teams tied on four points.

Chile file complaint over refereeing

Chile's football federation (FFC) has called on South American soccer's governing body (CON-



Venezuela's Salomon Rondon celebrates after scoring against Jamaica in their Copa America Group B match on Sunday

Gabriel Suazo picked up a second yellow card in the 27th minute of the match in Orlando.

They also felt aggrieved after Canada defender Moise Bombito

appeared to elbow Rodrigo Echeverria in the fifth minute of the match but VAR did not review the incident.

In the letter addressed to

CONMEBOL's refereeing commission, the FCC said Roldan had also made "blatant errors" at the 2021 Copa America where he failed to award Chile a penalty in

a 2-0 group-stage loss to Paraguay.

CONMEBOL rejected an FCC request to suspend the referee after that match.



Marcelo Bielsa

Uruguay coach Bielsa suspended after team's late arrival onto pitch

Uruguay coach Marcelo Bielsa has been suspended for one match by CONMEBOL after his team were late coming onto the pitch for their 5-0 win over Bolivia on Thursday.

South America's soccer governing body also handed the Uruguayan FA a \$15,000 fine after Bielsa's side failed to comply with articles 104 and 145 of the tournament's regulations, which relate to taking the field "later than the scheduled start or restart time", CONMEBOL said in a statement on Sunday.

The 68-year-old Bielsa will not be on the bench when his side face the United States in their final Group C match at Kansas City's Arrowhead Stadium on Monday, with Uruguay having all but secured a place in the last eight.

The former Leeds United manager is the fourth coach to be suspended for the same reason at this year's Copa America, after Argentina's Lionel Scaloni, Chile boss Ricardo Gareca and Venezuela manager Fernando Batista.

Uruguay assistant coach Diego Reyes told a press conference the Copa America was a very tough tournament in that respect.

"These sanctions are never taken well because it is a negative aspect for the team. We took the necessary precautions (to avoid delays) in the last game, but there were still uncertainties that could not be resolved," he said.

"In a dressing room during a game you know there is a lot of activity going on, and in this tournament they have been very strict with that short period of time."

Uruguay face the United States in their final group match on Monday.

Ecuador hold Mexico to reach quarterfinals

Glendale, US - Ecuador secured a place in the Copa America quarter-finals on Sunday after grinding out a 0-0 draw with Mexico, who bowed out of the tournament after finishing third in Group B.

Ecuador, who are looking to reach their first semi-final since hosting the event in 1993, face defending champions Argentina in the quarters, while group winners Venezuela, who beat Jamaica 3-0, take on Canada.

Ecuador finished level with Mexico on four points but progress to the last eight thanks to a superior goal difference.

"We would like to have a little bit more control," Ecuador coach Felix Sanchez told reporters.

"It's a very young squad, as I said, and we actually need to be



Mexico's Santiago Giménez is challenged by Ecuador's Kendry Páez (R) and Félix Torres

We know that even if you obtain the results you want, you need to be self-critical and continue improving

FELIX SANCHEZ

able to overcome these situations in these matches. We know that even if you obtain the results you want, you need to be self-critical and continue improving."

Mexico manager Jaime Lozano is likely to face increased scrutiny after they scored just one goal in their three group matches. Lozano, Mexico's third head coach in the last two years,

also faced criticism after their 2-0 loss to the United States in the 2024 CONCACAF Nations League final, and defeats in two recent friendlies, including a 4-0 thrashing by Uruguay.

"Whenever an objective is not meant, there is certain discomfort and doubts, that's only natural, no matter who's here," Lozano said. "But the players kept believing until the very end, that's not easy. It's not easy to play that strong union and the commitment that they showed ... over the whole tournament."

"That decision (about my future) is not up to me."

In a physical first half, Mexico attacked with real intensity as they sought the win they needed but lacked quality on the ball and failed to record a shot on target.

My shoulder is not cooperating: Sabalenka pulls out of Wimbledon

London, England - Third seed Aryna Sabalenka pulled out of Wimbledon shortly before her opening match on Monday due to a shoulder injury, organisers said.

The Belarusian, who was set to face American Emma Bektas, was replaced in the draw by Russian lucky loser Erika Andreeva.

"I tried everything to get myself ready but unfortunately my shoulder is not cooperating," Sabalenka said on Instagram.

"I pushed myself to the limit in practice today to try my best, but my team explained that playing would only make things much worse," she added. "This tournament means so much to me and I promise I'll be back stronger than ever next year."

