



Wakan Village to get cable car, new road

Our Correspondent
Muscat

South Batinah has announced plans to improve access to Wakan Village, situated in Wadi Mistal in the wilayat of Nakhal, with development of a new road and cable car project. The initiative aims to bolster tourism and showcase the natural beauty of the region.

South Batinah Governor's Office has floated a tender, inviting bids from companies specialising in urban and civil engineering consultancy, architecture and project management to design the road and cable car system. Interested firms, holding valid registration with the Tender Board, are encouraged to submit proposals. Technical specifications and conditions for the project

The project will revitalise tourism. There is need for better access to the village, which currently requires a vehicle with four-wheel drive

NASSER SALIM

ject are available on the official website.

The tendering process, emphasising support for the local economy and employment, will prioritise bids that demonstrate a commitment to Omanisation and the use of national products.

Deadline for tender document acquisition is set for April 19, with final submission deadline on May 9.

Tusker Engineering Consultancy, Renardet SA & Partners, and Modon Engineering have already expressed interest in the project.

It has garnered positive reactions from local residents and tourism enthusiasts. Abdullah al Riyami, a resident of Wakan, highlighted the potential impact of a cable car on tourism, drawing attention to the village's mild summer and cool winter temperatures, and its rich agricultural landscape.

"The village is known for its agricultural terraces, cultivating a variety of fruits such as grapes, pomegranates, apricots, peaches and figs, besides legumes," Riyami said, adding that Wakan's peak tourist season aligns with its fruit harvesting period, particularly apricots.

Adventurer Nasser Salim underscored the importance of the project in revitalising tourism, stressing the need for better access to the village, which currently requires a vehicle with four-wheel drive.

He also highlighted the appeal of an existing hiking trail connecting Wakan Village to Jabal Akhdar to outdoor enthusiasts.

The new project follows directives from His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to develop Wakan, aiming to provide essential infrastructure to leverage its tourist potential. With over 32,000 visitors of various nationalities in 2023 (Ministry of Heritage and Tourism data), the project is expected to further boost Wakan Village as a prominent tourist landmark in Oman.

SAYYID ASAAD BIDS FAREWELL TO CHINESE ENVOY



On behalf of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, Sayyid Asaad bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for International Relations and Cooperation Affairs and Personal Representative of His Majesty the Sultan, received Li Lingbing, Ambassador of People's Republic of China to the Sultanate of Oman, in his office on Tuesday to bid her farewell at the end of her tour of duty. The ambassador thanked His Majesty the Sultan, the Government and the Omani people for the support extended to her during her tour of duty in the sultanate (ONA)

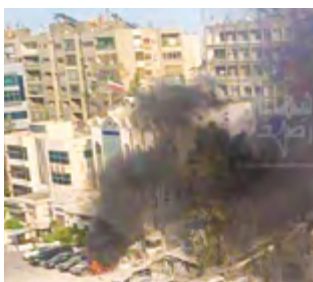
Oman condemns Damascus bombing

Muscat - Oman's Foreign Ministry has condemned and denounced a bombing that targeted the Iranian consulate in the Syrian capital Damascus.

In an official statement, the ministry said the bombing was a violation of Syria's sovereignty and all international diplomatic laws and statutes, while calling for the protection and preservation of diplomatic and consular missions.

The ministry stressed the need to stop the escalation in the region and reject aggression and other actions that threaten security and stability, and conveyed condolences to the families of the victims while wishing a speedy recovery to the injured.

On Tuesday, Moscow called for a UN Security Council meeting



Revolutionary Guard Corps, elite units of the Iranian armed forces, Brig Gen Mohammad Reza Zahedi and his deputy, Gen Mohammad Hadi Haji Rahimi, along with five other military advisers.

The Iranian mission to the UN described the Israeli air strike on the consulate in Damascus a 'cowardly terrorist act' and a 'blatant violation of the UN Charter', and called on the Security Council to condemn the strike and take action.

Iran and Syria accused Israel of orchestrating the attack, with Tehran warning of a 'serious response', and the Iran-backed Lebanese group Hezbollah saying the strike will be met with 'punishment and revenge'. Iran also said it would hold the US answerable due to its support of Israel.

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02 MUSCAT DAILY WEDNESDAY, APRIL 03, 2024	PRAYER TIMINGS	Fajr	Duhr	Asr	Maghrib	Isha
		4.41am	12.15pm	3.43pm	6.28pm	7.40pm

Ramadan inspires community spirit, volunteerism

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Volunteering is a meaningful way to contribute to society, but it takes on a more profound meaning during Ramadan, the month of giving and charity. Jihad Khalid al Farsi, the 27-year-old leader of Basmatna Ghair Team in Quriyat, shared with *Muscat Daily* the importance of voluntary efforts during Ramadan. "This time offers an opportunity for social contribution and reinforcing community bonds," Farsi said. His team is active in campaigns aimed at raising awareness on reducing food wastage, managing surplus food and ensuring it reaches those in need. It also distributes seedlings across Muscat governorate advocating the expansion of green spaces. Farsi's team is dedicated to promoting environmental consciousness, urging the youth of Oman to engage in initiatives that address ecological is-



I urge Omani youth to actively participate in volunteer work, fostering a more compassionate and united society

JIHAD KHALID AL FARSI

sues, champion recycling and minimise unnecessary consumption. "I urge Omani youth to actively participate in volunteer work, fostering a more compassionate and united society," he added. Adel al Ghailani, leader of Sur Volunteer Team, highlighted the enriching experience of volunteering, noting its impact on personal well-being and satisfaction, and the sense of belonging in communities. He views volunteer work as a means for youth to hone their skills and invest their leisure time in contributing positively to their community. Emphasising Ramadan's significance as an opportune time for Muslims to take part in voluntary activities, thus fulfilling the needs of the faithful and enhancing social cohesion, Ali Mohammed al Amri informed that Shinas Charity Team, which he leads, focuses on distributing iftar meals among Omanis and non-Omanis alike and supports orphaned children.

