

Oman welcomes ICJ order to halt offensive on Rafah

Muscat - The Sultanate of Oman has welcomed the decision of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) imposing additional emergency measures on Israel to immediately stop military operations in Rafah, allow humanitarian aid and access to Gaza for war crimes investigators.

In a statement, the Foreign Ministry called on the international community, especially the Security Council, to hold Israel to its responsibilities in accordance with international law and to implement the decision of ICJ to immediately stop aggression in the Palestinian territories.

The United Nations' top court

on Friday ordered Israel to immediately halt its controversial military operation in the southern Gaza city of Rafah, further increasing international pressure on Israel over its war against Hamas.

"Israel must immediately halt its military offensive and any other action in Rafah which may inflict - on the Palestinian group in Gaza - conditions of life that could bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part," Judge Nawaf Salam, president of the International Court of Justice (ICJ), said.

The court considered the humanitarian situation in Rafah to



Judge Nawaf Salam (centre), president of ICJ

be classified as 'disastrous', he said, adding that UN officials have indicated that the situation was set to 'intensify even further' if the Israeli operation in Rafah

continues.

South Africa filed an urgent request on May 10 for additional measures against Israel, accusing it of using forced evacuation or-

ders in the southern Gaza city of Rafah to 'endanger rather than protect civilian life'.

The request was part of a larger case brought by Pretoria against Israel in which South Africa accused Israel of committing genocide against Palestinians during the seven-month-long conflict.

Criticism of Israel's conduct in the war in Gaza has been growing.

Last week alone, three European countries announced they would recognise a Palestinian state, and the chief prosecutor for the International Criminal Court requested arrest warrants for Is-

raeli leaders, along with Hamas officials.

More than a million Palestinians were taking shelter in Rafah before Israel started its operation, but the court noted that around 800,000 have since been displaced.

Upon entering Rafah, the military seized the city's border crossing with Egypt, which has remained shut since. The crossing was a vital entry point for humanitarian aid.

The court ordered Israel to open the Rafah crossing for humanitarian assistance and said it had found that the evacuation and living conditions provided by

Israel are not "sufficient to alleviate the immense risk, which the Palestinian population is exposed" to.

Israel's Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich said on the social media platform X that "the State of Israel is at war for its existence."

"Those who demand that the State of Israel stop the war, demand that it decrees itself to cease to exist. We will not agree to that," he said.

Rulings by the court are final and binding, but the ICJ doesn't have a mechanism to enforce them, and they have been ignored in the past.

Agencies

OMAN, JORDAN PLAN DIRECT SHIPPING LINE

Muscat - Oman and Jordan are considering establishing a direct shipping line between the Jordanian port of Aqaba and ports in the sultanate.

The announcement was made during the visit of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to Jordan last week.

On the sidelines of His Majesty the Sultan's visit, a memorandum of understanding (MoU) was also signed for investments in various sectors.

The MoU was signed between the Oman Investment Authority (OIA) and the Social Security Corporation, represented by the Social Security Investment Fund (SSIF) in Jordan.

The agreement was signed by Abdulsalam bin Mohammed al Murshidi, President of OIA, and Dr Ezzeddin Kanakrieh, Chairman of SSIF.

The agreement stipulates the promotion of joint investment opportunities between Oman and Jordan in various fields, including the information and communications technology, food, agriculture, medicines, medical supplies, energy, mining, tourism, logistics services, among others.

Murshidi confirmed that this memorandum aligns with the



Discussions in the field of real estate development and studying the possibility of a direct shipping line between Aqaba and ports in Oman have started

ABDULSALAM AL MURSHIDI

Royal Directives of His Majesty the Sultan to strengthen the distinguished political relations between the two countries with broader economic relations.

"Discussions covering the field of real estate development and studying the possibility of establishing a direct shipping line between the Jordanian port of Aqaba and ports in the sultanate have started."

He added that OIA recently

sent a team to Jordan, and identified several sectors for potential cooperation with the kingdom.

He explained that the MoU consolidates the relationship between OIA and SSIF to develop sectors such as pharmaceuticals, food security, and mining.

In a joint communiqué issued by Oman and Jordan at the end of His Majesty the Sultan's visit to Amman, the two leaders underscored the significance of devel-

oping bilateral cooperation in various fields, notably in sectors related to Jordan's Economic Modernisation Vision and Oman Vision 2040.

They also stressed the need to implement the agreements, memorandums of understanding and executive programmes signed between the two countries and measures to realise these moves into practical steps that reflect positively on the interests of the two brotherly countries. They also underlined the importance of intensifying communication and exchanging visits between various stakeholders in the two countries to help explore new opportunities and expand their potentials.

OIA firms to seal pacts worth RO35mn at tech exhibition

Our Correspondent Muscat

Companies under the Oman Investment Authority (OIA) are set to sign more than 30 agreements valued at over RO35mn with leading international technology firms.

These agreements will be finalised at the upcoming four-day COMEX Global Technology Show, scheduled to commence on Monday at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre.

Omantel, Oman Data Park, ITHCA Group, and OQ are among the OIA-affiliated companies participating in these strategic engagements. They will collaborate with global giants such as Google, Amazon, Microsoft, TCS, and Virtusa. The scope of these agreements includes the establishment of data centres, as well as the adoption of cutting-edge technologies like cloud solutions and artificial intelligence.



Atef al Siyabi, Head of Information Management at OIA, stressed on the importance of these agreements, stating, "The authority and its companies place emphasis on the technology sector, which is pivotal to our vision and governmental directive towards cultivating a robust and sustainable digital economy."

He noted that these initiatives are designed to integrate technology into local sectors through various programmes and plans.

Siyabi further noted that the OIA is dedicated to supporting startups and small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in the tech-

nology field through substantial initiatives and agreements. These are intended to foster innovation and growth within Oman's tech sector.

Additionally, the OIA's affiliated companies will engage in strategic partnerships and cooperative agreements with various governmental and private institutions and banks at COMEX. These collaborations aim to enhance the provision of digital services and innovative technical solutions, underscoring the OIA's commitment to advancing Oman's investment environment in the technology sector.

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Genes provide hope for survival of Arabia's endangered big cat

Our Correspondent Muscat

The release of captive bred Arabian leopards carefully selected for their genes can make a significant contribution to the successful recovery of the dwindling wild population and avert the prospect of extinction.

This was the opinion of the authors who just completed a major study on the critically endangered Arabian leopard.

An international collaboration led by scientists from Kent's Durrell Institute of Conservation and Ecology (DICE), University of East Anglia (UEA), University College London (UCL), Nottingham-Trent University (NTU) and the Diwan of Royal Court in Oman, surveyed the remote Dhofar mountain range to determine how many of Arabia's last big cat survive.

By deploying camera traps to identify individual leopards and performing DNA analyses from wild leopard scat alongside samples from the captive population, the team estimated there could



be only 51 wild leopards remaining in Oman, distributed between three isolated, genetically impoverished but distinct sub-populations.

Despite revealing extremely low levels of genetic diversity in the wild leopard population in Oman, the team discovered higher levels of genetic diversity in captive leopards across the region, in particular among several ones originating from neighbouring Yemen that helped found today's captive-breeding population.

'This important genetic resource has the potential for a major role in successful recovery of the Arabian leopard,' the report suggested.

The research showed that the dwindling regional wild population, could most effectively be recovered thorough 'genetic rescue', namely, the introduction of offspring from captive-bred leopards - which harbour the greatest amount of genetic diversity - into the wild population.

However, their predictions indicate that for genetic rescue to establish the most viable populations through leopard reintroductions, the benefit that new genes can bring needs to be carefully assessed.

The genetic load poses a severe threat, but it can be alleviated by genetic rescue, and the study has projected the best way to do this.

جهاز الضرائب TAX AUTHORITY

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MoHERI celebrates discovery of three new fungi species, ten others first time in region

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Higher Education, Scientific Research and Innovation announced that researchers in Oman have discovered three new species of large fungi (mushrooms), and ten additional species recorded for the first time in Oman and the Arabian Peninsula.

The announcement was made during a press conference on Wednesday coinciding with the International Day for Biological Diversity, under the patronage of H E Dr Rahma al Mahrouqi, Minister of Higher Education, Scientific Research, and Innovation.

The groundbreaking discovery includes identification of three unique fungi species, identified for the first time globally, and ten additional species recorded for the first time in



Oman and the Arabian Peninsula. These fungi were collected from various locales within the Dhofar governorate during the autumn of 2023. They were

analysed in laboratories using advanced genetic sequencing techniques to establish their unique characteristics.

Among the newly discovered

species, the most notable is named *Termitomyces dhofarensis*, popular among the citizens of Dhofar. This species is notably the second mushroom to be

These fungi extend the biological diversity of Oman and are part of ongoing studies focusing on their nutritional and medicinal potential

named after Dhofar, reflecting a distinct genus and family classification compared to a previously identified species in 2022.

The second species unveiled was *Hymenagaricus wadijarzeezicus*, named after its discovery location in Wadi Jarzeez in Dhofar. The third, *Hymenagaricus parvulus*, receives its name from its small size and distinct appearance.

Additionally, ten fungi docu-

mented for the first time in the region are under study for their potential medicinal properties, though their specific benefits are still being researched. These fungi extend the biological diversity of Oman and are part of ongoing studies focusing on their nutritional and medicinal potential. The team had also discovered four new fungi for the first time in the world in 2022.

The project is a collaborative effort between the Oman Center for Animal and Plant Genetic Resources (Mawarid), the College of Agricultural and Marine Sciences at Sultan Qaboos University, and Dhofar University. It is supported by funding from the Agricultural and Fisheries Development Fund. This initiative not only highlights Oman's rich biodiversity but also underscores the country's commitment to scientific research and sustainable use of its natural resources.

148 SMEs get platform to strengthen their brands

Our Correspondent
Muscat

A three-day exhibition to support small and medium enterprises (SMEs) concluded on Saturday at the Movenpick Hotel Ghala.

Organised by Links, a company specialising in events and exhibitions, the Gulf Tkatuf Exhibition was opened under the patronage of H H Sayyida Aliya bint Thuwainy al Said, with the presence of senior officials from the government and private sectors.

It featured 148 Omani projects, as well as companies from various Gulf countries who believe in the purchasing power of the local market. "We thank strategic partners such as the Authority of Small and Medium Enterprises Development, Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry and Muscat Municipality," H H Sayyida Hujaija bint Jaifer al Said told *Muscat Daily*.

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Omani develops smart glove for paralytic hand

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Al Azhar Zahir al Jabri, a 22-year-old Chemical Engineering student from the University of Technology and Applied Sciences in Muscat, has developed a 'Smart Medical Glove' to assist patients suffering from hemiplegia - a condition that causes paralysis on one side of the body.

Inspired by the memory of his late mother, who suffered from hemiplegia, Jabri embarked on this project in early 2021.

"After my mother's passing, I wanted to do something for those people affected by hemiplegia, and so I started working on this project. It has now reached an advanced stage, and I hope to complete it early next year and launch the glove for permanent use," he said.

The Smart Medical Glove has been developed for individuals with hemiplegia, muscular dystrophy, the elderly and children.

"The glove aids in rehabilitating the affected hand through pre-programmed specialised movements stored in the device. It also connects to a mobile application that allows patients to communicate with doctors worldwide and displays health sensor readings," Jabri explained.

The glove includes simple daily movements that help patients perform certain activities independently. "I faced several challenges, primarily because I'm not an expert in rehabilitation science. However, through consultations with specialists, I was able to identify the essential movements and ensure their accuracy," he

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AL AZHAR ZAHIR AL JABRI

added.

In 2022, Jabri secured a patent for his invention from the Ministry of Commerce, Industry, and Investment Promotion. He believes the project represents a valuable economic resource for Oman.

"Projects like these are vital for keeping up with Oman's ongoing development and vision," Jabri recently represented Oman at the TEXPO exhibition in Malaysia, where he reached the final stages. He also collaborated with Khoula Hospital, which provided specialised consultations for the project and will continue to support its success.

"My family has been my primary supporter, and Khoula Hospital's expertise has been invaluable. I hope my project will soon see the light of day and become available in the market for the benefit of those who need it," he concluded.

Integrated public bus, taxi station for Nizwa in pipeline

Muscat - In an endeavour to streamline the public transport system in the Governorate of Dakhliyah, the authorities have invited bids for the development of an integrated bus and taxi station in Nizwa.

The tender has been issued by the Oman National Transport Company - Mwasalat in collaboration with the Tatweer platform. Proposed to come on an

11,412sqm of land in the wilayat of Nizwa, the integrated station aims to bolster the diversification of financing sources while creating an appealing and distinctive investment space.

An official from Dakhliyah said that a prime location has been identified in Nizwa for private companies and investors to participate in the development of the Integrated Nizwa Bus Station

and Taxi Station on a design, build, finance, operate, and transfer basis.

Investors will have the opportunity to engage in commercial and related activities, including the construction of up to six floors of commercial buildings within the designated area.

The project will be transferred back to Dakhliyah governorate after a 50-year term.



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Fitch affirms Oman's ratings at 'BB+' with stable outlook

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Fitch Ratings has affirmed Oman's Long-Term Foreign-Currency Issuer Default Rating (IDR) at 'BB+' with a stable outlook.

Oman's ratings are supported by a higher GDP per capita, the positive impact of recent budget reforms, and a decreasing government debt-to-GDP ratio, Fitch said in a statement released on Friday.

'High dependence on oil revenue, modest financial buffers given high exposure to volatile hydrocarbon prices, and Oman's net external debtor position weigh on the ratings. We anticipate Oman will retain a focus on improving its non-oil fiscal balance, although the record is short,' Fitch said.

Budget surpluses continue

Fitch projects Oman's budget surplus to narrow to 2.2% of GDP in 2024 and 0.9% in 2025 from 3.2% in 2023, assuming a Brent oil price of \$80 and \$70 per barrel, respectively.

The rating agency estimates Oman's fiscal breakeven oil price at \$65-70 per barrel, indicating that Oman will continue to post budget surpluses this year and next year.

Fitch assumes OPEC+ will un-



As per Fitch's estimates, Oman's debt-to-GDP ratio will fall to 32.4% of GDP at the end of 2024 and 31.9% in 2025 from 36.5% at the end of 2023 and 68% in 2020

wind production quotas from the fourth quarter of 2024, which will mitigate part of the revenue loss from lower oil prices for Oman, although overall hydrocarbon revenue will still drop by 11% in 2025. Oman is a member of OPEC+ alliance.

The rating agency acknowledged that the Omani authorities continue to improve tax enforcement while streamlining taxes and fees, resulting in moderate growth of non-oil revenue.

'Oman is making progress to-

wards personal income tax, which could bring a small amount of additional revenue from 2026. We project non-oil revenue to reach 10.6% of GDP at end-2024, up from 9.7% in 2019. There are currently no plans to increase value-added tax (VAT), although the measure could be revived in a low oil price scenario,' Fitch added.