Sabalenka, who suffered a lower back injury this year and



Aryna Sabalenka

struggled with illness at the French Open during her quarter-final loss to 17-year-old Mirra Andreeva, sustained the issue during last month's Berlin Open.

The Australian Open champion said on Saturday that she was still not 100% heading into the year's third Grand Slam.

Since claiming her maiden

Grand Slam title at the Australian Open in 2023, the 26-year-old Sabalenka has established herself as one of the most consistent players in major tournaments.

She reached the semi-finals at Roland Garros and Wimbledon last year, as well as the U.S. Open final, and started 2024 by defending her Melbourne crown.

Alcaraz marches into Wimbledon second round, easy for Medvedev

London, England - Third seed Carlos Alcaraz endured an early test in his Wimbledon title defence but the Spaniard quelled the challenge of Estonian qualifier Mark Lajal 7-6(3) 7-5 6-2 and moved into the second round on Monday.

The 21-year-old, bidding to add a fourth Grand Slam trophy to his cabinet after his maiden French Open triumph last month, dropped serve midway through a high-quality opening set before battling back to clinch it in a tiebreak.

Lajal broke Alcaraz again early in the next set but the dreadlocked world number 269 was unable to make the advantage count and his opponent broke back to love immediately before pouncing again in the 11th game.



Carlos Alcaraz celebrates winning a point against Mark Lajal

With the momentum having swung, Alcaraz continued to reel off the points for a two-set lead and raised his game further in the third to break with a superb backhand crosscourt winner and he never looked back from there to close out the victory.

Fifth seed Daniil Medvedev strode confidently and cheerfully into the Wimbledon second round on Monday with an assured 6-3 6-4 6-2 win over American Aleksandar Kovacevic on his favourite Court One.

The lofty 28-year-old Russian, beaten in the semi-finals last year by eventual champion Carlos Alcaraz, took one hour 46 minutes to dispose of the 88th-ranked New Yorker, who could not cope with his booming serve and whipped forehand.

GOLDEN GLOW

Al Manar Racing by Getspeed's Al Zubair, Baumann, Grenier and Ellis earn Gold Cup victory at 24 Hours of Spa

Spa-Francorchamps, Belgium - The Al Manar Racing by Getspeed quartet of Oman's Al Faisal bin Khalid al Zubair, Austrian Dominik Baumann, Canadian Mikaël Grenier and Swiss team debutant Philip Ellis finished the demanding CrowdStrike 24 Hours of Spa in seventh overall and claimed a stunning outright victory in the Gold Cup category on Sunday.

After starting the second round of the 2024 Fanatec GT World Challenge powered by AWS Endurance Cup from fourth place in the Gold category, the team managed its strategy to perfection with heavy rains dampening spirits during the night session.

Grenier drove the final stint and stayed clear of any late trouble to take the chequered flag well clear of Gold Cup runners-up Saintéloc Racing after 477 laps of racing on one of Europe's most demanding race circuits.

The Comtoy Racing Aston Martin Vantage AMR GT3 Evo, crewed by Mattia Drudi, Nicki



The Mercedes-AMG GT3 Evo of Al Manar Racing by Getspeed in action



Oman's Al Faisal bin Khalid al Zubair (L) celebrates with teammates Dominik Baumann, Mikaël Grenier and Philip Ellis after their victory

Thiim and Marco Sorensen, claimed a dramatic outright victory after a stationary Lamborghini blocked access to the pit lane for over a minute and dropped the long-time leading AF Corse Ferrari down to an eventual sec-

ond place when Alessandro Pier Guidi was obstructed from entering the pits.

Al Faisal said: "It was a great race. We were not sure how it was going to be initially. We had a strong driver line-up and a team

The most important thing was to bring back the win but also not only finishing as Gold Cup winners but also seventh overall out of 66 cars was something special

AL FAISAL BIN KHALID AL ZUBAIR

package to really come with something strong. We were very happy with how everything turned out. We kept it clean with no track limits and all my teammates were quick in the race.

"The most important thing was to bring back the win but also not only finishing as Gold Cup winners but also seventh overall out of 66 cars was something special and something to be very proud of. To do this under the Omani flag was something I was very happy to do. For what we have done in the past few years this was definitely at the top of the list. It was such a hectic

race. It is the 100th edition and that makes it more special. The drivers and the team did an amazing job."