Fawzi Abu Hadid, imam of a mosque in Muscat, underlined the importance of voluntarism during Ramadan, citing it as an ideal time for charitable acts. Referring to the teachings of Prophet Mohammed (PBUH), he said, "Ramadan is a sacred period when the doors of Paradise are opened, the gates of Hell are closed, and devils are chained, creating a conducive environment for good deeds and volunteering." He also emphasised the value of sincerity in these efforts, advising individuals to seek fulfillment in divine satisfaction over worldly recognition or praise. "The motivation should be for spiritual reward rather than worldly gains." These efforts and initiatives highlight the impact of volunteer work during Ramadan, not only in meeting immediate community needs but also in fostering a deeper sense of unity, personal growth and environmental responsibility.



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Dakhliyah Municipality holds expo to support productive families

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Dakhliyah Municipality, in collaboration with the Omani Women's Association in the wilayat of Adam, organised an exhibition on Monday aimed at supporting productive families during Ramadan. The two-day exhibition, with participation of 20 productive families, featured various sections, including a children's play area and displays for perfumes



and incense, clothing, traditional foods and luxury items. Fawzi bin Sulaiman al Omari, Director of Adam Municipality, informed that the objective of the event was to support entrepreneurs and productive fam-

ilies from different areas of the wilayat. Organising such events on a regular basis helps familiarise community members with the products, facilitating marketing and promoting entrepreneurship to sustain livelihoods. Omari emphasised the municipality's commitment to providing all necessary support for the success of the exhibition, which included various activities, programmes and events all aimed at enriching economic activities while also entertaining visitors.



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Qatar expands LNG fleet with deals for 19 new vessels

Doha, Qatar - QatarEnergy signed long-term time charter party (TCP) agreements with four international shipowners for the operation of 19 new, ultra-modern conventional size LNG vessels as part of the second ship-owner tender under QatarEnergy's historic LNG fleet expansion programme.

The agreements cater for the operation of six vessels by CMES LNG Carrier Investment, six vessels by Shandong Marine Energy (Singapore), and three vessels by MISC Berhad; all of which are being constructed at Samsung Heavy Industries in South Korea.

The remaining four vessels will be operated by a joint venture of Kawasaki Kisen Kaisha (K-Line) and Hyundai Glovis and are being constructed at Hanwha Ocean (formerly Daewoo Shipbuilding & Marine Engineering) also in South Korea.

Saad Sherida al-Kaabi, Qatar's Minister of State for Energy Affairs, the President and CEO of QatarEnergy signed four separate sets of agreements on Monday.

Commenting on this occasion, Kaabi said, "These signings form a significant milestone in QatarEnergy's LNG fleet expansion programme, as it marks the conclusion of the conventional sizes vessels portion of programme, bringing the total num-



Saad Sherida al-Kaabi (middle) signed four separate sets of agreements

New ships will support our expanded LNG production capacity from North Field in Qatar and Golden Pass in US, while also meeting our long-term fleet replacement requirements

SAAD SHERIDA AL-KAABI

ber of ships for which we have signed TCPs to 104 vessels, a massive undertaking that is the largest shipbuilding and leasing program ever in the history of the industry. These ships will support our expanded LNG production capacity from the North Field in Qatar and Golden Pass in the US, while also meeting our

long-term fleet replacement requirements."

Kaabi added "We are very proud to strengthen our collaboration with these esteemed shipowners. And, we have full confidence that the 19 vessels will be operated with the latest and most advanced safety, technical and environmental stan-

dards. This is an important undertaking that will enable QatarEnergy to continue delivering cleaner energy to the world safely and reliably."

Since 2022, QatarEnergy has signed a series of TCPs for the long-term charter and operation of 104 conventional LNG vessels, as part of its historic LNG fleet expansion programme. This initiative will support QatarEnergy's expanding LNG production capacity from the North Field LNG expansion and Golden Pass LNG export projects, as well as meeting its long-term fleet replacement requirements.

As many as 43 ships out of the 104 will be chartered by

QatarEnergy's affiliate QatarEnergy Trading, marking it the single largest one-step ship acquisition programme of any single entity in the history of the LNG industry, and placing QatarEnergy and consequently QatarEnergy Trading firmly on the road to becoming a leading global LNG trader.

The 19 conventional LNG vessels, part of the agreements, have a capacity of 174,000 cubic meters each and will be equipped with the latest LNG shipping technologies, embodying QatarEnergy's ongoing endeavors to achieve optimal fuel efficiency and reduce carbon emissions.