Falling debt

As per Fitch's estimates, Oman's debt-to-GDP ratio will fall to

32.4% of GDP at the end of 2024 and 31.9% in 2025 from 36.5% at the end of 2023 and 68% in 2020.

'Oman continues to prepay some of its debt, using the budget surplus from high oil prices. We expect Oman to have repaid nearly \$2.9bn in external debt in the first half of 2024. The resulting 10% drop in external debt from end-2023 is faster than our forecast at our last review in September 2023,' the agency said.

Fitch noted that Oman's debt management has smoothed the debt profile, reducing the risk of liquidity pressures. It said, 'The authorities aim to gradually increase the share of domestic debt by developing the local market and refinancing part of the upcoming external debt maturities in Omani rial.'

Growth to bounce back

Fitch projects Oman's overall GDP growth of 1.8% in 2024, after 1.3% in 2023, supported by non-oil growth of 2.7% in 2024, driven by greater domestic consumption, robust foreign investment, tourism, and downstream hydrocarbon.

As per Fitch's estimates, the sultanate's hydrocarbon GDP will contract slightly in 2024 under the effect of OPEC+ quotas.

'The authorities expect non-oil growth to pick up to 3.9% in 2025, but Fitch projects only 2.8%, assuming a substantial import content of additional domestic demand generated by the widening of the social benefits and more moderate growth in foreign direct investment, although risks are tilted towards faster growth. Green hydrogen projects remain in the study phase and no final investment decisions have been made,' Fitch said.



Omani banks well-positioned to absorb external shocks: Fitch

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Omani banks' reasonable credit fundamentals and improved operating conditions will enable them to withstand potential external shocks in 2024, according to a recent report by Fitch Ratings.

The report highlighted that the Omani banking sector's continued stability provides banks with headroom to absorb potential moderate shocks arising from heightened geopolitical tensions in the region.

Fitch Ratings said that the high energy prices and the country's diversification strategy to boost the non-oil economy continue to support economic growth in the sultanate.

Omani banks' asset quality, according to Fitch, is expected to improve slightly over 2024 due to favorable operating conditions, and write-offs will likely re-

duce the sector's impaired loans ratio.

'We have reassessed asset quality risks and expect asset quality metrics will improve slightly over 2024 owing to favourable operating conditions, while write-offs will reduce the sector impaired loans ratio,' Fitch noted.

The rating agency acknowledged that the vast majority of restructured loans in Oman, which accounted for 10% of total sector loans at the end of 2023, are in Stage 2 and adequately covered. Fitch does not anticipate any significant migration to Stage 3, despite remaining pressures on the real-estate, construction, and hospitality sectors.

However, the rating agency cautioned that the Omani banks are exposed to event risk due to high single-obligor concentrations, which is largely unavoidable given the narrow nature of the domestic economy.

Moody's affirms Saudi Arabia's rating at 'A1'

Riyadh, Saudi Arabia - The global credit rating agency Moody's has affirmed Saudi Arabia's credit rating at 'A1' with positive outlook.

The rating affirmation is based on Moody's assessment of the government's significant progress that achieved in implementing broad-based reform agenda since 2016 and the track record of macroeconomic and fiscal policy effectiveness that will support the sustainability of the economic diversification.

The agency also expects the continued implementation of large diversification projects in the kingdom will support non-hydrocarbon real GDP growth as they are designed to be modular and commercialised in phases.

Moody's also mentioned that the positive outlook is a reflection of the reforms and investments in various non-oil sectors that will, over time, lead to a material decline in Saudi Arabia's economic and fiscal reliance on hydrocarbons.

On Friday, Moody's also raised Saudi Arabia's local and foreign currency ceilings to Aa1 from Aa2.

'The decision to raise the local and foreign currency ceilings reflects the increased predictability of policies and decision-making processes affecting non-government issuers given institutional improvements,' Moody's said.

It said the three-notch gap between the local-currency ceiling and the A1 sovereign rating balances relatively predictable institutions and external balance of payments stability against the reliance on a single revenue source for the government and non-government issuers.

SPA

Oman joins International Transport Forum

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman, represented by the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, has joined the International Transport Forum (ITF), the only intergovernmental organisation in the world with a global mandate for all transport modes.

Along with Oman, the Dominican Republic and Saudi Arabia also joined the International Transport Forum as the organisation's member countries.

Hosted by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the ITF acts as a think tank for transport policy and organises the global summit of ministers of transport every year.

The ITF's highest statutory body, the Council of Ministers of Transport, voted on Thursday to admit Oman, the Dominican Republic, and Saudi Arabia at the International Transport Forum's annual meeting in Leipzig, Germany.



The ITF annual summit under the theme 'Greening Transport: Keeping Focus in Times of Crisis' held in Leipzig, Germany

Sultanate will seek, through this membership in ITF, to benefit from global expertise in developing policies and employing technology and innovation in all modes of transportation, including green transportation

H E ENG KHAMIS AL SHAMAKHI

More than 1,000 delegates from around the world met in Leipzig from May 22 to May 24 for the annual summit of transport ministers under the theme 'Greening Transport: Keeping

Focus in Times of Crisis'.

Welcoming the new member countries of International Transport Forum, ITF Secretary-General Young Tae Kim said, "The ITF welcomes the Dominican Re-

public, Oman, and Saudi Arabia with open arms as new members. We are proud to have with us a seventh nation from Latin America and the Caribbean, and our second and third members

from the Middle East."

He added, "Oman's Vision 2040 depends on the provision of advanced transportation, communications, and information technology infrastructure that is safe and integrated with urban and economic development. In particular, Oman's Ministry of Transport has initiated plans for zero-emission light and heavy-duty vehicles. ITF's member countries look forward to assisting Oman in any way that

they can. I am sure that Oman will find much inspiration in the experiences of other countries for further improving its transport systems."

In a statement to Oman News Agency, H E Eng Khamis bin Mohammed al Shamakhhi, Undersecretary for Transport at the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, said that Oman's membership in ITF comes within the ministry's efforts to make the most of the sultanate's strategic position in strengthening the transportation system at the local and global levels.

"The ministry's endeavor to obtain such membership also reflects Oman's commitment to international cooperation towards finding successful solutions to the various challenges facing the transport and logistics sector. The ministry will seek, through this membership, to benefit from global expertise in developing policies and employing technology and innovation in all modes of transportation, including green transportation," he said.

OQ to showcase innovations in energy sector at COMEX

Muscat - OQ, the sultanate's integrated global energy group, will showcase its digital transformation journey at the 33rd COMEX Global Technology Show, taking place from May 27-30, 2024.

As a key player in digital transformation, OQ will highlight its 2023 achievements, showcasing innovations that enhance competitiveness and sustainability through the utilisation of Fourth Industrial Revolution technologies. Key presentations will include advanced digital solutions across the entire energy value chain and plans for inte-

grating cutting-edge technologies into its facilities.

These efforts align with OQ's commitment to driving digital transformation in the energy sector and supporting the acceleration of e-government initiatives as part of Oman Vision 2040. OQ is committed to adopting advanced technologies, forming partnerships with leading global institutions, localising these technologies in Oman, and fostering the growth of SMEs and national technical capabilities.

Maryam bint Ahmed al Shaibani, Vice President of Inte-



grated Digital Solutions at OQ, outlined OQ's digital transformation strategy, which aims to drive growth through digital innovation and enhanced competitiveness while achieving

sustainability through advanced technologies.

She highlighted significant achievements in 2023, including the establishment of the 'Digital Factory', an initiative that aims

to store data within Oman, create a cloud-based infrastructure, and develop a digital roadmap for each subsidiary to integrate modern technologies into their operations, keeping pace with rapid technological advancements.

She also noted the implementation of AI, robotic process automation (RPA), and AI-based health, safety, security, and environment (HSSE) monitoring.

Looking ahead to 2024, OQ plans to expand its AI video analytics projects, enhance predictive maintenance solutions, and

implement more generative AI applications in legal and operational areas. OQ has launched the SAP Concur platform, becoming the first entity in Oman to enable employees to complete logistical procedures via electronic platforms and mobile phones for travel and expense management.

Additionally, OQ plans to sign a service contract for Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) or drone-based services that utilise AI and image analysis to mitigate HSSE risks, increase flexibility and productivity, and address challenges in digital transformation.

Global market rally runs out of steam

Tina Teng

Risk-off is currently dominating global market sentiment, leading equities to lose their upward momentum. Concurrently, metal prices, including gold, silver, and copper, have sharply retreated from their all-time highs. The US dollar has strengthened, putting pressure on other major currencies.

This development follows the release of the Federal Reserve's meeting minutes, which revealed a lack of confidence among board members regarding the potential for lowering interest rates.

Europe

European stock markets closed lower for the last week as sentiment soured amid uncertainties about central banks' interest rate trajectories.

The United Kingdom reported a Consumer Price Index (CPI) reading that was hotter than expected, raising concerns about whether the Bank of England will commence a rate cut in June.

Over the five-day trading period, the London FTSE 100 fell by 1.18%, the Euro Stoxx 600 was down 0.2%, the DAX slipped 0.28%, and the CAC 40 slid 1.05%.

Energy and luxury goods stocks dragged on the broad market, while the tech sector and drugmaker stocks outperformed.



Major global stock indices recorded negative weekly close as concerns about 'higher-for-longer' interest rates weigh on market sentiments

This sector rotation mirrored Wall Street's performance: sliding crude prices pressured oil producers' stocks, while Nvidia's strong quarterly earnings buoyed the tech sector.

On a weekly basis, Shell Plc's shares fell by 2.69%, BP's stocks slid 1.4%, and Totalenergies' shares declined by 2.75%. Luxury consumer stocks such as LVMH and Hermes also slumped, both

experiencing drops of more than 4%. Conversely, Novo Nordisk's stocks rose by 2.8%, AstraZeneca shares were up by 1.8%, SAP SE's shares climbed by 1.84%, and ASML's stocks advanced by 1.44%

Mining stocks saw mixed performance, with Anglo-American's shares slightly higher, up by 0.28% for the week, following the British miner's rejection of BHP's takeover offer for the third

time.

On the economic front, the flash manufacturing and services PMIs presented a mixed picture in major European countries in May. Germany exhibited further improvement in its economic activities, while the services sector in France reverted to contraction after a one-month expansion in April. However, the overall Eurozone manufacturing PMI remained in contraction for the

15th consecutive month in April.

In currencies, both the Euro and the British pound weakened against the US dollar. This is attributed to a more hawkish stance held by the Federal Reserve compared to the European Central Bank (ECB) and the Bank of England (BoE). Markets are pricing in the possibility of a sooner rate cut by the two European central banks than by the Fed.

Wall Street

The Wall Street rally has also lost steam due to Fed officials' reluctance to consider rate cuts, despite Nvidia's strong quarterly earnings.

Over the past five trading days, the Dow Jones Industrial Average slumped by 2.35%, the S&P 500 was down by 0.67%, and the Nasdaq rose by 0.3%.

At a sector level, technology was the sole sector that was higher over a five-day trading period, up by 0.4%. Real estate and energy were the biggest laggards, down by 3.49% and 3%, respectively, due to growing concerns about a "higher-for-longer" interest rate environment.

The magnificent seven stocks showed a mixed performance for the week, with Microsoft's shares up by 1.43% and Nvidia's stocks jumping by 10%. However, shares of Apple, Alphabet, Amazon, Meta Platforms, and Tesla were all down, ranging between 0.2% and 1%.

The AI powerhouse, Nvidia, surpassed earnings expectations with annual revenue surging an impressive 262% in its first quarter of fiscal year 2025. Following this stellar performance, the chipmaker's shares soared by more than 9% on Thursday, surpassing the \$1,000 mark for the first time.

Asian markets

Most Asian indices closed in the red for last week, with signs of a renewed trade war between the US and China sparking risk-off sentiment and sending Chinese stock markets lower.

The Chinese benchmark index, the Hang Seng Index, slumped by 3.5%, and the Japanese index, the Nikkei 225, is down 0.35% over the past five trading days.

The Australian stock market benchmark, the ASX 200, fell by 0.48% during the last five trading days, with the consumer discretionary and telecommunications services sectors leading losses, both down by more than 3%.

However, the information technology sector outperformed, rising by 3.3%. BHP's shares slumped nearly 3% on Thursday following Anglo-American's rejection of the takeover offer. Despite this, the world's largest miner's stocks remained flat for the week.

(Source: Euronews.com)

Oil prices drop on Fed rate cut uncertainty

London, UK - Oil prices drifted lower on Friday amid ongoing concerns about the timing of the first interest rate cut by the US Federal Reserve, the lower demand outlook in the US, and market players' cautious steps ahead of the meeting of the OPEC and its allies, known as OPEC+.

International benchmark Brent crude traded at \$81.13 per barrel on Friday, a fall of 0.28% from the closing price of \$81.36 per barrel in the previous trading session. The US benchmark West Texas Intermediate (WTI) traded at \$76.61 per barrel at the same time, a 0.34% decrease from the previous session that closed at \$76.87 per barrel.

According to analysts, positive economic data flow from the US increased the likelihood that the Fed would keep the policy rate high for longer, with expectations that it would not lower interest rates until November.

Atlanta Fed President Raphael Bostic stated they might need to be a little more patient and confident about the path of inflation to the 2% target before changing the policy rate.



"Given how high inflation was, it wouldn't be a surprise for inflation to take several years to get down to our 2% target," Bostic said.

The likelihood of an interest rate cut in the near future decreased, fueling demand concerns and suppressing oil prices. This is because generally, high interest rates boost the value of the US dollar, making oil more expensive for holders of other currencies.

Meanwhile, Energy Information Administration (EIA) data released late Wednesday portrayed a lower demand outlook than expected in the world's

largest oil-consuming country, supporting further price decreases.

The EIA announced that US commercial crude oil inventories increased by 1.8mn barrels during the week ending May 17. The agency indicated an inventory build-up that significantly outpaced market projections, indicating a decline in US demand of almost 2.4mn barrels.

Nevertheless, expectations that the OPEC+ group will decide to continue with voluntary crude oil supply cuts at the June 1 meeting continue to put upward pressure on oil prices.

Anadolu Agency

Nvidia earnings top expectations as chip sales soar amid booming AI demand

Naomi Buchanan

Nvidia reported fiscal first-quarter earnings Wednesday that beat analysts' expectations and surpassed the increasingly high bar set by investors, as data center sales surged to record high amid booming demand for artificial intelligence (AI).

Nvidia reported record revenue of \$26.04bn for the fiscal first quarter, more than triple what it was in the year-ago period, and above analysts' expectations, according to estimates compiled by Visible Alpha. Sales in Nvidia's data center segment surged to \$22.6bn, quintupling year-over-year and breaking the record set the previous quarter.

Nvidia's net income came in at \$14.88bn or \$5.98 per share, versus \$2.04bn or 82 cents per share reported in the same period a year prior, also beating analysts' projections.

Along with its earnings beat, Nvidia announced a 10-for-1 forward stock split, meaning shareholders will get ten shares for each one they held before the split. The chipmaker said the stock split could help make the stock more accessible to employees and investors.