Sixty-six cars lined up for the start of the centenary edition of the 24-hour classic and Baumann finished the opening lap in 11th place and fourth in the Gold category. Eighty per cent of the track had been resurfaced before the race and it gave for better grip on the dry surface, as Baumann maintained his position through the first half an hour of the race before pitting after 40 minutes and climbing a place to 10th once his rivals had followed suit.



Oman's Ahmad al Harthy and his team OQ by Oman Racing had a fine start before a mechanical issue ended their challenge

Mechanical problem ends OQ by Oman Racing's strong bid at Spa 24hrs

Spa-Francorchamps, Belgium - Spa-Francorchamps in Belgium was, for once, a less-than-happy hunting ground for Oman's Ahmad al Harthy during the weekend, when a mechanical problem with the No.30 BMW M4 GT3 - with just eight hours to run - ended involvement in this year's CrowdStrike 24 Hours of Spa.

From the outset in the Centenary staging of the Fanatec GT World Challenge Europe powered by AWS Endurance Cup's blue riband event, Al Harthy's OQ by Oman Racing team didn't put a wheel wrong in terms of driving or the pit-stops as a top result in the Bronze class became a distinct reality.

Unfortunately, though, the as-yet unidentified mechanical issue on Sunday morning brought an immediate end to the challenge of Al Harthy and team-

mates Sam De Haan, Jens Klingmann and Calan Williams.

"It was a very tough race, one of the hardest Spa 24 hours I have been part of or witnessed in terms of the level of competition and the excitement on the race track. We started out in a solid position, we started climbing through as we were planning and we knew we had a good race car. We actually had good pace and I was really happy with my stints," said Al Harthy.

"Unfortunately I picked up a penalty, from some debris on the race track, which resulted in us just coming out of sequence slightly but we knew we could alter that as the race went on. Going through the night was one of the toughest Spa races I've been involved in, with the rain and thunderstorms, and it was a target to finish the night phase of the race - which we did."

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The sciatic nerve is the longest and thickest nerve in your body. It's actually a bundle of five nerves that start in your lower back and run through your buttocks and down each leg. Inflammation of the sciatic nerve is called sciatica. It can cause a burning or shooting pain in your buttocks or a pain that goes all the way down your leg. You usually have the pain only on one side.

Sciatica, also known as lumbar radiculopathy, may be caused by a bone spur on your spine or a herniated disk that presses on the nerve.

Most people have some small abnormalities of the spine. That's why doctors don't rely on imaging tests to diagnose sciatica. Instead, they may give you instructions for self-care and suggest exercises for you. Most of the time, these measures work.

Because sciatica pain is often intense, you might think something is seriously wrong. But about 3 out of 4 people with sciatica usually improve in a few weeks. Moving more and sitting less usually help, and you can use over-the-counter medication for pain relief.

Self-care and pain medication may not be the best options if your pain lasts more than 4 months. Your doctor may recommend physical therapy, in which a therapist guides you through passive and active exercises to ease pain and prevent future back problems.

Here are some exercises to ease sciatica:

Knee-to-chest stretch

- This simple stretch targets the lower buttock and upper thigh area.
- **Step 1:** Lie on your back with your legs bent and feet flat on the floor.
- **Step 2:** Bring one knee to the chest while keeping the other foot on the floor.
- **Step 3:** Keeping the lower back pressed to the floor, hold for up to 30 seconds.
- **Step 4:** Repeat on the other side.

Try doing two to four repetitions on each side. To make the exercise a little harder, keep one leg straight on the floor while raising the other to the chest. You can also bring both knees to your chest.



Exercises for Sciatica



Standing hamstring stretch

Use care when doing this exercise. Hold on to something if you need to, and don't overstretch.

- **Step 1:** Stand straight up and put one foot on a slightly higher surface, such as a stair step.
- **Step 2:** Straighten the leg on the step and point the toes up.
- **Step 3:** Lean slightly forward while keeping your back straight.
- **Step 4:** Hold for 20-30 seconds. Remember to breathe.
- **Step 5:** Repeat with the other leg.

Try for two to three repetitions with each leg.

should be about shoulder-width apart. Relax your arms at your sides.

- **Step 2:** Pushing through your heels, lift your hips until your body forms a straight line from knees to shoulders.
- **Step 3:** Hold the position for a few seconds.
- **Step 4:** Slowly lower your hips to the floor.

Pelvic tilts

This is another deceptively simple exercise that's good for sciatica.