Oil prices rise on growing tensions in Middle East

London, UK - Oil prices increased on Tuesday, with data showing strong economic activity in the US and escalated geopolitical tensions in the Middle East, where the majority of global oil resources are located.

International benchmark Brent crude traded at \$88.40 per barrel at 11.28 a.m. local time (0828 GMT), a 1.1% rise from the closing price of \$87.42 per barrel in the previous trading session.

The US benchmark West Texas Intermediate (WTI) traded at \$84.77 per barrel at the same time, a 1.3% increase from the previous session that closed at \$83.71 per barrel.

Oil prices spiked up after data released on Monday showed that the manufacturing industry in the US expanded for the first time after a 16-month contraction.

According to the US Institute of Supply Management's (ISM) Manufacturing Purchasing Managers Index (PMI), the manufacturing sector in the world's biggest oil-consuming country exceeded market expectations with a value of 50.3 in March, signaling strong oil demand.

Major central banks worldwide, in preparation for interest rate cuts, also supported higher oil prices. Experts forecast that interest rate cuts will boost economic activity and demand in all sectors, including the oil market.

Meanwhile, Israel's sustained attacks on the Gaza Strip, which are carried out in defiance of a UN Security Council resolution calling for a cease-fire, are exacerbating tensions in the Middle East.

Furthermore, a missile strike targeting the Iranian Consulate in the Syrian capital, Damascus, resulting in the killing of a top commander of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and six other officers, heightened tensions in the region that hosts busy energy supply routes.

Early Monday, General Mohammed Reza Zahedi, a senior commander of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps' (IRGC) Quds Force in Syria and Lebanon, was reportedly killed in a strike that destroyed the Iranian consulate building next to the Iranian Embassy, according to the state-run IRNA news agency.

Anadolu Agency



Global renewable energy capacity up 52% in 5 years

Ankara, Turkey - The capacity of renewable energy projects reached 3,869 gigawatts last year, an increase of 52% over the last five years, the latest data from the International Renewable Energy Agency's Renewable Capacity Statistics 2024 report reveals.

The rise in renewable capacity was fueled by the growing trend toward clean energy sources worldwide as countries aim to distance themselves from environmentally harmful fossil fuels.

The share of renewable energy in electricity capacity reached 43.2% last year, rising by 8.6% compared to 2019.

Between 2019 and 2023, solar power plants experienced the biggest increase among renewable energy sources.

In the last five years, installed solar capacity rose by 138.5% to 1,419 gigawatts, followed by wind power plants, which recorded a 63.5% rise from 2019 levels. The total installed power of global wind power plants reached 1,017 gigawatts last year.

Biomass power plants in-



creased their capacity by 20% from 2019 to 2023, reaching 150 gigawatts, while geothermal power plants hit 15 gigawatts last year, up by 7.1% from 2019.

The capacity of hydroelectric power plants in 2023 increased by 6.4% over the five-year period, reaching 1,268 gigawatts.

The source with the smallest change in terms of installed capacity was marine energy. This source, which encompasses electricity produced from waves, tidal events, and sea winds, saw a marginal growth rate of 0.2%. Half of the marine energy projects with 527 megawatts of in-

stalled capacity are located in Asia, and 45% are in Europe.

The biggest growth in renewable energy capacity was seen in Asia at 74%, followed by Oceania countries at 56% and European countries at 37%.

Over the same period, renewable capacity grew by 36% in North America and by 29% in South America, while capacity growth was registered in Africa at 23%.

In the last five years, total off-grid renewable energy capacity has increased by 36% to 12,754 megawatts.

Anadolu Agency

UK's technical recession raises doubts about Sunak's economic claims

London, UK - The UK officially entered a technical recession, defined as two consecutive quarters of negative gross domestic product (GDP) growth, at the end of last year, due to higher inflation, reduced external demand and record interest rates.

The economic slump has prompted swathes of criticism from opposition politicians, notably Shadow Chancellor Rachel Reeves, who said that Prime Minister Rishi Sunak "has broken his promise to grow the economy and left Britain in recession with working people paying the price," according to Yahoo Finance.

"The Conservatives cannot claim that their plan is working or that they have turned the corner on more than 14 years of economic failure," she said.

Ahead of the general election, the prime minister has been trying to reassure consumers and Tory MPs alike that the economy is recovering, mainly based on private sector activity bouncing back lately.

This technical recession is the first one since the first half of 2020, when the UK economy



UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak

Ahead of general election, Rishi Sunak has been trying to reassure consumers and Tory MPs alike that economy is recovering, mainly based on private sector activity bouncing back lately

was still reeling under the shock of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The final estimate for the quarter-on-quarter GDP report for the last quarter of 2023 was released on Thursday, clocking in at -0.3%, according to the Office

for National Statistics. This was in line with analyst forecasts, although a step down from the last quarter's -0.1%.

Falling exports were one of the key reasons for this dampened number, as well as changes in in-

ventory. Household consumption also fell somewhat by 0.1%, versus -0.9% in the previous quarter. This was largely due to decreased spending on household goods and services, culture and recreation and footwear and clothing.