Each shareholder as of market close on Thursday, June 6, will receive nine additional shares of Nvidia's common stock, to be distributed after market close the following day on Friday, June 7. The stock is expected to begin trading on a split-adjusted basis at market open on Monday, June 10.

The company also announced it will increase its quarterly cash dividend to 10 cents per share from 4 cents a share.

"The next industrial revolution has begun - companies and countries are partnering with

Nvidia to shift the trillion-dollar traditional data centers to accelerated computing and build a new type of data center - AI factories - to produce a new commodity: artificial intelligence," Nvidia CEO Jensen Huang said in the earnings release.

Shares of Nvidia soared after the AI chipmaker reported yet another quarter of staggering revenue and earnings growth amid booming demand for its semiconductors.

Thursday's gains tacked more than \$221bn onto Nvidia's market capitalisation, in the second-

largest daily gain on record. The only instance of a bigger one-day jump was when Nvidia shares surged more than 16% after its fiscal fourth-quarter earnings report in February, adding \$272bn to its market value.

Shares rose again Friday, climbing 2.6% to \$1,064.69 and bringing Nvidia's market cap gain this week to more than \$338bn. That's larger than the gross domestic products (GDPs) of most countries, the market values of most companies, and the budgets of most US agencies.

(Source: Investopedia)

Germany's economy expands slightly in first quarter of 2024

Indrabati Lahiri

The final estimate for Germany's quarter-on-quarter gross domestic product (GDP) report for Q1 2024 came out on Friday morning. It revealed that GDP grew by 0.2%, according to the Federal Statistical Office. This was a surge from the previous quarter's -0.5% and in line with analyst estimates.

This increase was mainly due to a jump in gross fixed capital formation, which rose to 1.2% in the first quarter of the year, from -2.1% in Q4 2023, primarily driven by advances in construction investment.

Year-on-year GDP came in at -0.2% in Q1 2024, which was the same as the previous quarter, as well as in line with market expectations.

Improving foreign trade also contributed significantly to this number, with exports growing 1.1% in Q1 2024, up from -0.9% in the previous quarter, and imports advancing 0.6%, a rise from the -1.6% seen in the last quarter.

German inflation came in at 2.2% in April 2024, which was the same number as March, and down from February's 2.5%. This could be an encouraging sign for Europe's biggest economy, as in-



Germany's improving foreign trade contributed significantly to Q1 GDP growth

flation is gradually coming back towards the European Central Bank (ECB)'s 2% target.

Ruth Brand, president of the Federal Statistical Office, said in a statement, "The rate of inflation has been below three percent since the start of the year. Energy and food prices in particular, have had a dampening effect on the inflation rate since January 2024.

"However, core inflation - measured as the change in the consumer price index excluding food and energy - has been higher than overall inflation since the beginning of the year."

Despite inflation inching down however, consumer spending has

not quite picked up as expected, with private consumption and government spending both dropping 0.4%.

This is likely to be due to most consumers still being cautious about the lingering effects of higher interest rates and economic uncertainty, which have plagued Germany for several months.

In recent months, the German economy has faced several challenges such as a worsening property crisis, airline strikes and a lacklustre economy. However, this latest GDP report may signal a turning point.

(Source: Euronews.com)

Ooredoo takes part in first International IEEE Conference

Ooredoo participated as Telecom Partner in the International Conference on Innovative Engineering Sciences & Technological Research (ICIESTR 2024). Dedicated to the latest advances and trends in engineering and technology, ICIESTR 2024 was the first IEEE international conference organised by the University of Technology and Applied Sciences (UTAS) in Oman, a press release said.

IEEE stands for the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers, the world's largest technical professional organisation dedicated to advancing technology for the benefit of humanity. As such, ICIESTR 2024 brought together practitioners in engineering and technology from industry, academia, and the government, providing them with a platform to share their insights and experience. Topics included emerging technologies, sustainable engineering, artificial intelligence, robotics, renewable energy, data science, and the Internet of Things.

Dr Ahmed Abdullah al Abri, chief Technology and Innovation officer at Ooredoo Oman, said, "Ooredoo continues to transform sustainably into a technology-focused and innovative company well-positioned to play an essential role in shaping the future of communication



and innovation. During this event, our team was able to exchange insights, ideas, and best practices in innovation, digital transformation, and customer experience with other stakeholders. These endeavours support us in adapting to the evolving digital landscape and the ever-changing needs of society-at-large."



Bank Muscat, Meethaq to showcase digital prowess at COMEX 2024

Bank Muscat and Meethaq Islamic Banking have announced their participation in the 33rd edition of COMEX (May 27 - 30) at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre.

This year's edition will be attended by more than 100 local and international organisations, government entities and corporates. Bank Muscat and Meethaq will showcase the wide selection of services and digital banking solutions developed to enhance customer experience, a press release said.

The 4-day long exhibition is an opportunity to introduce customers to the role the bank takes to enhance digital services, and demonstrate its state-of-the-arts products, financial facilities and digital services offered through Internet Banking and Mobile Banking. Customers will be able to visit the team present at the exhibition and get to know more details about the digital banking services offered and

the recent solutions added to provide a seamless banking experience and a more facilitated payment process.

Bank Muscat has been witnessing a remarkable rise in e-channels usage over the past couple of years. Today, customers are using various features like real-time bill payments for utilities in Oman, fund transfers within the bank and in Oman, fund transfers across the world via the SWIFT network; speed transfers to a number of countries including Bangladesh, Egypt, India, Pakistan, the Philippines and Sri Lanka; Zakat calculator and charity payments.

Bill payment facility is available for a variety of utility services such as electricity, water, telecom, school payments etc. Internet banking and the mBanking app allows customers to disable/enable their debit card for international usage adding an extra layer of security.



DGHS-Muscat organises Health Education Forum

The Directorate General of Health Services of Muscat Governorate (DGHS-Muscat), represented by the Health Education Department at the Primary Health Care Department and Community Initiatives, organised the Health Education Forum titled 'Promoting Mental Health' at the Holiday Inn Hotel on Wednesday.

The event was held under the auspices of Sayida Ma'ani Abdullah al Busaidi, the director general of Family Development at the Ministry of Social Development, in the presence of Dr Thamra Saeed al Ghaferi, DGHS-Muscat Director General, along with a number of officials from the directorate and its affiliated health institutions, a press release said.

Approximately 50 health education professionals from various health institutions across the sultanate participated in the forum.

Dr Ghaferi emphasised the important and complementary role of health education in the services provided at primary healthcare centres. She highlighted the dissemination of health awareness, and patient education, and encouraging them to adopt optimal health behaviours.



Aida Saleh al Rahbi, DGHS-Muscat head of the Health Education and Community Initiatives Section, pointed out that the forum aims to qualify healthcare professionals to enhance mental health in primary healthcare, and to raise awareness among primary healthcare workers about the importance of mental health and psychological education.

Additionally, it aims to provide healthcare workers with the skill of psychological first aid, familiarise them with the most common mental disorders in primary healthcare, and define the role of health educators.

Bar Zaman Basketball Championship kicks-off

The Barzman Basketball Championship for Indian schools, organised by the Ministry of Education, represented by the Omani School Sports Association, in cooperation with the International Food and Beverage Company (Bar Zaman brand), kicked off earlier last week, with the participation of six teams from Indian schools in Muscat Governorate.

The championship continues until May 21 targeting sixty students under the age of 17 in the sub-hall of the Sultan Qaboos Complex in Bausher, a press release said.

The tournament started with six matches, in the first of which, the Indian School Muscat won over Indian School Ghubrah by 16 goals to 10. In the second match, the Indian School Darsait won over Indian School Wadi Kabir by 26 goals to 17. In the third match, the Indian School Ghubrah won over Indian School Maabelah by 26 goals to 17. In the fourth match, Indian School Darsait won over Indian School Bowsher by 38 goals to 11. In the



fifth match, Indian School Muscat won over Indian School Maabelah by 27 goals to 15, and in the sixth match, Indian School Wadi Kabir won over Indian School Bowsher by 24 goals to 13.

Three matches were held on Thursday, the first match of which was between two teams of Indian School Muscat and Indian School Wadi Kabir. In the second match, Indian School Ghubrah met Indian School Darsait. The third match was between the two losing teams from the two matches.

MoE launches Electronic Programme for Qualifying Employees at TDL

The Ministry of Education (MoE) has launched the Electronic Programme for Qualifying Employees, developed by the Smart Applications Development Department in cooperation with the Qualification and Training Department.

The launch was held under the patronage of Saif al Kharousi, director-general of the Directorate-General of Administrative Affairs. The ceremony took place at the Technical Development Laboratory (TDL) at the Ministry's General Diwan, a press release said.

The electronic programme was designed and implemented by specialists in the ministry with the aim of maintaining databases of ministry employees who have



obtained approval to study an academic degree and benefiting from this data in making strategic decisions.

The programme also aims at following up on employees' requirements during the study period and sending notifications to them from the beginning of the study until completion, unifying the databases and tasks of the qualification departments and the learner follow-up department.

OOC organises first aid course

Oman Olympic Committee (OOC), represented by Oman Sports Medicine Committee, organised a first aid and resuscitation course at the headquarters of Oman Olympic Academy during May 20-22 within the framework of enhancing health and sports awareness and developing the skills of sports cadres in dealing with emergency cases.

The course concluded under the patronage of H E Dr Fatima Mohammed al Ajmi, CEO of the Oman Medical Specialisation Board, in the presence of Khalid Mohammed al Zubair, OOC chairman, Taha al Kishri, OOC secretary general, and a number of members of the Board of Directors, a press release said.

The closing ceremony included the distribution of cardiopulmonary resuscitation devices (AED) to sports federations and a number of sports committees as an initiative of Oman Sports Medicine Committee to enhance their capabilities in dealing with emergency cases and providing immediate first aid at training and match sites to ensure the safety of athletes.

The course was presented by Ahmed Bouzid, a first aid trainer at the Gate for Training Services, and a number of physical therapists and technical staff in sports federations and committees participated in it.

It aimed to raise awareness of the importance of first aid and cardiopulmonary resuscitation, provide participants with the knowledge and skills necessary to deal with sports injuries and emergency situations, and enhance their readiness.

WE ARE HIRING

Software Developer - DOT NET
Minimum 3 years of Experience required.
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Lincoln Nautilus elevates driving

The Nautilus is a wonderful addition to Lincoln's mid-size luxury crossover line-up. With stark sculpted exteriors, premium interior fittings, spaciousness and world-class technology adaptations, the Nautilus redefines the luxury experience.

Owning a Lincoln is considered a premium-power experience. The 5-seater Nautilus is powered by a turbocharged 2ltr engine that produces 250hp and 380 Nm torque and mated with an 8-speed automatic transmission. The engine is exceedingly fuel-efficient and delivers optimal power output, a press release said.

Lincoln has set a benchmark for providing premium luxury driving experiences based on high comfort levels, spaciousness, utility, technological and safety aspects. Consequently, Lincoln was named the best premium brand in the Vehicle Satisfaction Awards, which are conducted by Auto Pacific, a future-oriented automotive marketing research and product consulting business. Lincoln won the accolade by qualifying in 49 different characteristics, ranging from interior, comfort, styling to fuel economy, speed performance and the owning experience.



Experience first-class family travel experience in the Nautilus and create joyous unforgettable memories. Cruise pathways while indulging in the outside world through the panoramic vista sunroof. Fitted with sunshades that keep the outside temperature at bay, the sunroof is an ideal window to view the outside world.

Enjoy a stress-free drive with the 48" LCD driver information display screen seamlessly blended into the instrument panel.



Sohar International bags Oman's Best Bank award

Sohar International proudly announces its triumph at the prestigious Euromoney Awards, being recognised with the title of 'Oman's Best Bank'. This esteemed award underscores the bank's exceptional performance in the banking sector.

The awards ceremony, held at the Waldorf Astoria in Dubai, brought together industry luminaries and top-tier financial institutions. Mazin Mahmood al Raisi, chief marketing officer at Sohar International, received the award on behalf of the bank, a press release said.

The evaluation process undertaken by Euromoney's panel of judges assessed Sohar International across various parameters, including its leading market position, product diversity, financial performance, asset quality, customer satisfaction, CSR initiatives, and environmental, social, governance (ESG) practices.

ISF Annual Science Fiesta concludes at NUST

The two-day Annual Science Fiesta 2024 organised by the Indian Science Forum saw the participation of hundreds of students held at the campus of National University for Science and Technology (NUST), AI Hail.

The Rolling Trophy for the overall performance this year went to the Indian School Bowsher, a press release said.

One of the main features of the annual event is Sastrapri-bha and this year it saw the participation of close to 3000 students from 21 Indian schools across the Sultanate of Oman.

The Chairman of ISF, Dr J Retnakumar, said, "Every year the



Annual Science Fiesta comes up with topics that is important to the society. This year, we had Environmental Stewardship as the main theme for all our competi-

tions We are extremely happy to see the enthusiastic participation by the students and support of the schools and teachers. The message conveyed in this sci-

ence fiesta 2024 is that everyone should become an environment steward for sustainability."

The Indian Science Forum, a pioneering organisation dedi-

cated to promoting scientific knowledge and fostering talent among youth, every year invites distinguished keynote speakers. This year, the chief guest was Dr

Muralee Thumarukudy, Director of the G20 Global Land Initiative Coordination Office of United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD).



SEZAD organises cleaning campaign at Antut beach

Under the theme 'Clean Beaches for a Healthy Environment', the management of the Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD) organised a cleanup campaign for Antut beach in which many local companies and organisations as well as local residents took part.

The campaign attempts to demonstrate the degree of envi-

ronmental harm and impacts produced by disposing of trash on land or in the sea, as well as to advocate and increase awareness of environmental issues, a press release said.

A number of organisations, including Duqm Hospital, A'soud Global School, Marafiq - CUC, Beah Company, and Al Nahda Company, contributed to this

campaign in an effort to inspire collaboration and partnership between the public and private sectors.

Remarkably, many volunteers participated in a three-hour long campaign organised by the Department of Environmental Sustainability and Partnership and Development Section to clean the area's beaches.

Aster Hospital launches Advanced Stroke Unit

Aster Royal Al Raffah Hospital, part of the GCC's leading integrated healthcare provider Aster DM Healthcare FZC, announced the launch of the Aster Stroke Unit and Aster Urgent Care 24x7 programme.

Located in Ghubra, Muscat, the hospital is set to significantly enhance its regional healthcare services with these new facilities, a press release said.

The inauguration ceremony was graced by H E Dr Ahmed Salim Saif al Mandhari, under-secretary of the Ministry of Health for Planning and Health Organisation, who officially opened the new units in the presence of esteemed guests including Dr Sherbaz Bichu, Group CEO, Aster Hospitals and Clinics, UAE, Oman and Bahrain, Shailesh Guntu, CEO of Aster Hospitals & Clinics, Oman, and Dr Ali al Balushi, Vascular Neurologist and Neuro-endovascular Surgeon, Aster Royal Al Raffah Hospital, Oman.