- **Step 1:** Lie on your back with your legs bent and arms by your side.
- **Step 2:** Tightening your stomach muscles, press your back into the floor, and rock your hips and pelvis slightly upward.
- **Step 3:** Hold this position while imagining that you're trying to make your belly button touch your backbone. Don't forget to breathe.
- **Step 4:** Release after a few seconds. Try for two to eight repetitions.

Glute bridge

The gluteal muscles, or glutes, are a group of muscles in your buttocks. If they're tight, they can press on the sciatic nerve.

- **Step 1:** Lie down with your back on the floor and your knees bent. Your feet



NUTRITION & YOU



Mention the term "Heart Attack" and most people imagine a middle-aged man drenched in sweat and clutching his chest. Few people seem to consider cardiovascular disease (CVD) as a woman's disease. Women are six times as likely to die of heart disease as of breast cancer.

All women face the threat of heart disease. With Menopause, a heart-friendly hormone, Estrogen falls, which further increases the risk.

Studies have shown that women may have undiagnosed warning signs weeks, months, and even years be-

fore having a heart attack, as they are very subtle. This may be because women tend to have blockages not only in their main arteries but also in the smaller arteries that supply blood to the heart — a condition called small vessel heart disease.

Strategies towards Healthy-Heart Diet

- Limit unhealthy fats like saturated fats and trans fats diet found in butter, margarine & animal foods. Replace it with heart-friendly fats like monounsaturated fats found in olive oil or polyunsaturated fats found in nuts, seeds, and some vegetable oils.
- Check the food labels of your favourite snacks, like, cookies, crackers or chips. If the term, 'partially hydrogenated' appears on the ingredient list, the snack is made with trans fats. Moreover, snacks labelled 'reduced fat' may

- also be made up of oils containing trans fats.
- Include Cholesterol-lowering foods like Oatmeal, Oat bran, kidney beans, apples, pears, psyllium, and prunes. Soluble fibre, present in them, reduces low-density lipoprotein (LDL), the "bad" cholesterol.
- Walnuts, Almonds and other nuts, like, pistachio, hazelnuts or pine nuts are all heart-friendly. Nuts are rich in heart-friendly substances, like, omega-3 fatty acids, fibre, vitamin E, plant sterols and L-arginine which keep the heart strong. As nuts are calorie-dense, eat a handful of these each day.
- Omega-3 fatty acids help in reducing bad cholesterol, blood pressure and the risk of blood clots. Omega-3 fatty acids are found in fatty fish

like, mackerel, lake trout, herring, sardines, and salmon. However, to maintain the heart-healthy benefits of fish, bake or grill it. Non-fish eaters can get their omegas from flaxseeds or canola oil.

- Olive Oil - Olive oil contains a potent mix of a n-



- tioxidants that can lower your "bad" (LDL) cholesterol but leave your "good" (HDL) cholesterol untouched. The effects are better if it is extra virgin oil.
- Choose low-fat protein foods, like, Lean meat, poultry, fish, low-fat dairy products, and egg whites, in place of red meat, fried chicken or full cream dairy. Lentils, beans, peas and nuts are all good sources of proteins, low in fat and with zero cholesterol. Substituting soy protein with animal protein is another good option.
- Make your diet colourful with veggies and fruits. These foods are rich in powerful antioxidants and phytonutrients that help prevent CVD. Veggies and fruits in any form - stir fry, salads, soups or pure juices, all work wonders for the body.
- Go for Whole grains. Being good

- sources of fibre, vitamins, and minerals, like, thiamin, riboflavin, niacin, vitamin E, magnesium, phosphorus, selenium, zinc, and iron, they play a great role in regulating blood pressure and keeping a heart healthy.
 - Go for whole-grain bread, pasta, and brown rice. Select high-fibre cereals for breakfast, instead of sugar-sweetened cereals.
 - Reduce salt in your diet, by reducing the use of table salt and salt added while cooking. Limit the use of ketchup, sauces, processed and ready-to-eat foods. Eating fresh and preparing your meals is an ideal choice.
- Incorporate these strategies and you will find a heart-healthy diet simple and enjoyable. Make small substitutions and keep your heart healthy for those who are close to your heart.

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



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INTERNET ADDICTION

GREY TRUTH

Internet addiction can significantly affect the behaviour and development of adolescents, according to a new study which urges youngsters to limit their usage of digital screen time before it impairs their grey cells

How often do you turn to the Internet everyday? Do you spend hours on end, educating, enlightening or entertaining yourself with the Internet on your smart phone or desktop/laptop? Are you often lost if you do not have access to the Internet to crosscheck, confirm or contradict things that are part of your daily routine?