However, fixed investment increased by 0.9%, stabilising after two quarters of reduction, mainly due to investments in transport and buildings. Government consumption also inched up 0.1% for the third quarter in a row, mainly because of increased defence and public administration spending.

The year-on-year GDP report for Q4 2023 came in at -0.2%, in line with analyst expectations, but down from the last quarter's 0.2%.

In the US, the final estimate for the quarter-on-quarter GDP for Q4 2023 clocked in at 3.4%, which was more than analyst expectations of 3.2%, according to the US Bureau of Economic Analysis. However, it was also a sharp reduction from the previous quarter's 4.9%.

[Source: Euronews.com]

US plans 131 projects in carbon capture and storage field by 2040

Washington, US - The US continues to lead the field in carbon capture and storage with both the number of active facilities and the 131 projects it plans to implement by 2040, the latest data from Global Carbon Capture and Storage Institute reports reveals.

Having established the world's first carbon capture and storage facility in 1972, it has continued unabated since then. Last year, it increased the number of planned projects and those under construction by 73 compared to 2022, figures

Carbon emissions resulting from thermal power plants, factory chimneys and fossil fuel use are currently stored in 43 facilities in various parts of the world



compiled by Anadolu from Global Carbon Capture and Storage Institute shows.

Carbon emissions resulting from thermal power plants, factory chimneys and fossil fuel

use are currently stored in 43 facilities in various parts of the world.

Approximately 65mn tonnes of carbon emissions are prevented from reaching the atmosphere annually due to these 43 facilities worldwide.

With 15 facilities in operation, the US ranks first in the world, followed by China with 12 active facilities, Canada with seven facilities, and Norway with two facilities.

The other seven carbon capture and storage facilities are located in Hungary, Brazil, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Australia, Qatar and Iceland.

With the development of

carbon capture and storage technologies, countries aim to reduce global emissions and limit the air temperature to 1.5 degrees, in line with the Paris Agreement.

There are currently 21 facilities under construction globally, which are expected to be completed by 2027.

Of the projects under construction, seven are in the US and three are in Norway, while China, Qatar and Iceland each have two facilities being built.

The remaining five facilities are still under construction in

Australia, Malaysia, the Netherlands, Canada, and Oman.

Once complete, these projects will have a total annual carbon emission capture and storage capacity of 28.9 million tons.

There are now 256 projects in several countries that are in the development stage and have a completion date of 2040. The top three countries with the most projects in the planning phase are the US with 124, the UK with 38, and Canada with 19 projects.

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MHD Automobiles presents unmatched Ramadan offers

MHD Automobiles, distributors of the iconic Stellantis brands - Jeep, RAM, Dodge, and Alfa Romeo, announces their exclusive Ramadan offers for customers.

With this limited-time offer, customers can enjoy unparalleled benefits on a wide range of vehicles, making it the perfect time to drive home in a new car. The offers vary from model to model, a press release said.

To make owning a new vehicle more affordable than ever before, MHD Automobiles offers the unique option for customers to pay a 50% downpayment and the balance 50% in 12 months with 0% Interest. This is subject to credit approval from the selected bank/finance company.

For added peace of mind, customers purchasing select models will receive service packages depending on the model. Customers purchasing Jeep Wrangler, Dodge Charger, and Challenger models will receive 3 years or 60,000 Kms service package. Similarly, Jeep Grand Cherokee, Grand Wagoneer, Dodge Durango, and the RAM 1500 range buyers will benefit



from 5 years or 100,000km service package. The Alfa Romeo models come with 5 years or 120,000km service package.

All Jeep, Dodge, and RAM models will be covered by 5 years or 100,000km warranty,

while Alfa Romeo models get 7 years/200,000km warranty.

Additionally, customers will benefit from 5 years or 100,000km roadside assistance, complimentary first-year insurance and registration.

Visitors to the showroom stand a chance to win one of two iPhones through the 'Walk In & Win' raffle, further adding excitement to the Ramadan campaign.

"We are pleased to offer these exclusive Ramadan benefits to

our valued customers," said Mohsin Hani al Bahrani, CEO of MHD Automobiles. "This campaign not only provides unbeatable value but also reflects our commitment to delivering exceptional customer satisfaction."

ahlibank launches Iftar initiative

As part of its ongoing Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives, and under its 'Ahlicares' wing, Ahlibank has recently distributed Iftar meal boxes in collaboration with Oman Food Bank to the students residing in university and college hostels and individuals from different regions during the month of Ramadan.

The initiative took place on March 27 and targeted the Wilayat of Bowshar. The process was carried out by Ahli cares volunteers, ardent supporters of Ahlibank's vision and CSR initiatives, a press release said.

Under the theme of 'Month of Giving', the main focus of this year's CSR Ramadan initiative was students living in hostels. The Ahli cares volunteers distributed Iftar food boxes to the students. Over the years, the Ahli cares team has implemented a variety of initiatives that assisted the lives of many individuals. Most notably, Ahlibank's CSR initiatives have had a profound impact on the local community, thanks to the continuous efforts of the Ahli cares team.

Jumana al Hashmi, head of Marketing and Corporate Communications at Ahlibank, said, "Being a leading institution

within the banking sector, our responsibility is not limited to providing traditional banking services, but it extends to supporting all segments of society. Therefore, we are pleased to provide Iftar to students who live away from their families in hostels, in that we can share the spirit of giving during the holy month. With the support of our Ahli cares team, a team committed to volunteer work and taking impactful initiatives in its stride, we will be able to achieve our CSR goals."