Aster Royal Al Raffah Hospital is now the first private hospital in the region to receive approval from the Ministry of Health for operating a dedicated Stroke Unit. This unit will be spearheaded by the renowned stroke specialist, Dr Ali al Balushi, vascular neurologist and neuro-endovascular surgeon. The unit,

based on the principles of 'BE FAST'—Balance, Eyes, Face, Arms, Speech, Time—occupies the third floor of the hospital and is equipped with cutting-edge infrastructure and 24x7 availability of stroke care specialists, ensuring a systematic and efficient treatment pathway for all stroke patients.

The newly launched Aster Urgent Care 24x7 programme is dedicated to providing efficient emergency care, ensuring that patients receive urgent attention necessary to maximise their chances of a swift and successful recovery. This unit is equipped to handle a broad spectrum of emergencies.

ISAM celebrates new era of student leadership

On May 22, Indian School Al Maabala hosted a resplendent Investiture Ceremony at the school's multi-purpose hall with Omar Sulaiman al Bahri, general manager, Corporate Techno Plastic Industry, as its chief guest, a press release said.

Others present on the occasion included Ahmed al Hajri, general manager, International Food and Beverages Company, Barzman, who offered his felicitations and congratulated the ceremonial heads, council members and prefects.

A touch of solemnity accompanied the traditional lighting of the lamp and felicitations, setting



the stage for the formal proceedings. Principal of ISAM, Parveen Kumar addressed the gathering and emphasised ISAM's commitment to nurturing young

leaders. The highlight of the ceremony was the induction of student representatives across all grades. Notably, Asish Manu Mathew

and Suveeksha Sanjay Shanbhag assumed the roles of Head Boy and Head Girl, respectively, embodying the ideals of integrity, resilience, and service that ISAM

seeks to cultivate. Twenty two ceremonial heads and 8 captains and vice captains from the senior section, 13 ceremonial heads and 8 captains and vice captains, 16 student ministers, 32 class prefects and 32 members of student parliament from the middle section, and 4 ceremonial heads and 9 blossoms from the primary section took the oath from the principal.

Bahri urged students to embrace challenges with courage and conviction, while Syed Salman, vice chairman of the Board of Directors, underscored the importance of leadership in shaping the future.

Mall of Muscat offers unique experiences

Mall of Muscat, a leading leisure and entertainment destination, has welcomed the arrival of three exciting new outlets of Taiba Pharmacy and Torino, each bringing a unique offering to the mall's diverse range of services and products.

Taiba Pharmacy, a trailblazer in the Omani pharmaceutical industry, is set to open its doors, bringing with it a legacy of high-quality services and unparalleled customer care. As the leading pharmacy chain in Oman, Taiba Pharmacy continues its mission to be the top choice among consumers in the region, a press re-

lease said.

With its rich history dating back to 1980, Taiba Pharmacy is dedicated to enhancing the Omani pharmaceutical industry and ensuring customer satisfaction through innovative solutions and comprehensive care. Established in 2014, Torino is expanding its footprint with a new outlet in Mall of Muscat.

Known for its stylish and high-quality shoes, bags, and accessories for women, Torino prides itself on competitive prices, exceptional customer service, and a keen eye for the latest trends

Future EU leaders need to decide on Turkey’s application: Borrell

Rome, Italy - The European Union foreign policy chief said on Friday that the bloc’s future leaders will need to decide on Turkey’s application to become a member, as the current stalemate is no longer tenable.

“EU Council leaders will have to say what kind of relationship we want to have (with Turkey),” Josep Borrell said at a conference on European affairs in Florence that was organised by the European University Institute.

He said that Turkey feels that the bloc is no longer interested in having it as a member after years in which the accession process has stalled. “That’s what they believe. And they are looking for a decision on our side.”

“We cannot continue ... like this, because more and more, Turkey is taking another direction not converging with our values,” he said.

Borrell started his address at the conference with opening remarks about the current challenges affecting the EU, but he was almost immediately interrupted by three pro-Palestinian



EU Council leaders will have to say what kind of relationship we want to have (with Turkey). We cannot continue ... like this, because more and more, Turkey is taking another direction

JOSEP BORRELL



activists, who read a statement in English, while holding a Palestinian flag and shouted ‘Shame!’ several times.

“I understand you’re perfectly,” said the EU foreign policy chief, as he let them speak.

Referring to the recent decision by Spain, Norway and Ireland to recognise a Palestinian state, he said such a decision does not mean ‘supporting Hamas’. “I really have to contest the positions expressed by the Israeli government,” he said, adding the recognition is a gesture of support to the Palestinian Authority, not Hamas, which the EU considers a terror group.

He said Israel has the right to defend itself but it has to happen in accordance with international law. “And if it doesn’t happen, what to do?” he said.

So far, the EU has not found a common position on the matter and Borrell said he hopes at Monday’s EU foreign ministers’ council meeting in Brussels the bloc will be able to make progress toward a consensus.

Anadolu Agency



Algeria, France sign agreement on archives

Algiers, Algeria - Algeria and France signed an agreement concerning the memory and retrieval of Algerian archives from the period of French colonisation (1830 - 1962), according to media reports

The Algerian History and Memory Committee, represented by its chairman, historian Lahcen Zeghidi, signed the agreement and joint memorandum with the French Truth and Memory Commission, represented by historian Benjamin Stora, Algeria International Radio reported.

“The signing ceremony, which took place in the capital, Algiers, followed the conclusion of the fifth meeting of the Algeria-France Joint Commission on History and Memory,” the radio reported.

The agreement aims to ‘retrieve the Algerian archives from the colonial era and possessions of immeasurable historical value to the hearts of the Algerian people’.

The fifth meeting of the joint Commission began last Monday in Algiers, which Zeghidi previously described as ‘procedural and practical’ without revealing details.

No additional information was provided about the content of the agreement.

Algeria insists on addressing four main issues with France: complete retrieval of the archives, return of the skulls and remains of resistance fighters, compensation for victims of nuclear tests and the cleanup of lands contaminated by nuclear radiation, and the disclosure of the fate of the missing.

The formation of the joint commission, composed exclusively of historians, came during French President Emmanuel Macron’s visit to Algeria in August 2022, aiming for a ‘fair treatment’ of the memory issue.

Algeria links the improvement of relations with France to progress on the memory file.

The visit of Algerian Presi-

dent Abdelmadjid Tebboune to Paris has been postponed several times because of the issue, specifically the French authorities’ refusal to hand over Emir Abdelkader’s sword, his burnous (traditional cloak), and some of his belongings, which have been held at the Château d’Amboise where he was imprisoned from 1848 to 1852.

Abdelkader was an Algerian political leader and military commander who opposed French colonisation in the 1840s. More than 140 years after his death, he remains at the centre of the memory and history debate between France and Algeria.

In November, the two countries agreed to the return of two million digitised documents related to the colonial period and looted possessions, as well as 29 rolls and 13 registers from the remaining Ottoman-era archives, according to Algerian Radio.

Anadolu Agency

US announces \$275mn fresh package for Ukraine

Washington, D.C., US - The United States on Friday announced new security assistance worth US\$275mn for Ukraine, including ammunitions, artillery rounds, and precision aerial munitions. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken reiterated US support for Ukraine amid its ongoing war with Russia.

Blinken said that the new security assistance of Ukraine is part of the US efforts to help Kyiv repel Moscow’s assault near Kharkiv.

In a post on X, Blinken stated: “Today, the United States is announcing a US\$275mn drawdown of weapons and equipment to support the brave people of Ukraine. We will continue to stand with Ukraine in its fight against Russia’s aggression.”

In a statement, Blinken stated: “The United States is announcing today a significant new drawdown of weapons and equipment for Ukraine to support the brave Ukrainian people as they defend their country against Russia’s aggression.”

“This US\$275mn package, which is part of our efforts to help Ukraine repel Russia’s assault near Kharkiv, contains urgently needed capabilities including ammunition for HIMARS, 155mm and 105mm artillery rounds, tube-launched, optically-tracked, wire-guided missiles, Javelin and AT-4 anti-armour systems, precision aerial munitions, small arms and additional rounds of small arms ammunition and grenades, demolitions munitions, anti-armour mines, tactical vehicles, body armour, Chemical, Biological, Radiological, nuclear protective equipment, and spare parts, maintenance, and other



US Secretary of State Antony Blinken

The US is announcing today a new drawdown of weapons and equipment for Ukraine to support the brave Ukrainian people as they defend their country

ANTONY BLINKEN



equipment,” he added.

In the statement, Blinken noted that it is the fifth security assistance package authorised by US President Joe Biden since signing the national security supplemental and the third package using Presidential Drawdown Authorities.

Antony Blinken stated that the assistance from previous packages has already made it to the front lines and the new military assistance will be moved as quickly as possible so that the Ukrainian military can use it to defend their territory and protect the people of Ukraine.

Blinken stated: “As President Biden has made clear, the United States and the international coalition we have assembled will continue to stand with Ukraine in its defence of its freedom.”

Notably, the US has offered support to Ukraine since the war between Moscow and Kyiv started in 2022. Earlier this month, Antony Blinken arrived on a surprise visit to Ukraine to foster ties and reaffirm American support to Kyiv amid its ongoing war with Russia.

Upon his arrival in Ukraine, Blinken in a post on X stated: “I returned to Kyiv today to demonstrate our unwavering support for Ukraine as they defend their freedom against Russian aggression.” He made this unannounced visit for the fourth time since the war between Moscow and Kyiv started in February 2022.

On Friday, Russia launched a wave of missile strikes in several locations of Ukraine’s Kharkiv, including a printing house, killing seven people and injuring 23 others. Seven people who were killed, including at least five women, were civilians working for the Factor-Druk printing company in Kharkiv, according to the regional governor, Oleh Syniehubov, CNN reported.

As many as 16 people were injured at the printing house, and another seven were injured at another location.

ANI

What’s behind assassination attempt on Slovak PM?

Istanbul, Turkey - The coming to power in Slovakia of Prime Minister Robert Fico and President Peter Pellegrini, associated with more pro-Russian positions, was certainly an unwelcome development for Brussels, but not unexpected. Last week’s assassination attempt on Prime Minister Fico, on the other hand, shocked all on the old continent and beyond. Indeed, Europe has not experienced such acts of violence against high-profile elected officials in more than two decades. The last recorded cases were the assassination attempt on French President Jacques Chirac in 2002, the assassination of Serbian Prime Minister Zoran Djindjic in March 2003, and that of Swedish Foreign Minister Anna Lindh six months later.

It is not helpful to play the blame game at this point, but the shooting of Prime Minister Fico seems to be symptomatic of the extreme polarisation, inflamma-



Slovakia’s Prime Minister Robert Fico

tory rhetoric, hate speech, and illiberal values that have engulfed European countries and the United States over the past decade, all problems that populist politicians like Fico have cultivated and fuelled, to begin with.

Robert Fico, a former communist party member, is the nominal leader of a left-wing party

known as Direction-Social Democracy (Smer-SD), but has moved rather radically to the right on immigration, minority and cultural issues, reflecting the blurring of boundaries between left and right-wing populism in the charged political environment in Europe. He indeed stood behind the ultranationalist Slovak

politician Milan Mazurek when the latter famously likened the country’s Roma minority to ‘animals in the zoo’ and accused Slovakia’s outgoing President Zuzana Caputova of being an ‘agent’ of America and of George Soros.

In the same vein, Lubos Blaha, a senior politician from Fico’s party, lambasted the West in an unmistakably Putinist language in one of the parliamentary campaign speeches last October: “Fascism is coming back in rainbow colours. The fascists now wear pink colours. Today we have liberal fascism, and we must defeat it. Fascism always comes from the West. And liberty and peace come from the East.”

Upon assuming power last October, Fico also delivered one of his main campaign promises by ending Slovak military donations to Ukraine, but he did not interfere with Western military deliveries to Ukraine via Slovakia, reflecting his pragmatism.

In short, the assassination attempt is likely to add fuel to an already extremely polarised society and will likely be instrumentalised by Prime Minister Fico’s ruling coalition to double down on its Eurosceptic and illiberal course of action. On the other hand, the fact that the shooting occurred just 3 weeks before the European Parliament elections will likely have broader repercussions by strengthening populist forces of various strands across the European Union (EU), all developments set to be welcomed by the Kremlin.

The attempt on Prime Minister Fico’s life was unanimously condemned by Balkan leaders. Beyond geographical proximity, shared Slavic roots, and a common Habsburg legacy, developments in Slovakia have a direct impact on the Balkans since Slovakia is one of the four NATO members, along with Greece, Romania, and Spain.

Anadolu Agency

Death toll from PNG landslide climbs to 300

Ankara, Turkey - The death toll from a massive landslide in a remote region of northern Papua New Guinea has risen to more than 300, a lawmaker said on Saturday.

While confirming the latest death toll, Aimos Akem, a member of parliament from Enga province, said the landslide that hit the Maip-Mulitaka region in the early hours of Friday also ripped out 1,182 houses in the Rural LLG area, local daily PNG Post Courier reported.

According to ground reports, he said the landslide buried more than 300 people and devastated six villages in the region.

The landslide destroyed Yambili village in Enga province, which is over 600km (372 miles) northwest of the capital Port Moresby.

Mark Ipuia, a local leader and former lawmaker from the region, said Yambili village is covered in large piles of rocks caused by the deadly landslide that occurred about 3am (1700GMT Thursday).

The local authorities have not confirmed the death toll yet.

The landslide has also blocked a road leading to the town of Porgera, which is home to a large gold mine.

The US and Australia have separately offered assistance to the Papua New Guinea government.

President Joe Biden and his wife expressed their concern for the affected people in a message. Australian Foreign Minister Penny Wong said Canberra is ready to assist the government.

Anadolu Agency

20 Palestinians killed in Israeli attacks

Several others were also injured on Saturday as a result of continuous bombardment north of Gaza City

Gaza City, Palestine - At least 20 Palestinians were killed and many others injured on Saturday in a series of Israeli attacks on the Gaza Strip.

The Palestinian official news agency Wafa reported that '20 citizens, including children and women, were killed and others were injured on Saturday as a result of the continuous bombardment by occupation aircraft north of Gaza City'.

Medical sources reported that at least 10 Palestinians were killed and several others were injured in an Israeli attack on a house next to shelter centres in Beit Hanoun.

Another 10 Palestinians were killed and 17 others were injured in an Israeli attack targeting the Al-Nazla School in the Al-Saftawi area, the sources added.

Israel continues its brutal offensive on Gaza despite a UN Security Council resolution demanding an immediate ceasefire. Over 35,850 Palestinians have been killed in Gaza, the vast majority being women and children, and nearly 80,300 others injured since October following an attack by Hamas.

More than seven months into the Israeli war, vast swathes of Gaza lay in ruins amid a crippling blockade of food, clean water and medicine.