If the answer is 'yes' to the above questions and you are an adolescent, you could be in for serious trouble with the normal functioning of your brain, termed as 'Internet addiction'.

Adolescents with an Internet addiction undergo changes in the brain that could lead to additional addictive behaviour and tendencies, finds a new study by UCL researchers.

The findings, published in PLOS Mental Health, reviewed 12 articles involving 237 young people aged 10-19 with a formal diagnosis of Internet addiction between 2013 and 2023.

Internet addiction has been defined as a person's inability to resist the urge to use the internet, negatively impacting their psychological wellbeing, as well as their social, academic and professional lives.

The studies used functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) to inspect the functional connectivity (how regions of the brain interact with each other) of participants with internet addiction, both while resting and completing a task.

The effects of Internet addiction were seen throughout multiple neural networks in the brains of adolescents. There was a mixture of increased and decreased activity in the parts of the brain that are activated when resting (the default mode network).

Meanwhile, there was an overall decrease in the functional connectivity in the parts of the brain involved in active thinking (the executive control network).

These changes were found to lead to addictive behaviours and tendencies in adolescents, as well as behaviour changes associated with intellectual ability, physical coordination, mental health and development.

Lead author, MSc student, Max Chang (UCL Great Ormond Street Institute for Child Health) said, "Adolescence is a crucial developmental stage during which people go through significant changes in their biology, cognition, and personalities. As a result, the brain is particularly vulnerable to internet addiction related urges during this time, such as compulsive internet usage, cravings towards usage of the mouse or keyboard and consuming media.

"The findings from our study show that this can lead to potentially negative behavioural and developmental changes that could impact the lives of adolescents. For example, they may struggle to maintain relationships and social activities, lie about online activity and experience irregular eating and disrupted sleep."

With smartphones and laptops being ever more accessible, Internet addiction is a growing problem across the globe. Previous research has shown that people in the UK spend over 24 hours every week online and, of those surveyed, more than half self-reported being addicted to the internet.

Meanwhile, Ofcom found that of the 50 million Internet users in the UK, over 60% said their Internet usage had a negative effect on their lives - such as being late or neglecting chores.

Senior author, Irene Lee (UCL Great Ormond Street Institute of Child

Health), said, "There is no doubt that the Internet has certain advantages. However, when it begins to affect our day-to-day lives, it is a problem.

"We would advise that young people enforce sensible time limits for their daily internet usage and ensure that they are aware of the psychological and social implications of spending too much time online."

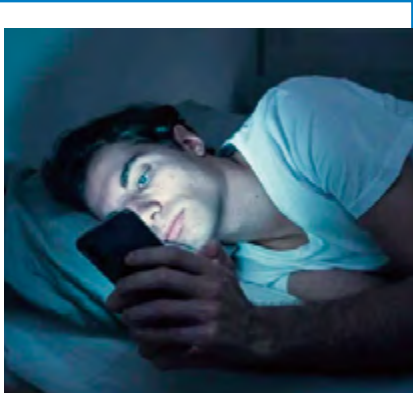
Chang added, "We hope our findings will demonstrate how internet addiction alters the connection between the brain networks in adolescence, allowing physicians to screen and treat the onset of internet addiction more effectively.

"Clinicians could potentially prescribe treatment to aim at certain brain regions or suggest psychotherapy or family therapy targeting key symptoms of Internet addiction.

"Importantly, parental education on Internet addiction is another possible avenue of prevention from a public health standpoint.

Parents who are aware of the early signs and onset of Internet addiction will more effectively handle screen time, impulsivity, and minimise the risk factors surrounding internet addiction."

(Courtesy: sciencedaily.com)



WHAT IS INTERNET ADDICTION?

Internet addiction is when a person has a compulsive need to spend a great deal of time on the Internet, to the point where other areas of life (such as relationships, work or health) are allowed to suffer. The person becomes dependent on using the Internet and needs to spend more and more time online to achieve the same 'high'.

There is a range of behaviours that can be referred to as Internet addiction. Other terms for this addiction include Internet addiction disorder (IAD) and net addiction.

Generally speaking, surveys suggest that males who are addicted to spending time online tend to prefer viewing pornographic websites, while females are attracted to chat rooms for making platonic relationships.

Medical opinion is, however, divided on whether Internet addiction exists as a mental disorder in its own right or whether it's an expression of pre-existing mental disorders or behavioural problems. For example, a person who compulsively browses the Internet for online gambling venues may have a gambling problem rather than an Internet addiction.





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