In keeping with its values of sharing and caring for others, Ahli cares underscores Ahlibank's commitment towards serving the community. Over time, the Ahlicares team has carried out many initiatives, such as the Iftar meal distribution in Ramadan, and, previously, the blood donation campaign. Ahli cares' CSR initiatives complement the government's socio-economic development efforts, and contribute to achieving the goals outlined in Oman Vision 2040.

The Ahli cares initiative plays a prominent role in organising and implementing a variety of volunteer programmes that aim to support national projects and initiatives.

Informatica launches Saudi Arabia's first AI data platform

Informatica (NYSE: INFA), the enterprise cloud data management leader, launched its AI-powered Intelligent Data Management Cloud (IDMC) in Saudi Arabia, a first for the Kingdom.

The investment includes establishing a new Point of Delivery (PoD) in Riyadh, and reflects a commitment to support local, scalable, cloud-first data management services. The move further strengthens Informatica's presence in the Middle East, following the launch of its first regional PoD in Abu Dhabi, UAE in 2023, a press release said.

The investment underpins Informatica's commitment to furthering the Saudi government's Vision 2030, which includes digitally empowering all sectors of the economy. Aligned with the leadership's ambitions to adopt a cloud-first policy, the new PoD launch will help expedite the shift of government organisations from traditional IT systems to a secure, cloud-based alternative.

With reports from the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology that the cloud computing sector is ex-



Jitesh Ghai



Yasser Shawky

pected to double in size over the next three years, adding USD 13.3bn to the country's GDP, the move is set to help transform Riyadh into a data-driven state that can further economic and digital growth.

By establishing a regional PoD in Riyadh, Informatica will be able to better support local organisations with its cloud data management platform in line with local regulations.

Jitesh Ghai, chief product officer, Informatica, said, "Saudi Arabia is fast making headway on its journey to become a technology hub for the Middle East and is creating a solid cloud foundation to realise its Vision 2030 ambitions. By having a significant cloud, data, and AI pres-

ence in the Kingdom, we will be providing organisations with an in-country AI-powered data infrastructure to run their cloud-based technology solutions. This can enable them to unlock the value of their data while ensuring that it remains secure, well-governed and in region. We're proud to help the Kingdom become a global leader in digital technologies, catering to the fast-growing demand for cloud services across the Middle East and beyond."

Yasser Shawky, vice president for Emerging Markets at Informatica, added, "Today, we have reached a major milestone for the Kingdom - launching Saudi Arabia's first ever AI-powered intelligent Data Management."

Visa confers Achievement Award on BankDhofar for using SoftPOS

BankDhofar has been honoured by Visa with an award for its outstanding achievement in enabling Visa's Tap-to-Phone technology - known as SoftPOS.

BankDhofar's dedication to implementing and promoting this innovative solution has not only enhanced the digital payment landscape in Oman but has also empowered local businesses to thrive in an increasingly digital economy, a press release said.

Soft POS, or Software Point of Sale, is a paradigm shift in the way merchants handle transactions. Unlike traditional POS systems that rely on dedicated hardware, Soft POS leverages software applications running on android smartphones there by eliminating operational costs to the merchants. Any android smartphone can be used as a payment terminal and customers can get their receipts via an SMS, thereby reducing the carbon footprint.

The solution gives businesses access to a host of added benefits that include contactless cards, 24x7 access to history,



statements and reconciliations, direct push notifications for alerts, web links and in-history adverts, integration with loyalty by facilitating coupons and point redemption, pre-transaction controls on the amount, frequency, and time restrictions, chargeback resolutions by flagging transactions, and assistance with calculating and recording

taxes as well as tip amounts with transactions.

Bilal Faiz Muhammad al Raiisi, AGM - Cards and Bancassurance at BankDhofar, expressed the institution's delight in being honoured with an award from Visa. This accolade recognises BankDhofar's dedication to fostering digital adoption in harmony with Oman Vision 2040.

The bank's Soft POS solutions have seen widespread acceptance among a diverse range of merchants, including home-based businesses, delivery services, gas delivery agents and taxi drivers, and "This award underscores our ongoing commitment to deliver innovative, convenient, and secure payment options that address the changing needs of our clients and play a pivotal role in the economic development of Oman," he said.

Manish Gautam, Visa's country manager for Oman, said, "According to Visa's recent Value of Acceptance survey, 65% of small businesses in Oman have reported an increase in both revenue and customer traffic since they began accepting digital payments. This highlights the significant impact that acceptance solutions like Visa's Tap to Phone can have on business growth and competitiveness. We are therefore delighted to recognize BankDhofar's efforts in bringing Tap to Phone to local businesses and driving the digital transformation of Oman's retail sector."

Lulu's 'convoy of goodness' strikes a chord across sultanate

Lulu group has launched the 'Convoy of Goodness' campaign to distribute special Ramadan grocery kits to deserving families, reflecting the spirit of sharing and caring in its true sense during the holy month of Ramadan.