Israel is accused of 'genocide' at the International Court of Justice (ICJ), which in its latest ruling has demanded Israel halt its operation in Rafah, a city in southern Gaza where more than



More than seven months into the Israeli war, vast swathes of Gaza lay in ruins amid a crippling blockade of food, clean water and medicine

a million displaced Palestinians were seeking refuge.

Pier swept away

Meanwhile, waves swept away a section of the American floating pier installed to carry aid to Gaza, Israeli media reported on Saturday. "Part of the American pier was washed ashore in Ash-

dod (a city in Israel)," said Channel 12.

"The Israeli Navy is currently helping to connect the separated part," it added. There were no injuries reported.

The US army in mid-May announced it finished constructing a temporary floating pier off the coast of Gaza Strip meant

to provide much needed aid to the blockaded enclave.

'Fascist aggression'

Palestinian factions on Saturday urged the prompt and genuine implementation of the International Court of Justice's (ICJ) decisions, stressing the need to avoid delays or ob-

structions that could absolve Israel of its responsibilities. The National and Islamic Forces Committee, which represents the majority of Palestinian groups, issued a statement in support of the top UN court decision.

"The fascist aggression against the city of Rafah and all

parts of the Gaza Strip and the Palestinian Territory must be stopped, and the Nazi occupation army must withdraw completely," the committee said.

It urged all parties to 'seriously and genuinely work to implement the decisions of the International Court of Justice, without procrastination or de-

The fascist aggression against the city of Rafah and all parts of the Gaza Strip and the Palestinian Territory must be stopped, and the Nazi occupation army must withdraw completely



PNIF COMMITTEE

lays that could absolve the occupation of its responsibilities under various pretexts'. It asked all parties to ensure 'the complete withdrawal of the Israeli army from the Rafah crossing' and to reopen it as a 'solely Palestinian-Egyptian crossing in accordance with the agreed-upon mechanisms'.

The committee cautioned 'against any attempts to circumvent the decision of the International Court of Justice or legitimise the siege and occupation'. On Friday, the ICJ reaffirmed its previous orders and indicated further measures including an end to military operations in the southern city, maintaining the Rafah border crossing open and allowing access for investigators to the blockaded enclave.

Anadolu Agency

Yemeni Houthis to release 100 prisoners

Sana'a, Yemen - The Yemeni Houthi group announced the release of 100 prisoners on Saturday in a humanitarian initiative, though the legitimate government has not confirmed the move.

"Under the directives of Abdul-Malik Badr al-Din al-Houthi (the group's leader), we will implement a one-sided humanitarian initiative on Saturday," Abdul Qader Al-Murtada, head of the group's National Committee for Prisoner Affairs, wrote on X. "We will release more than 100 prisoners from the other side," referring to the legitimate government supported by a Saudi-led Arab coalition. As of 21:00 GMT, the legitimate government has not yet issued a statement on the announcement.

Both sides had previously carried out several prisoner exchange deals through local and international efforts.

During UN-sponsored consultations in Sweden in 2018, the parties submitted lists containing the names of more than 15,000 prisoners, detainees and abductees. There is no accurate



count of the number of prisoners held by both sides, especially as more individuals have since been captured.

On March 20, 2023, the Yemeni government and the Houthis agreed to release 887 prisoners and detainees from both sides after consultations in Switzerland. On April 16, 2023, the legitimate government announced the completion of the first batch of a prisoner exchange

process with the Houthis, involving around 900 prisoners from both sides.

Among those released were members of the Arab coalition forces, Nasser Mansour (brother of former President Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi), former Defence Minister Mahmoud al-Subaihi, sons of former Vice President Ali Mohsen al-Ahmar, and sons of the Deputy Chairman of the Presidential Leadership Council

Brigadier General Tariq Mohammed Abdullah Saleh.

Yemen has been suffering from a war that began after the Houthis took control of the capital, Sana'a, and several provinces in late 2014. The conflict intensified in March 2015 when a Saudi-led Arab military coalition intervened to support legitimate government forces against the Iran-backed Houthi group.

Anadolu Agency

Italy extends support for ceasefire in Gaza

Rome, Italy - Italy's Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni on Saturday extended her country's support to reaching a sustainable ceasefire in Gaza.

In a meeting with Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammed Mustafa in Rome, Meloni said she is supporting international efforts for the release of all remaining hostages held in Gaza by Hamas and towards a drastic improvement of the distribution of humanitarian aid for Gaza's civilian population.

Italy will increase its financing to the Food for Gaza initiative it launched in collaboration with several international humanitarian organisations, aimed at getting more aid inside the blockaded enclave, her office said. "During the meeting, Premier Meloni has also reiterated the need to restart a political process which would lead to a lasting peace based on the two-state solution," it added.

Separately, Italy's Foreign Minister Antonio Tajani told Mustafa that the Italian government has



Italy's PM Giorgia Meloni

earmarked 35mn of new financing for Palestinian civilians, of which 5mn will go to the UN Palestinian agency (UNRWA), according to Italian media.

Meanwhile, Spain's foreign minister warned Israel on Saturday that the ICJ ruling requiring Israel to 'immediately halt its military offensive in Rafah' must be complied with.

"The ICJ's provisional measures, including the cessation of Israel's offensive in Rafah, are mandatory," Jose Manuel Albares said in a post on X.

"We demand it's implementation," he added.

In his statement on Saturday, Albares added that Spain also demands a ceasefire, the release of hostages and the access of humanitarian aid to Gaza.

"The suffering of the people of Gaza and the violence must end," he concluded.

His statements come amid growing tension between Spain and Israel.

The strain on bilateral relations picked up this week, when Spain, along with Ireland and Norway, announced they will formally recognise Palestinian statehood in the coming days.

In response, the Israeli government recalled its ambassadors to the nation and summoned the three countries' ambassadors to Israel. As part of Israel's reproach of the nations' ambassadors, authorities filmed the diplomats while they were forced to watch violent footage of the October 7 attacks. They later broadcast the video.

Anadolu Agency

New ICJ order could be viewed 'a sharp rebuke to Israel': Legal expert

Istanbul, Turkey - The International Court of Justice (ICJ) in a ruling on Friday ordered Israel to immediately halt its military offensive in Rafah, a city in the southern Gaza Strip.

Commenting on the hearing of the ICJ, Michael Becker, a former ICJ staffer and international law expert, told Anadolu: "This is not only a further recognition by the ICJ of the extraordinary humanitarian crisis in Gaza. It can also be viewed as a sharp rebuke to Israel."

According to Becker, the rul-



The ICJ has also ordered Tel Aviv to submit a report on the measures taken on the latest order within a month

ing suggests that the world court views Israel as incapable of carrying out this war in ways that avoid violating the Genocide Convention or respecting the fundamental rights of the Palestinian population of Gaza.

"Up until this point, the ICJ has declined to indicate provisional measures against Israel that expressly require a suspension of military operations. By doing so today, at least with respect to Rafah, the court has indicated that it no longer sees any other means of protecting the

rights of the Palestinian population in Gaza," he said. Becker also deemed it 'extraordinary' that the ICJ has ordered Israel not to impede access to UN fact-finding bodies or other UN-mandated investigators to ensure that potentially relevant evidence in the case is preserved.

He noted that in other cases, the court had declined to grant similar measures.

Among the three new provisional measures listed in the new ICJ order, the first calls on Israel to 'immediately halt its

military offensive, and any other action in the Rafah Governorate, which may inflict on the Palestinian group in Gaza conditions of life that could bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part'. To a question about the wording of this specific measure, Becker explained that the ICJ 'is linking the language of the order back to the Genocide Convention, since the 'conditions of life' language is one of the genocidal acts listed in Article II of the convention'.

Anadolu Agency

Iran's helicopter fleet under scrutiny after fatal crash



The decades-old fleet comprising various models reportedly faces significant maintenance and parts supply challenges due to prolonged international sanctions

Ankara, Turkey - Iran's ageing helicopter fleet was pushed into the spotlight after a crash last week claimed the lives of President Ebrahim Raisi, Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian, and seven others.

Anadolu correspondent compiled the information about the condition and maintenance of the helicopters in Iran's military inventory.

The decades-old fleet comprising various models all procured before the 1979 Islamic Revolution reportedly faces significant maintenance and parts supply challenges due to prolonged international sanctions. These issues have severely affected their operability, leaving the exact number of functional airframes unclear.

US-made helicopters

A substantial portion of Iran's helicopter fleet consists of American-made choppers, including Sikorsky SH-3 Sea Kings, RH-53D Sea Stallions, Boeing CH-47 Chinooks, and various Bell models. These helicopters were acquired before the 1979 revolution.

Iran operates eight Sikorsky SH-3 Sea Kings, initially designed

for anti-submarine warfare but later adapted for VIP transport.

The country's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei rarely uses helicopters, preferring airplanes even for short domestic trips despite having a fleet capable of VIP transport. These helicopters were used by the US Navy from 1961 to 2006 when they were eventually retired.

Iran also possesses several RH-53D Sea Stallions, primarily obtained for naval mine-laying tasks. The helicopter made its first flight in 1964 and entered service in 1966, before being retired from active duty in 2020.

The tandem-rotor Boeing CH-47 Chinook, known for its heavy-lift capabilities, also features prominently in the Iranian fleet.

Iran received over 100 Chinooks from the US before the revolution but several were lost during the Iran-Iraq War in the 1980s. Additionally, models like the Bell 206, Bell 212, and Bell 214 are part of Iran's inventory, though their operational status remains uncertain due to maintenance challenges. A Bell 212 was carrying President Raisi and his entourage.

The Iranian army currently has

32 Bell 212s and Bell 214s.

Iran has two Bell 412 helicopters, an improved version of the Bell 212 that made its first flight in 1979.

Finally, Iran holds 12 US-built Kaman HH-43 Huskie helicopters, which initially flew in

A substantial portion of Iran's helicopter fleet consists of American-made choppers. These helicopters were acquired before the 1979 revolution

1953 and were retired in the 1970s. There is no evidence as to whether Tehran actively uses them.

Russian-made helicopters

The Iranian fleet also features several models of Russian-made helicopters, including the Mil Mi-8/17, known for its versatility and a popular choice in military trans-

port. Iran is thought to have at least five Mi-17 model helicopters, a staple in many military fleets worldwide. It is capable of various roles, including cargo transport and armed missions.

First designed in the 1960s, the Mil Mi-17 entered service in 1975 and is still in production.

Russia delivered approximately 21 Mil Mi-171S helicopters, a modern version of Mi-17, to Iran in 1999-2001, but the exact number is unknown.

Attack helicopters

The majority of Iran's attack helicopter fleet consists of US Bell AH-1 SuperCobra. It made its first flight in 1969 and was retired by the US in 2020.

The 202 helicopters in Iran's inventory are known as AH-1J International. It is believed that some of these helicopters were lost during the Iran-Iraq War. Iran claims it can produce the helicopter with domestic capabilities.

Iran also operates Russian Mil Mi-24s, a robust attack helicopter with considerable firepower and protective armour.

The helicopter has been produced since 1972 and is currently used by 50 countries. Iran's ac-

tual fleet size for the Mil Mi-24 is unknown.

Recently, Iran confirmed acquiring Russian Mi-28 attack helicopters, known for their combat capabilities. Additionally, plans for joint production of Mi-28 and Ka-52 attack helicopters in Iran have been announced.

Local production

Iran has taken steps to locally produce and modify existing helicopter models in response to sanctions and the resulting parts shortage.

The Shabaviz 206-1 is a reverse-engineered version of the Augusta-Bell AB-206 and the Shabaviz 2-75 is an Iranian production model of the Bell 214C. Both helicopters are facing patent lawsuits filed in the US.

Iran has also developed a light helicopter similar to the Bell 206, the Shahid-278, which is a combination of several helicopters.

The Saba-248, which Iran put into service in 2016-2017, is a twin-engine, four-wing general-purpose helicopter, similar in appearance to choppers like the AgustaWestland AW119 and Bell 427.

Anadolu Agency

Police search for slain Bangladesh MP's minced body

Kolkata, India - West Bengal Criminal Investigation Department (CID) conducted a search operation in Bhargar for the second consecutive day on Saturday to retrieve the minced pieces of the body of Bangladesh member of parliament Anwarul Azim Anar.

According to the West Bengal Criminal Investigation Department (CID) Anar was smothered and killed in a flat in Kolkata and his body chopped and minced to destroy his identity. The CID team has launched a search operation to find the body parts of the Bangladeshi MP.

Anar who entered India on May 12, was last seen on the afternoon of May 13 when he went with friends to the flat in

Bidhannagar near Kolkata for a medical check-up. The CID said that they had arrested one of the suspects in the case, a Mumbai-based butcher who confessed during interrogation that he had taken off all the skin from the Bangladeshi MP's body, chopped it up and minced the cut parts in a bid to destroy its identity.

Police said: "The assailants brought a butcher named Jihad (alias Siam) who was living in Mumbai illegally for many years. Two months ago, he was brought to Kolkata by an American citizen of Bangladesh origin, Akhtaruz-zaman Shaheen. This Shaheen is the mastermind of this planned heinous murder."

ANI



Sudan's health system collapsing, says UN

Geneva, Switzerland - The World Health Organization (WHO) on Friday warned that Sudan's health system is collapsing with only 20-30 per cent of facilities functioning at 'minimal levels'.

The situation is especially dire in the hard-to-reach areas with health facilities destroyed, looted, or struggling with acute shortages of staff, medicines, vaccines, equipment, and supplies, spokesperson Christian Lindmeier told a UN press briefing in Geneva.

"Only 20-30 per cent of health facilities remain functional, and even so at minimal levels," Lindmeier said.

"Medical supplies in the coun-

try are meeting only 25 per cent of the needs," he added.

He noted that WHO's warehouse in Al Gezirah state has been inaccessible since last December, and some states, including Darfur, have not received medical supplies for the past year.

People suffering from diabetes, hypertension, cancer or kidney failure 'may experience complications or die from the lack of treatment', he warned.

According to the spokesperson, disease outbreaks are increasing with over 1.3mn cases of malaria, 11,000 cases of cholera, over 4,600 cases of measles, and some 8,500 cases of dengue.

Anadolu Agency

PEOPLE'S POWER



Voters show their ink-marked fingers after casting their votes for the sixth phase of the Lok Sabha elections 2024, in Paschim Medinipur, West Bengal, India on Saturday (ANI)

New electric train signals leap in Tanzania's transport sector

Dar es Salaam, Tanzania - With a shimmering facade of sky-blue glass panels, the Standard Gauge Railway Station in Tanzania's commercial hub Dar es Salaam looks more like an opulent airport terminal than a railway facility.

Inside, a maze of escalators gracefully glides passengers to various levels, offering a panoramic view of the bustling terminal below.

This architectural marvel, meticulously designed with passengers' comfort in mind, boasts state-of-the-art ticketing counters and plush waiting lounges equipped with charging ports and other amenities. The station serves the Standard Gauge Railway (SGR) electric train built by Turkish company Yapi Merkezi, a project that represents a significant leap forward for the East African nation's transportation infrastructure.