Lulu's Convoy of Goodness is travelling across major governorates in Oman to distribute Ramadan essentials to families in need. The campaign is part of Lulu's continued commitment to engage in several charitable, humanitarian and community activities and create a positive impact on the community, a press release said.

The campaign, which is a continuation of the initiative that Lulu had started last year, will run throughout Ramadan. By launching such a move, Lulu aims to foster the spirit of unity



and relationship with the community as well as contribute to instilling the concept of sharing and caring during Ramadan.

Lulu has joined hands with N7Z (Nahnu) volunteer team to implement this charity campaign. The volunteers have been travelling across the city as well as the remote areas of Oman, distributing Ramadan kits. The kits contain food provisions and groceries needed for a whole month for an entire family during Ramadan. The convoy will cover governorates such as Muscat, Dhofar, and Sharqiyah.

Speaking about the initiative, Shabeer K A, regional director - Oman stated, "We are happy to launch this initiative and be an active part of the community. By doing so, we also highlight the importance of sharing."

Toyota announces next raffle draw winner

Saud Bahwan Automotive recently announced one more winner of the Toyota Crown in Oman's most popular automotive campaign – Toyota's Biggest Excitement.

Salim Saleh Saif al Wahaibi from Muscat, who purchased a Land Cruiser 3.5 TT VX 7 Prestige, was the winner of one of the 5 Toyota Crown Raffle draw, a press release said.

Customers purchasing their favourite Toyota vehicle can during Toyota's Biggest Excitement Campaign look forward to a chance to enter the raffle draw and win one from 5 Toyota Crown cars and avail exclusive benefits including Service from 3 years/30,000km up to 10 Years/100,000km (whichever is earlier), insurance 1 year and free registration.

Apart from that customers can also avail attractive instalments. The campaign is valid from March 3 up to May 1 (Prospective buyers may be advised that the benefits vary between model variants, model year and manufacturing year. EMI calculated are for base mod-



My family has been loyal customers and that has made me experience everything about Toyota, including the inspiring customer service extended to customers by Saud Bahwan Automotive

SALIM SALEH SAIF AL WAHAIBI

els with 20% down payment for 10 years. Loan approval is based on the sole discretion of banks.

Salim said, I am extremely happy to win this beauty – the Toyota Crown. It is definitely something I will keep with me for a long time. Since my younger days, I have been a fan of Toyota. My family has been their loyal customers and that has made me experience everything about Toyota, including the inspiring customer service extended to customers by Saud Bahwan Automotive. I too have always had pleasant experiences with Toyota here in Oman and for me Toyota will always be on top of my mind whenever it comes to buying a car."

The Toyota Crown is built around the Toyota New Global Architecture (TNGA-K) platform. The new Crown comes exclusively with two environment-friendly power trains.

The first hybrid electric powertrain consists of a front electric motor and Toyota's first-ever 2.4ltr inline four-cylinder turbo engine with All Wheel Drive, paired with direct shift six-speed automatic transmission with a combined power of 340 HP and 40.7 Kg.m torque.

The second hybrid electric powertrain consists of two electric motors and a 2.5ltr petrol engine. The hybrid-electric system, paired with an Electric Continuously Variable Transmission achieves variable lowest fuel efficiency.

Souq Al Wathbah witnesses vibrant trade

This year's edition of Al Wathbah Ramadan Souq, organised by the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority and Bank Muscat, witnessed a significant influx of visitors taking advantage of the competitive prices on the products such as clothing, food, perfumes and other products.

Organised from March 28-30, at the Bank Muscat head office, Airport Heights, the Souq saw a participation of more than 150 entrepreneurs and owners of start-up and small enterprises. This year edition of Souq Al Wathbah was inaugurated in the presence of Ilham Murtadha al Hamaid, general manager - Corporate Banking, Bank Muscat, and a number of officials from both institutions, invitees and



visitors, a press release said.

The three-day annual market comes within the framework of Bank Muscat's social corporate responsibility programmes and complements the ongoing partnership with the SME Development Authority to support this important sector. It represented an opportunity for entrepreneurs to promote their own products, allowing the visitors to shop from a wide range of purchases especially with Eid Al Fitr around the corner.

Ibrahim Khamis Salim al Bulushi, senior assistant general manager – SME, Bank Muscat, indicated the significance of the partnership between the private and government institutions to

support the SMEs, which represent an essential pillar of the national economy and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

He said: "Such initiatives play an important role in supporting SMEs and start-ups. We are delighted about the Souq's success shown in the big turnout and participation of the various businesses. I would like to extend thanks and gratitude to the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority for their support to this sector reflected in the annual programmes and initiatives. Bank Muscat will continue to adopt such initiatives aiming to enable entrepreneurs and SMEs and provide them with the appropriate platform to promote their products, in light of this ever-growing sector."



OAB launches corporate Internet Banking platform

In a significant leap forward for business online banking, Oman Arab Bank (OAB) has launched its innovative Corporate Internet Banking platform (CIB), designed to bolster government and corporate clients with financial management capabilities.

Unveiled during OAB's annual Merchant Event, which brought together over 700 industry leaders, this latest addition to OAB's corporate solutions aims to further foster a collaborative and supportive environment between the bank and the business community, a press release said.