The electric train, a project worth nearly US\$2bn, is seen as an immense boost to domestic connectivity, trade and economic opportunities with neighbouring landlocked countries like Uganda



and Rwanda.

The SGR's entire route will run from Dar es Salaam to Mwanza, a port city on the shore of Lake Victoria, and Kigoma, a city on the northeastern shores of Lake Tanganyika, near the border with Burundi and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. That route will cover a total of nearly 1,300km (around 810 miles).

For now, the section completed is from Dar es Salaam to the capital Dodoma, running approximately 460km (285 miles), which will be officially inaugurated on July 1. The SGR is also

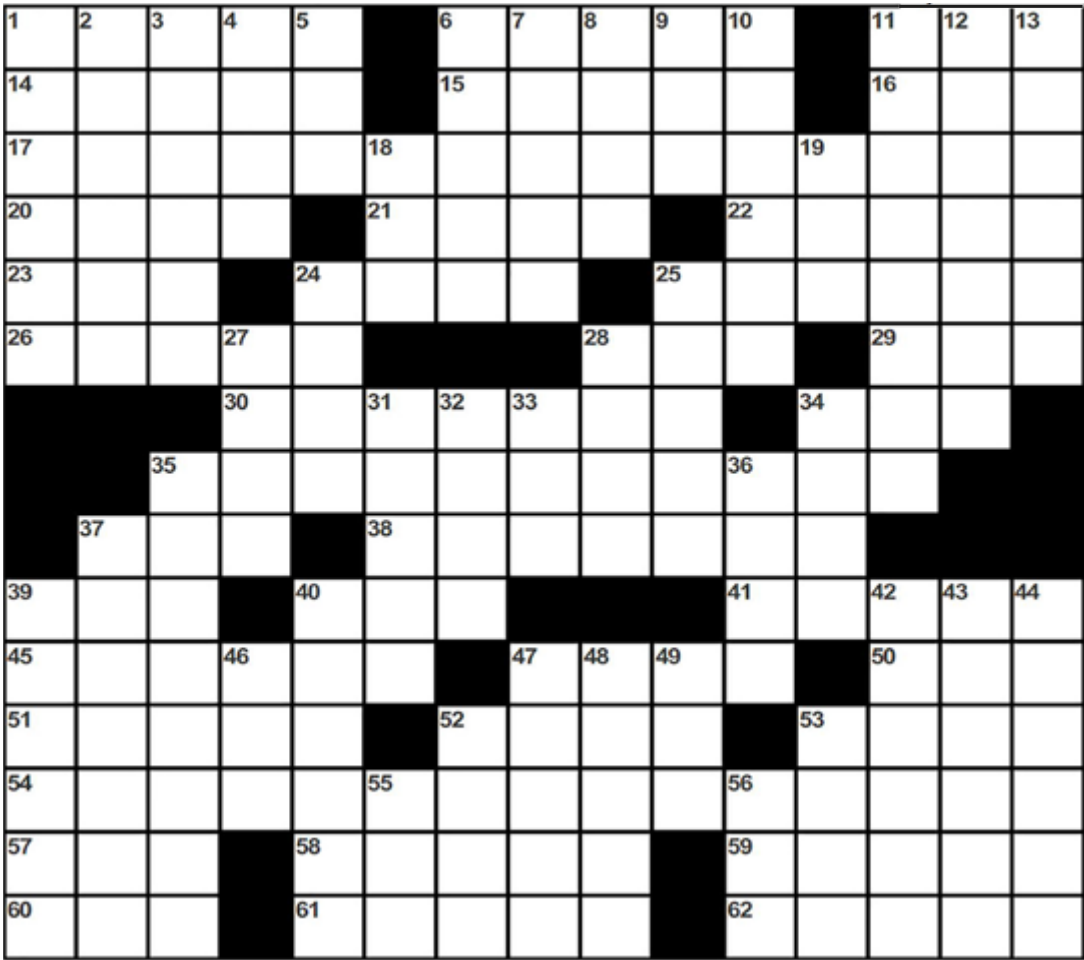
part of a wider regional initiative known as the Central Corridor, which aims to connect DR Congo and landlocked countries like Rwanda, Burundi, Uganda to Tanzania's key port of Dar es Salaam.

A few weeks ago, a group of officials and dignitaries, including Prime Minister Kassim Majaliwa, were given a trial run.

Majaliwa hailed it as a 'historic moment' for the nation, saying the electric rail will reduce traveling time for people, boost trade connectivity and help in environmental conservation efforts.

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DAILY CROSSWORD



ACROSS

- 1) Wine stoppers
6) One-pot meals
11) High-arching hit
14) Sports venue
15) White-sale item
16) "Ciao, Brutus"
17) Cable alternatives
20) Be aware of
21) "Oh, me!"
22) San Diego player
23) Bigheadedness
24) "... Flanders"
25) Easy to control
26) AT&T, for one
28) Coffee house?
29) Grand Coulee or Aswan
30) John Lennon's lady
34) Drivel
35) Semi-gloss alternative
37) Is able
38) Alphabetic characters
39) Bare-bones bed
40) "... all in your mind"
41) Playful marine mam-mal
45) Adjusts wheels
4 7) Advise caution
50) Eggs, to Nero
51) Spiral-homed ante-lope

- 52) "Art of Fugue" com-poser
53) "Wheel of Fortune" action
54) Time for cartoon watching
57) Donned the feedbag
58) Really dumb
59) Tiny weight
60) Cardinal, e.g.
61) Merchant's successes
62) Urged (with " on")
DOWN
1) Coffin
2) Certain citrus fruit
3) Come out with a modi-fied version
4) Homophone of 46-Down
5) Actor Mineo
6) " It's... Rock and Roll to Me"
7) Destroy completely, as a car
8) Some meadow crea-tures
9) "With this ring, I thee..."
10) Like some blouses or shoes
11) Pretentious
12) Partly coincide
13) Old-fashioned suit?

- 18) " 7 Faces of Dr..." (1964 flick)
19) Cul-de-_
24) Beside the point
25) Stingless male honey-bee
27) Blue shade
28) College course divi-sion
31) Bagpipers' gannents
32) Aces, sometimes
33) O'er and o'er
34) " Do you want to hear a secret?"
35) Filled to the gills
36) Appliance for smoothing cloth
37) Assemble in proper sequence
39) Victim of Brutus
40) Short-tailed lemurs
42) Hitting the bottle
43) Demonstrate clearly
44) Traveled far and wide
46) African antelope
4 7) Batman Bruce
48) Apexes
49) Greek "P"
52) Canaanite deity
53) Like a bug in a rug
55) FBI evidence, at times
56) Lobster coral

NOTE PAD



YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE



ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

Hey, accidents happen. You can't beat yourself up forever if you got someone's name wrong, sent an email to the wrong person, or dropped something on someone's foot. These things are just part of living, so all you can do is make the best of any awkward situation you find yourself in today. You have the tact and charm necessary to get anyone on your good side. The best move after a mistake is to smile and offer a heartfelt apology. People know when you're being genuine.



LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

You could be forced into a partnership with someone you don't know well or don't like very much. Unfortunately, you can't change the situation; you can only get used to it. Summon your positive attitude and work on finding a bright side to this arrangement, because there is one. Volunteer to take on tasks that you enjoy and can work on at your own pace without your partner's interference. You may find yourself moving into an introverted mood, but that's okay.



SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

Lots of fun social stuff is coming up, but you need to be selective. You have a few serious responsibilities that you need to take care of before you go trotting off to have mindless fun, so don't overbook your social calendar. You'll only end up getting stressed out. But if you cover the tiny details of your responsibilities early in the day, you will be able to free up time later to have fun. Get work out of the way early.



TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

Seeing someone from your past will trigger some weird feelings today, and you might not know what to do about it. This sentimentality is not a productive place to be in right now, and you should seek out some sort of distraction to help you work your way out of it. Switch your focus away from emotional ideas and toward analytical data, numbers, and dates. Invoicing, scheduling, and planning are good activities for today.



VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

Today, you might feel a strong drive to initiate something new. This is perfect because you're in a superb phase to begin new projects and relationships. Social and entertainment activities are favored over business or school meetings, but either way you will be able to get lots of planning and preparation done if you start on the major tasks today. Enlist the help of a friend who has a list of killer contacts.



CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

There are lots of small details to wrangle today, but you will flourish under the pressure and leave people impressed by your abilities! It's an excellent day for planning and fact finding, so you might want to sit at the computer for a while. It's exciting knowing that all of the answers you need are right at your fingertips, and your brain is ready to soak them all in. You'll have a blast and time will fly by.



GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

The tide is starting to turn in your life, and things are definitely changing for the better. But are you ready to take advantage of the new opportunities coming your way? You are if you have a path to follow and a plan to guide you. This is the right time to build that plan, and it's the right time to ask around for advice from friends who have been down this way before. They know what you need to know and can tell it to you in a way that you'll understand.



LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

Just when you think you can send that important email today, you notice a spelling error. You'll be able to start and work on things, but completion is a whole other matter. Focus on what you can do, and launch a few new ideas or tasks. That way you can stay motivated and occupied by all of the details you have to manage. Checking things off your list isn't going to be possible, but you'll still get things done and feel a sense of accomplishment.



AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

There are lots of small details to wrangle today, but you will flourish under the pressure and leave people impressed by your abilities! It's an excellent day for planning and fact finding, so you might want to sit at the computer for a while. It's exciting knowing that all of the answers you need are right at your fingertips, and your brain is ready to soak them all in. You'll have a blast and time will fly by.



CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

Today, focus on the people who give back. They deserve more of your time and gratitude. The troublemakers who take, cause waves, and create drama force your attention their way, and it's always a waste of your energy. Ignore the drama queens you encounter today. Every time you fall for their antics, you give them encouragement to continue their toxic behavior. If you want more peace in your life, spend more time with mellow people.



SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

If your social life is starting to feel too boring, take time today to cook up some new ideas on how to liven it up a bit! Why not take a walk on the wild side? The people over there seem so much more interesting, don't they? Step out and go somewhere you have never been before with a few of your favorite people. They want to spend some time with you, so why not do your friends a favor and grace them with an hour or two of your time?



PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

A frustrating friendship is causing you to wonder what you ever saw in this person. People change, and unfortunately they don't always grow in the same direction as you. Accept who this person is becoming, but don't keep them in your life if they make you feel bad or bring out your insecurities. Friendships are elective relationships, they do not always have to be lifelong commitments. There is nothing wrong with moving on so you both can be happy.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

1. The home of the drink called "bourbon" is Bourbon County. What state of the USA is it in?

- A. Kentucky
B. Tennessee
C. Arkansas
D. Louisiana

2. Olympic gold medallists Natasa Janics and Alfréd Hajós represented which country?

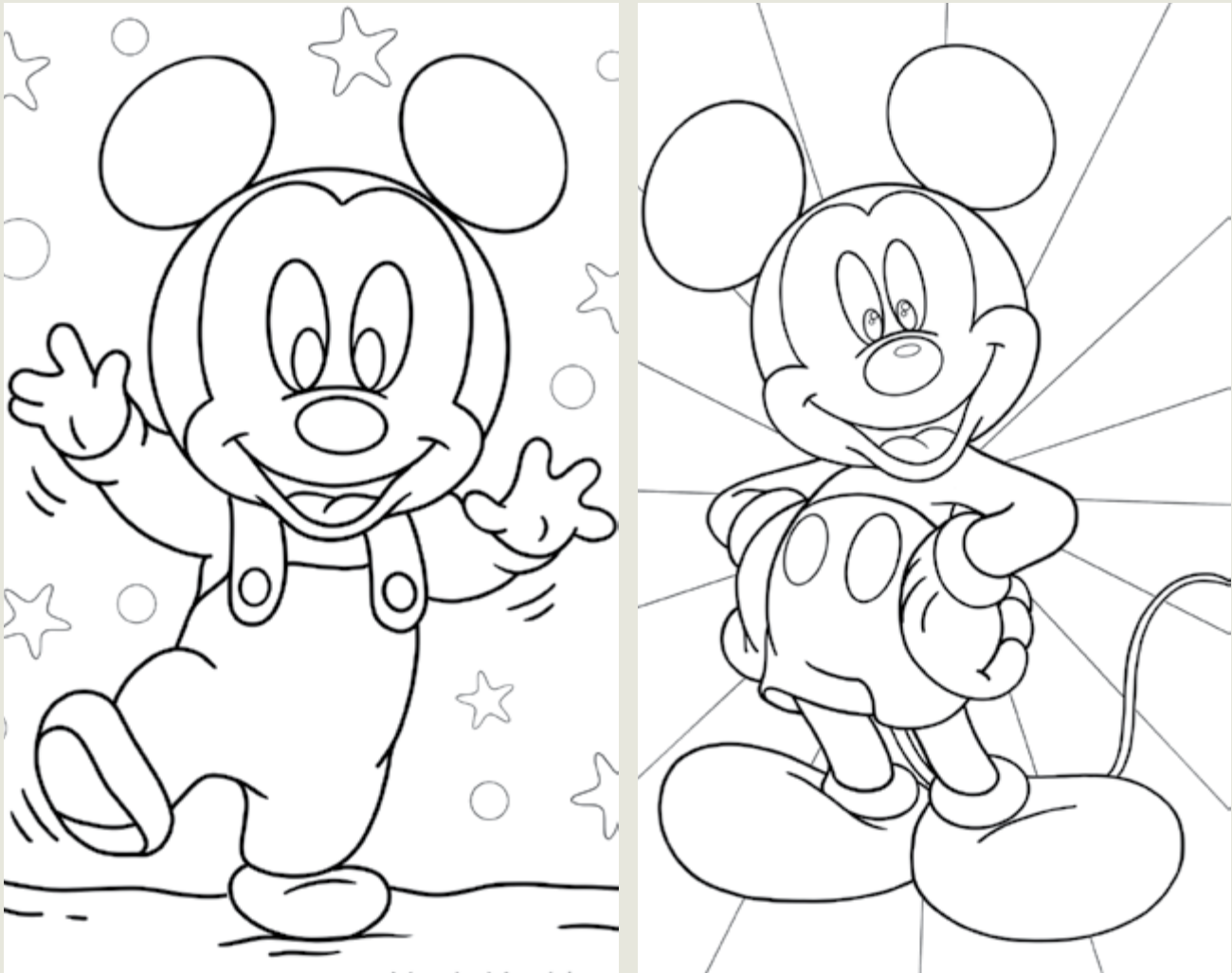
- A. Serbia
B. Romania
C. Estonia
D. Hungary

3. What is the best-known English blue cheese?

- A. Salop
B. Badminton
C. Stilton
D. Queensberry

Answers: 1.A 2.D 3.C

KIDS COLOURING



BOGGLER

H	A	N	I
T	G	W	N
B	R	W	L
A	S	A	O

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

SOLUTION
20-25 words: Excellent,
15-20 words: Very good,
10-15 words: Good,
5-10 words: Average

DO YOU SUDOKU?