The newly launched CIB platform offers significant advantages for businesses and business owners, focusing on enhancing financial management and operational efficiency. With key features including bulk payment processing, account reconciliation, card management, personalised dashboard and capable of handling Board resolutions, the platform enables businesses to make quicker and more informed financial decisions, contributing to improved performance and growth.

Moreover, it provides state-of-the-art security features such as encryption, multi factor authentication, transaction verification ensuring the safety and integrity of their transactions and information. This emphasis on operational efficiency, rapid decision-making, and security demonstrates OAB's dedication to empowering businesses with tools that are not only technologically advanced but also strategically focused on growth.

Sulaiman al Harthi, CEO of Oman Arab Bank, said, "Our new CIB Platform is a key milestone in our digital transformation journey. It underscores our belief in the power of partnerships, enabling us to deliver a solution that meets our clients' needs and drives shared growth."

Visa Everywhere initiative tasks fintech startups

Applications are now open in Oman for the Saudi Arabia, Oman and Bahrain edition of the 2024 Visa Everywhere Initiative (VEI), a global open innovation programme and competition that sees fintech startups pitch their solutions to solve tomorrow's payment and commerce challenges.

In addition to equity-free funding, VEI winners gain access and exposure to Visa's vast networks of partners in the banking, merchant, venture capital, and government sectors. The winners also benefit from receiving recognition from one of the world's most trusted and valuable brands, a press release said.

With applications open until April 22, this year's Saudi Arabia, Oman and Bahrain edition of VEI



will see an in-person competition for finalists from all three countries in mid-June in Riyadh. The winner will progress to a virtual Central and Eastern Europe, Middle East, and Africa (CEMEA) competition on July 17. The startup that wins at the CEMEA finale will participate in the global finale – competing against winners from Europe, Asia-Pacific, Latin America, and North America – at the TechCrunch Disrupt event in San Francisco on October 29.

For fintech participants in Oman, this year's edition of VEI brings back the Impact Prize,

which goes to a competitor who has innovated a solution that has a positive social impact on the communities it operates in. Examples include initiatives that boost financial inclusion, promote sustainability, or safeguard the environment. Last year, Saudi-based fintech Lamaa won the Impact Prize for providing SMBs with technological, financially inclusive embedded finance and payment solutions.

"The Visa Everywhere Initiative is a powerful platform that empowers and uplifts fintechs and entrepreneurs to showcase the most ground-breaking, impactful solutions solving tomorrow's challenges in the world of payments and commerce," said Manish Gautam, Visa's country manager for Oman.

Vodafone Oman lines up the stars for friendly football match

Stepping onto the football field to make a bigger difference, Vodafone Oman and Al Seeb Club put together an all-star line-up for a friendly match to accumulate even more steps for goodness.

Comprising of Vodafone employees, led by CEO Bader al Zidi and the 'Steps for Goodness' social media ambassadors, the Stars Team also included Omani football legends, Ali al Habsi, Emad al Hosni and Hassan Mudhafar, a press release said.



Taking home the Steps for Goodness Cup was the Stars Team with penalties win yet, the bigger win was when both teams collectively gathered the largest number of steps this week for Al Rahma Associations' Kiswat al Eid programme.

In its second year, Vodafone Oman's 'Steps for Goodness' has garnered even greater success, inviting people to join a healthy lifestyle this Ramadan by not only taking up walking for a good deed, but also enabling them to double the goodness through community activities and by listening to podcasts, all through the My Vodafone App.

The campaign has donated the funds on a weekly basis to people with special needs, Gaza relief aid, now, Eid donations for underprivileged families. The funds from the last week of Ramadan will provide emergency support for individuals who have fallen into financial crisis.

US President Biden to visit Baltimore bridge collapse site

Washington, D.C., US - President Joe Biden is set to visit Baltimore this Friday to survey the aftermath of the Francis Scott Key Bridge collapse, as announced by the White House on Monday, *The Hill* reported.

“We are with you Baltimore, and we will be there to get this done,” White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said while making the announcement. President Biden pledged to visit Baltimore, asserting his intention to do so alongside Maryland Governor Wes Moore. Following the early Tuesday morning collapse, Biden expressed his determination to arrive at the scene ‘as quickly as he can’.

Jean-Pierre emphasised Biden’s steadfast leadership in coordinating a comprehensive government response to the tragedy. She highlighted the collaborative efforts between Biden and Governor Moore aimed at reopening the affected port and initiating bridge reconstruction.

The collapse of the Francis Scott Key Bridge, situated on Interstate 695, occurred when the cargo ship Dali struck it around 1:30am last Tuesday, en route to Sri Lanka, according to *The Hill*. In a firm commitment to aid in



A file picture of the fallen Francis Scott Key Bridge in Baltimore, US

the reconstruction efforts, President Biden assured that the federal government would cover the costs. However, this stance faced opposition from conservative spending advocates. Notwithstanding, the Department of Transportation has allocated US\$16mn as an initial contribution, labelled by Jean-Pierre as a ‘down payment’.

She affirmed the administration’s ongoing dialogue with Congress regarding further assistance, emphasising President Biden’s determination to facilitate the swift restoration of the bridge.

Acting Labour Secretary Julie Su convened in Baltimore on Monday for discussions with stakeholders, further underscoring the government’s commitment to support the affected community. Additionally, Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg visited Baltimore on the day of the collapse.