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

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

WORD BUILDER



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

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

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER

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

AGAINST ALL ODDS

Garnacho, Mainoo score as Man United beat favourites City to win FA Cup

London, England - Manchester United saved their best performance of a mediocre season to the very end as they upset Manchester City 2-1 in the FA Cup final on Saturday to deprive their rivals of the double.

With speculation swirling about the future of manager Erik Ten Hag, United ripped up the form book as first-half goals from teenagers Alejandro Garnacho and Kobbie Mainoo proved enough for them to lift the trophy for a 13th time.

They had to endure a second-half siege, however, as City swarmed forward and a late goal by Jeremy Doku set up a nerve-shredding finale before United could celebrate at Wembley.

Premier League champions City, bidding to become the first club to win the double in successive seasons, had been on a 35-match unbeaten run in all competitions in open play.

But they were well below their best in the first half, gifting Garnacho a 30th-minute opener before Mainoo made it 2-0.

City woke up in the second half and Erling Haaland hit the crossbar, but they had to wait until the 87th minute for substitute Doku to halve the deficit.

United hung on, however, to seal the best result of Ten Hag's two-season reign and qualification for next season's Europa League.

"Incredible. Nobody believed in us. But we're a team, all together. We fought, the game of our lives," Garnacho, who became the first Argentine to score in the Cup final since Ricky Villa for Tottenham Hotspur in 1981, said.

The build-up had been dominated by talk of the chasm between the two Manchester clubs with City having won an un-



Manchester United players celebrate their victory against Manchester City in the FA Cup final on Saturday

Premier League champions City, bidding to become the first club to win the double in successive seasons, had been on a 35-match unbeaten run in all competitions in open play. But they were well below their best...

precedented fourth successive English title and United suffering their worst Premier League campaign.

Ten Hag's future was also clouded in uncertainty with re-

ports that the showpiece would be his last game in charge, whatever the outcome.

Even the most optimistic United fans would have walked down Wembley Way in the sun-

shine fearing a drubbing, but their team turned logic on its head.

Garnacho, one of the few positives in United's season, had the game's first shot on target and his movement was a constant threat to a City defence featuring two changes with Guardiola handing starts to John Stones and Nathan Ake.

City looked ruffled by United's energy and offered a rare gift after 30 minutes.

A long ball forward should have been easily dealt with by

Josko Gvardiol but his headed back pass went over advancing keeper Stefan Ortega and Garnacho ran through to tap the ball into an empty net.

Marcus Rashford had a goal ruled out minutes later with Garnacho adjudged offside in the build-up but it was not long before United were in dreamland.

This time there was no help required as a brilliant move saw Garnacho play the ball in to Bruno Fernandes whose no-look pass released Mainoo to slot his shot past Ortega.



Xavi Hernandez

I have no regrets: Xavi after Barca sacking

Barcelona, Spain - Outgoing Barcelona manager Xavi Hernandez said on Saturday he was proud of his achievements with the club and was looking forward to being a fan again, as he prepares to coach his final game against Sevilla after being sacked on Friday.

"I have no regrets. I have tried to do my best. We have worked with a lot of love for this club. I'm a Barca fan for life... It's an apprenticeship for the future," Xavi told a press conference on Saturday.

"These are complicated days, they have not been easy, but I'm fine. I have a clear conscience, I'm proud of myself and calm," he added.

Barca's stuttering season led Xavi to say in January that he would resign at the end of this campaign. But after discussions in April at club president Joan Laporta's home, he agreed to stay on - with a series of unspecified conditions set by the club. Then, four weeks after confirming their former midfielder would hon-

our the last year of his contract and lead them through next season, Laporta changed his mind and axed the coach after a season with no silverware.

Xavi mentioned again on Saturday that the club faced problems. Similar comments had reportedly annoyed Laporta earlier in the season.

"It has not been an easy time because of the state of the club. I am happy because I have done a good job - we have won two titles, more successes and won important matches," Xavi said.

The 44-year-old arrived at Barcelona on a three-year deal following the departure of another club legend, Dutchman Ronald Koeman, at the end of 2021. Xavi is a product of Barcelona's famous La Masia youth academy, which he joined at age 11. As a player, he won 31 trophies for Barcelona and Spain, including the 2010 World Cup, two European Championships, eight LaLiga and four Champions League titles.



Lautaro Martinez

Martinez named Serie A player of season

Milan, Italy - Inter Milan captain and Serie A 2023-24 leading goalscorer Lautaro Martinez was named the most valuable player (MVP) of the season by the Italian top-flight league on Friday.

The Argentina international has scored 24 goals in Inter's league-winning campaign this season, eight more than Juventus' Dusan Vlahovic who is second on the list.

Vlahovic was named as the best striker by the league, while Monza's Michele Di Gregorio was named best goalkeeper. Martinez's team mates Alessandro Bastoni and Hakan Calhanoglu were named the best defender and midfielder.

Martinez will receive his trophy on Sunday before Inter finish their campaign at Verona, Serie A said in a statement.

Dovbyk scores hat-trick as Girona thrash Granada

Girona, Spain - A hat-trick from LaLiga top scorer Artem Dovbyk propelled Girona to their biggest ever win as they thrashed relegated Granada 7-0 on Friday to complete a dream season with a third-place finish in the standings.

The atmosphere at the Montilivi stadium was festive as fans celebrated the Catalans' remarkable season, ending with 81 points and securing their maiden Champions League berth.

"I am happy because it is a historic season, these players are incredible," Girona coach Michel told a news conference. "It has been a great season, people have supported us and felt proud and represented by this team. Let's celebrate."

Defender Eric Garcia opened the scoring on the half-hour mark, pouncing on the visitors' sloppy defending to head home from close range before Viktor Tsygankov doubled the advan-



Girona's Artem Dovbyk celebrates after scoring against Granada 7-0 on Friday

tage with a tap-in three minutes later.

Dovbyk made it 3-0 from the penalty spot in the 44th minute after a foul on Portu and Tsy-

gankov scored his second with a simple finish nine minutes into the second half.

Granada were dealt a further blow when they were reduced

to 10 men in the 61st minute after Facundo Pellistri's second yellow card before Dovbyk scored again in the 75th. Substitute Cristhian Stuani got on the

scoresheet with a close-range strike in the 78th minute.

Dovbyk completed his hat-trick with a 90th-minute penalty to reach 24 league goals this season, ahead of Villarreal's Alexander Sorloth in the battle for the league's top goalscorer.

"The only thing we had at stake today was to make our fans proud, which is the main objective in every game," Michel said.

"Also to help Dovbyk for the possibility of being top scorer, those were the two objectives and I think we have achieved them. It is difficult because of Granada's position, it is difficult, we understand them but we had to achieve our objectives," the Spaniard added referring to their opponents' last game in the top flight.

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Real Madrid are the best team in world and will continue to be so, says Simeone

Madrid, Spain - Atletico Madrid coach Diego Simeone, on the eve of his side's final LaLiga match against Real Sociedad, said they fell short of their objectives this season and that title winners Real Madrid were the best team in the world.

Atletico, who will finish fourth in the standings behind Real, runners-up Barcelona and surprise package Girona, secured their place in the Champions League, although the coach believes they could have done better.

"We have the responsibility to get into the Champions League every year. You can be left out, but you can also be champion, yet with Real Madrid, who are the best team in the world and will continue to be because they have rejuvenated the squad, it is not easy," Simeone told a press conference on Thursday.

"We have to keep working at 120% because 100% is not enough and 80% is even less to be able to get closer to them, keeping in mind that those below

We have to keep working at 120% because 100% is not enough to be able to get closer to them, keeping in mind that those below us are also improving

DIEGO SIMEONE

us are also improving."

The coach said the team lacked the right response when it mattered most, such as when they were knocked out of the

Champions League after a 5-4 aggregate defeat by German side Borussia Dortmund in the quarter-finals.

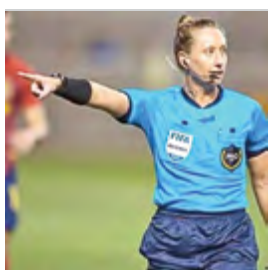
"We were close to the Copa

del Rey final and were expecting to reach the semi-finals of the Champions League. We created the illusion of being in a possible final and we weren't able to do it, so now we have to think about what comes next to improve things," the Argentine said.

Simeone, 54, added that while there have been shortcomings this season, he remains excited about the future and reflected on his long 12-year tenure at the club, having amassed 402 victories in 680 matches in charge.



Diego Simeone with Real Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti



Maria Victoria Penso
Copa America to feature female referees for the first time

Luque, Paraguay - Next month's Copa America will be the first edition of the continental men's football tournament to have female referees, South America's soccer governing body (CONMEBOL) said on Friday.

Copa America, which runs from June 20 to July 14 hosted by the United States, will have a total of 101 match officials, including eight women.

Edina Alves of Brazil and Maria Victoria Penso of the United States will be referees in the tournament. They will be supported by Tatiana Guzman of Nicaragua, a VAR official.

Brazilian Neuza Back, Mary Blanco of Colombia, Migdalia Rodriguez of Venezuela, and Americans Brooke Mayo and Kathryn Nesbitt will join as assistants.

Reigning champion Djokovic worried about French Open chances

Geneva, Switzerland - World number one Novak Djokovic said he does not consider himself a favourite ahead of his title defence at the French Open, which begins with a first-round match against local hope Pierre-Hugues Herbert on Sunday.

Djokovic's barren run ahead of Roland Garros continued as the 24-times Grand Slam winner was beaten 6-4 0-6 6-1 by Tomas Machac in the Geneva Open semi-finals on Friday, weeks after losing heavily to Alejandro Tabilo in Rome.

The 37-year-old Serb is struggling to regain his rhythm with many fearing that his erratic form could spell trouble for his bid for a fourth Paris crown.

"Of course I am worried... I haven't been playing good at all this year," Djokovic told reporters after being beaten by Machac on Friday.

Asked about his title defence at Roland Garros, Djokovic said: "(I've had) some (good) matches here and there but it is what it is. You have to accept it. I don't consider myself a favourite there.



Novak Djokovic

"I have a lot to work on. I'm going to take it match by match and see how far I can go."

During the final moments of the first set, Djokovic requested a medical pause due to a stomach issue. Earlier in May, he was hit on the head by a fan's water bottle while signing autographs.

"I just need to feel better. It's not enjoyment when you are suffering on the court feeling this way," he added.

"You're not able to focus on tennis when you have other stuff happening. I just hope I can be fit and ready and prepared for Roland Garros."

Sinner not worried about hip

Meanwhile, Italian Jannik Sinner says his hip injury has recovered in time for the French Open but his preparation has not been ideal.

Sinner, who could become the new world number one over the next fortnight, withdrew before his quarter-final match at the Madrid Open and skipped the Rome Masters. The Australian Open champion had said he would not risk his long-term fitness by playing at Roland Garros unless he was fully recovered, but will take his place in the draw.

"I mean, I'm not concerned anymore about my hip. The last tests we made, they were very positive. That's why I'm here," the 22-year-old world number two said on Friday.

It's a tough draw for both of us, says Zverev on playing Nadal

Paris, France - Germany's Alexander Zverev thought his brother was joking when he informed him he was playing 14-time champion Rafa Nadal in the opening round of the French Open.

Nadal, who has barely played this year, will be making his last appearance at the Grand Slam he has owned for nearly two decades but is not seeded because of his lowly ranking.

There was always the danger that the Spaniard could be paired with one of the top players and Zverev drew the short straw, even though he will be

firm favourite to win. It will be their first meeting since the 2022 semi-final when Zverev retired hurt after suffering a serious ankle injury -- Nadal going on to win his 14th title by thrashing Casper Ruud in the final.

"I was on court with (Andrey) Rublev yesterday on Chatrier practising, and then after the practice was over, which was actually a great practice, my brother told me," Zverev, a semi-finalist for the last three years, told reporters on Friday.

"I actually thought he was joking in the beginning. But then, yeah, it is what it is. I mean, ob-



Alexander Zverev retired hurt after suffering a serious ankle injury in their 2022 semifinal at Roland Garros

I didn't want my last memory of me playing against Rafa to be me leaving the court in a wheelchair

ALEXANDER ZVEREV

viously, to be very honest, I wanted to play Rafa again in my career, in his career, because I didn't want my last memory of me playing against Rafa to be me leaving the court in a wheelchair.

"Ideally, I would have liked to play him in the latter stage of the tournament. It's a tough draw, but it's a tough draw for both of us. We'll see how it goes on Monday."

Some have suggested Nadal should have been seeded, given his record at Roland Garros, but Zverev said that organisers had no choice but to stick to the ATP rankings.

"Of course I can guarantee you Novak (Djokovic) didn't want to play Rafa in the first round and (Carlos) Alcaraz, and Jannik (Sinner) didn't want to play him," Zverev said. "I don't

want to play him in the first round, but it is how it is. I think he's excited and I'm excited for it."

Nadal's domination at Roland Garros, where for many years he looked invincible, means he retains the aura, even if his powers have diminished because of injuries.

"For me, in my mind, I'm going to play peak Rafa Nadal. That's what I expect him to be," Zverev said. "I expect him to be at his absolute best. I expect him to play the best tennis he's played in a long time on this court."

Osaka eyes success at Roland Garros after encouraging progress

Paris, France - Naomi Osaka said she was encouraged by her progress on clay in the run up to the French Open, as the four-time Grand Slam winner eyes an elusive trophy on tennis' slowest surface since returning from a 15-month maternity break.

Former world number one Osaka, who returned to action in January, has had huge success on hard courts thanks to her explosive baseline game, but the 26-year-old from Japan has usually struggled on clay. Now ranked 134th in the world after her long break, Osaka has never reached a final on the surface and has yet to advance beyond the third round at Roland Garros.

However, she shrugged off early defeats in Rouen and Madrid before a run to the Italian Open fourth round, earning her first two career top-20 wins on clay in Rome by beating Marta Kostyuk and Daria Kasatkina.

"I think I've made a significant amount of progress and I feel like people can see that throughout the tournaments that I've played, but I feel like I've dedicated a lot of time to learning about clay," Osaka said

"I want to do well and I want to



Naomi Osaka

keep beating really good players. Hopefully the last stop here I'll play well too."

Osaka, who returns to the French Open after a gap of two years, takes on Italian Lucia Bronzetti first up on Sunday.

"I don't think I've ever played her, not to my knowledge. So I've seen her around and I know that anyone that's playing this tourna-

ment is a really tough opponent," Osaka said. "Plus it's a first round of a Grand Slam. I'm usually quite nervous during those first-round matches. So I'm just going in there trying my best and seeing if all the lessons that I have learned so far have adapted me into a better player."

She will have the welcome distraction of her daughter Shai at

during the tournament.

"Being away from her was really tough, but I called her every day. I saw how well she was doing and saw how happy she was, so that made me happy too," she added.

"Yesterday she walked for the first time, so I was really happy. We're going to practice some more when I get back."



Charles Leclerc in action

Ferrari's Leclerc beats Piastri to take Monaco GP pole, Verstappen sixth

Monaco - Ferrari's Charles Leclerc ended Max Verstappen's record-equalling run of Formula One pole positions in style on Saturday to make himself favourite to become the first home winner of the Monaco Grand Prix since 1931.

The pole was Leclerc's third in Monaco and 24th of his career, but he has yet to stand on the podium in front of his home crowd. McLaren's Oscar Piastri will start alongside the 26-year-old on the front row.

"We need to put everything together for Sunday's race," said Leclerc, who can become the first Monegasque to win since Louis Chiron drove a Bugatti to victory in the early years of an event that now stands for glamour and his-



Charles Leclerc

tory. "In the past here we didn't manage to do so, but we are in a stronger position and we are a stronger team. I'm sure we can achieve great things tomorrow and the win is the target."

Red Bull's triple world champion Verstappen, who was chasing an unprecedented ninth

successive pole and eighth of the season, will line up only sixth.

"I've hit the wall," the championship leader, who has won five of seven races so far this year, exclaimed over the team radio.

Verstappen had been third fastest after the initial round of fast laps in the final top 10 shootout, with Leclerc setting a time of one minute 10.418 seconds and Piastri 1:10.444.

Leclerc improved on his time with his final effort of 1:10.270, while Piastri also shaved 0.020 of a second off his previous best.

Verstappen, wrestling with his car since Friday practice, threw everything at it but his mistake effectively cost him three places on a circuit where overtaking is very difficult.



CLASH OF TITANS

Hyderabad get the better of Rajasthan in playoff, to take on Kolkata in final

Chennai, India - Sunrisers Hyderabad marched into the final of IPL 2024 and this time they did it with their bowling.

It looked like Rajasthan Royals had won a crucial toss and they did the right thing by opting to chase. One square boundary was significantly shorter than the other (61m vs 72m) and asymmetry like that makes it really hard to defend totals, especially if the dew came in, but it didn't. All of a sudden SRH had a dry ball and a dry pitch. And they worked a miracle on that.

Shahbaz Ahmed originally came into this game to try and shore up a stop-start batting innings. It was the second time in two playoff games that SRH had to pull the Impact Player trigger early. He made 17 in a partnership of 43 with Heinrich Klaasen to push the total up to 175. But that total looked light when Yashasvi Jaiswal raced to 41 off 19 balls. The game was slipping away. Except it had also shown SRH a way to claw back. Jaydev Unadkat's first over - the seventh - showed signs of how much the ball was gripping. SRH had no specialist spinner in their line-up but in conditions like these you don't need specialists. You just need people that can turn the ball and hold a line. Shahbaz did that and more, winning a match-up he was second-favourite in. Bowling into the left-hander's hitting arc, he handed Jaiswal his first dismissal to spin since IPL 2022.

Pat Cummins brought Abhishek Sharma, who had bowled



Sunrisers Hyderabad captain Pat Cummins (R) and Kolkata Knight Riders skipper Shreyas Iyer with the trophy

TODAY'S MATCH

FINAL

6 PM

SUNRISERS HYDERABAD VS KOLKATA KNIGHT RIDERS

only three overs this campaign, from the other end. He even called Aiden Markram to roll his arm over. The pitch was now tak-

ing handsome amounts of turn and Cummins used any means in his armoury to exploit it. SRH produced a 33-ball period without a single boundary using bowlers whom they haven't really had to turn to but were there now at this crucial time. This 33-ball period also included four wickets. Shahbaz who hadn't picked up a wicket since April 5 turned up with 4-0-23-3 tonight. Abhishek, who had bowled his full quota of overs only twice before Friday, finished with 4-0-24-2.

SRH have one of the world's best batters as a finisher and that played a big part in their win.

Heinrich Klaasen does not need any protection. He does not need his entry point to be delayed because he has the ability to move through the gears. He can resurrect a failing innings with risk-free shots and still find ways to hit boundaries when he needs to.

Looking back now, all the good work RR did feels bitter-sweet. Trent Boult gave them a first-over wicket for the seventh time this season breaking a partnership that has rewritten history. Abhishek and Travis Head have been scoring their runs at 13.64 an over, the best in IPL history (min 300 runs scored).

Sandeep Sharma bowled 18

slower balls in his spell for just 17 runs and picked up the wicket of Head. His yorker, where he changed his action to be extra slinging, slipped underneath Klaasen in prime hitting form and knocked out his stumps. RR gave away only 12 runs in the last two overs with Avesh Khan executing his yorkers near perfectly. He dismissed Nitish Kumar Reddy, who actually had a decent plan against those yorkers - the reverse scoop because there was no one on the deep-third boundary - by refusing to give him a ball to get underneath. It was high quality planning and execution.

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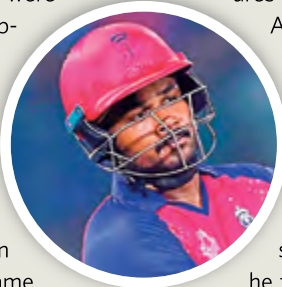
Samson: 'We were short of options in the middle overs against spin'

Chennai, India - The lack of a proactive batting approach against Sunrisers Hyderabad's left-arm fingerspinners on a dry Chepauk pitch, which offered more purchase to the slower bowlers in the second innings, cost Rajasthan Royals a spot in the IPL 2024 final. This is the assessment of their captain Sanju Samson after they managed only 139 for 7 in their pursuit of 176 in the second qualifier in Chennai on Friday.

"I think we were found short of options in the middle overs against spin, and I think that's where we lost the game," Samson said after the game. "Against left-arm spin, we had three-four right-handers in the middle and the ball was stopping. But we couldn't try a bit more [options] - reverse-sweep or use of the crease a bit more - and they [SRH] also bowled really well, actually. "It's actually very hard to guess - when we can expect dew or not [in Chennai]. So, the wicket started behaving differently in the second innings. "The ball started turning a bit and they used the advantage and bowled spin in the middle overs against our right-handers and that's where they were one-up against us."

The Chepauk track had offered an average turn of 1.8 degrees in the first innings, but that number jumped up to 3.3 degrees in the second, according to the host broadcaster. SRH had left out their main spinners, Vijayakanth Vijayakanth and Mayank Markande, for this knockout game. But Shahbaz Ahmed, who was subbed in as an Impact Player more for his batting than bowling, combined with Abhishek Sharma for figures of 8-0-47-5.

Aiden Markram also found sharp turn in the only over that he bowled. Yashasvi Jaiswal reverse-swept the first ball he faced from Shahbaz to the shorter off-side boundary, but later in the same over, he holed out for 42 off 21 balls. SRH then matched up their left-arm spinners with RR's right-hander heavy middle-order to damage the chase. Kumar Sangakkara, RR's director of cricket, echoed Samson's comments, suggesting their batters should've shown more intent and game-awareness to throw Shahbaz and Abhishek off their lengths and lines. "I think we've got to be a lot more clinical in our chases and these games are not won quite easily," Sangakkara said at his post-match press conference.



Sanju Samson

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BASS WITH HIS LATEST
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MCQUEEN SHOWS NOTHING
AT ALL... BASS (2024), A NEW
INSTALLATION, FILLS A HUGE
BASEMENT SPACE IN HUDSON
VALLEY WITH CHANGING
SOUND AND LIGHT, MAKING
THE VISITOR EXPERIENCE THAT
WHICH IS OUT OF SIGHT

Artist and filmmaker Steve McQueen specialises in the kinds of lengthy shots that brand themselves upon your brain: a house that nearly falls onto a person, the Statue of Liberty filmed from a whirling helicopter, the attempted lynching of a Black man shot via long take. But no longer does McQueen seem so interested in creating images like those.

Occupied City (2023), his four-and-a-half-hour documentary about Amsterdam during the Holocaust, seems most telling about his priorities right now. In this film, a narrator outlines the disenfranchisement of Jews across the city, but McQueen's footage of the present-day Dutch capital never testifies to what is described.

His camera drifts through apartments, down museum corridors, and across canals. More often than not, he doesn't show us anything of much interest. At a time when images of police brutality and suffering have become pervasive, McQueen has moved away from representing violence altogether.

With his latest work, he shows us nothing at all. McQueen has parted ways with moving images entirely for Bass (2024), a new installation that fills the 30,000-square-foot basement of Dia:Beacon in the Hudson Valley with sound and light. The only objects on view are 60 boxes hung on the ceiling that slowly change their hue, turning the space a succession of vibrant colours, from the retina-burning red of a horror movie to the orange glow of a sunset.

Sound, not sight

The title of Bass is the giveaway: the focus is sound, not sight. The sounds were produced by five musicians, all belonging to the African diaspora, who performed together in Dia's columned basement this past January. McQueen was there to act as conductor, not that these musicians really needed it - mainly, they just improvised. He has presented all 189 minutes of their music largely unedited.

This quintet - Marcus Miller, Aston Barrett Jr, Mamadou Kouyate, Laura-Simone Martin, and Meshell Ndegeocello - appears to have played as a unified whole, not as five soloists. It is difficult, for example, to discern which sounds were produced by Kouyate, playing a West African instrument called a *ngoni*, and which were produced by Miller, a bassist who's worked with many jazz greats. Together, the musicians have created a symphony of rumbles, bowed strings, and plaintive hums, some of which McQueen has arrayed across space so that they appear to echo across this vast gallery.

The relationship between the music and the lightboxes is oblique. Sometimes, colouristic shifts and sonic digressions sync to form associations. To my mind, a transition from deep blue to that burning red seemed to induce a horror-like state. Harsh knocking noises and aggressive pizzicato started to pour out of speakers overhead. The sounds continued until red faded to orange.

That, however, is an exceptional instance in this elegant installation. Most of the time, the music is set to a low simmer, with the sounds of fingers running across frets and the roll

of bass playing whether the space is lit neon green, lush fuchsia, or haunting azure.

Inner warmth

These hues recall the ones emitted by the Dan Flavin sculptures upstairs; the squarish, factory-made look of the lightboxes owes something to pieces by Donald Judd and his ilk. There can be no doubt that McQueen is situating Bass within the history of Minimal-

ism, the movement that has provided the backbone of Dia's collection. Yet whereas the Minimalists of the 1960s and '70s prized austerity and order, McQueen's latest contains an inner warmth. In that way, it's closer to another recent installation that showed in this basement, Carl Craig's more maximal *Party/After-Party* (2020), a light-and-sound spectacle that had the feeling of a wild night's final hours.

What is Bass about? The work is abstract, but McQueen seems to have had concrete ideas on his mind. He told the *New York Times* that he'd been thinking of the Middle Passage as a state of 'limbo', and that he views Black people as being 'post-apocalyptic'. Maybe that second remark explains the vacant, semi-abandoned look of the Dia basement in this artist's hands.

Invisible histories

There is no one-to-one relationship: Bass does not simulate the hull of a ship ferrying enslaved people across the Atlantic, nor does it even feature representations of anything or anyone at all. If Bass is in some way connected to the Middle Passage, McQueen has approached the carnage that happened along the way using the same method he applied to the atrocities of the Holocaust in *Occupied City*: by not depicting it at all.

His reasons for doing so may be similar to those of many artists in the current Whitney Biennial, a show of art that deals with racism and other

forms of prejudice without representing them. Perhaps McQueen, like those artists, rightfully assumes that we know enough about the barbarities of slavery and sees no reason to re-infect trauma by depicting them once more. (He already did that anyway in *12 Years a Slave*, his 2013 Oscar-winning film adapted, with a questionable degree of historical accuracy, from Solomon Northup's memoir.) Perhaps, too, McQueen is suggesting that painful histories live on in ways that cannot be visualised, especially when those in power have been successful in expunging them from public memory.

And when that happens, invisible histories are spun into sound - stories get told and retold, songs record events that books do not, abstract musical tones recall clear memories. Bass is a sonic work about that which cannot be seen. Hear its hushed cacophony, feel its sounds vibrate in your chest, and find what exists out of sight.

(Courtesy: artnews.com)



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KING CHARLES' FIRST OFFICIAL PORTRAIT

The first official portrait of Charles III since his coronation was unveiled on at Buckingham Palace a week ago.

Created by British artist Jonathan Yeo, the painting portrays the king holding a sword and wearing the uniform of the Welsh Guards, which blends into a matching red backdrop. A butterfly flies above his right shoulder.

The unveiling ceremony took place three months after the king revealed his cancer diagnosis; a few weeks ago, he announced his return to public duties.

"Much like the butterfly I've painted hovering over his shoulder, this portrait has evolved as the subject's role in our public life has transformed," writes Yeo in an Instagram post. "I do my best to capture the life experiences and humanity etched into any individual sitter's face, and I hope that is what I have achieved in this portrait."

He has been working on the painting since June 2021, roughly two years before Charles' coronation. The king sat for Yeo on four occasions, according to a statement from Buckingham Palace. The artist also used other drawings and photographs for reference.

Previously, Yeo has painted prominent figures such as Rupert Murdoch, Tony Blair and Malala Yousafzai. The artist has also created portraits of Charles' father - Prince Philip, and his wife - Queen Camilla.

The intense red colour that covers the majority of the canvas marks a departure from the customs of royal portraiture. On his website, Yeo writes that he wanted to inject a dynamic, contemporary jolt into the genre with its uniformly powerful hue ... providing a modern contrast to more traditional depictions.

RED FORTE

CHARLES III UNVEILED HIS FIRST OFFICIAL PORTRAIT AS KING - SOME FIND IT DISTINGUISHED, OTHERS FEEL IT IS QUITE DISTURBING. THE ARTIST JUSTIFIES THE USE OF THE INTENSE RED COLOUR IN THE BACKDROP AS IT SIGNIFIES THE CHANGE IN HIS DEMEANOUR AND HIS FORTE AS AN ENVIRONMENT ACTIVIST

The king saw the painting when it was about halfway done. Yeo tells BBC News' Katie Razzall that Charles was mildly surprised by the strong colour, but otherwise he seemed to be smiling approvingly. He adds that when Camilla saw the portrait, she said, "Yes, you've got him."

Outside of Buckingham Palace, the 8.5 foot by 6.5 foot framed artwork has been met with mixed reviews.

When BBC News asked members of the public for their reactions, some were taken aback by the 'very red' colour, calling the portrait 'quite disturbing', evoking imagery like a massacre or flames. Others approved of the modern approach, calling it 'nice and distinguished'. One woman remarked, "I'm a big fan of red."

Meanwhile, some critics have been quite harsh. "Charles' face is like a disembodied specter of death floating between violent brushstrokes," writes the Cut's Danielle Cohen. The Washington Post's Sebastian Smee calls it "confused, obsequious, oversized and unaccountably frightening."

Charles' portrait will hang in London's financial district at Drapers' Hall among those of other British monarchs, including George III and Queen Victoria. The butterfly above the king's shoulder was Charles' idea. It represents his transition from prince to king and his environmental activism.

Yeo tells the New York Times that he noticed physical differences in Charles throughout their four sittings together.

"Age and experience were suiting him," says Yeo. "His demeanour definitely changed after he became king."

(Courtesy: smithsonianmag.com)



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