Despite the absence of a definitive timeline for the reopening of the Port of Baltimore, officials have cautioned that the bridge reconstruction process will require ‘some time’ to complete, *The Hill* reported.

ANI

North Korea fires IRBM towards Sea of Japan

Tokyo, Japan - North Korea launched an intermediate-range ballistic missile (IRBM) towards the Sea of Japan on Tuesday, with the projectile falling into waters outside Japan’s exclusive economic zone, according to Japan’s Defence Ministry, Kyodo news reported.

Kyodo news citing the ministry said that a missile was fired from North Korea’s west coast at 6:52am and there were no reports of damage to aircraft or vessels.

This marks North Korea’s third ballistic missile launch of the year, Yonhap reported.

The missile, which South Korea’s military officials suspect was equipped with a hypersonic warhead flew about 600km before landing in the East Sea, the Seoul-based news agency said.

South Korea’s Joint Chiefs of Staff said that it detected the launch from the area of the North Korean capital Pyongyang on Tuesday at 6:53am (21:53 GMT on Monday).

“We have stepped up monitoring and are closely sharing relevant information with the US and Japan,” they added.

Confirming the launch of missile, Tokyo urged the coastguard vessels to be vigilant and report any fallen objects without approaching them.

Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida condemned the



Missile was fired from North Korea’s west coast and there were no reports of damage to aircraft or vessels

launch, telling reporters North Korea had ‘repeatedly launched ballistic missiles’ this year, adding that it was a threat to regional security and ‘absolutely unacceptable’.

The launch was the third of a ballistic missile in 2024, with North Korea saying it is testing a new intermediate-range hypersonic missile powered by a solid-fuel engine.

It comes just days after a Russian veto ended United Nations

expert monitoring of North Korean sanctions violations, amid a probe into alleged arms deals between Moscow and Pyongyang, and a week before South Korea holds general elections, Al Jazeera reported.

“The Kim regime prioritises advancing its military capabilities and doesn’t care to stay quiet during the South Korean legislative election campaign,” Leif-Eric Easley, a professor at Ewha University in Seoul, wrote in emailed comments.

“But firing an intermediate-range missile lacks the shock value of a full-range ICBM (intercontinental ballistic missile) launch or a nuclear test, so it’s unlikely to swing any National Assembly seats. Although Pyongyang’s weapons development remains a major concern, Seoul is currently focused on health care reform, economic policies, and domestic political scandals.”

Pyongyang has continued to develop its military arsenal despite strict international sanctions imposed over its nuclear weapons programme.

It has also declared South Korea its ‘principal enemy’, shut down agencies dedicated to reunification and outreach, and threatened war over ‘even 0.001 mm’ of territorial infringement.

Last month, the United States and South Korea staged one of their major annual joint military exercises, prompting angry retorts and live-fire drills from Pyongyang, which condemns all such exercises as rehearsals for invasion.

ANI



DR Congo President Felix Tshisekedi meets with the new prime minister Judith Tuluca Suminwa in Kinshasa, DR Congo, on Monday (Xinhua)

DR Congo gets its 1st woman premier

Kinshasa, DR Congo - Democratic Republic of Congo President Felix Tshisekedi on Monday appointed the country’s first female prime minister, the president’s office announced, ending months of speculation.

Judith Suminwa Tuluca replaces Jean-Michel Sama Lukonde, who resigned in March alongside his entire government team following last December’s general election. Tuluca served as the planning minister in the previous government.

She is a member of the ruling Union for Democracy and Social Progress (UDPS) party of President Tshisekedi, which won the majority of seats in the December parliamentary election. The party won 69 seats in the 500-member National Assembly, securing its position as the leading party among 44 others in the elections.

She has the task of forming a new government with the various political forces that subscribe to the ruling coalition.

The new government is expected to be formed at a time of intensified fighting in eastern Congo, where large areas in the territories of Rutshuru, Nyiragongo and Masisi have been occupied by M23 rebels. “The task ahead is formidable and the challenges are immense. However, with the support of the President of the Republic and everyone else, we will succeed,” Tuluca told reporters.

Tuluca obtained a master’s degree in applied economics from the Free University of Brussels. She worked in the banking sector before joining United Nations agencies, including the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

Agencies

Mexico evacuates 34 nationals from Haiti amid insecurity crisis

Mexico City, Mexico - Mexican Foreign Ministry announced on Monday the evacuation of 34 Mexican nationals from Port-au-Prince, Haiti, amid the ongoing insecurity crisis in the country.

On March 31, the Mexican government conducted a clandestine rescue operation involving the Navy and the Foreign Ministry to airlift the 34 citizens out of Haiti. A Navy ship, equipped with a helicopter, facilitated the evacuation of 24 men and 10 women, including seven minors, seeking to depart Haiti due to the prevailing insecurity crisis.

In a joint statement by the Foreign Ministry and the Navy, it was revealed that Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador had ordered the evacuation in response to the ‘illegal control’ exerted by armed groups over the Toussaint Louverture International Airport, hindering civilian de-

A Navy ship, equipped with a helicopter, facilitated the evacuation of 24 men and 10 women, including seven minors

partures. The statement also cited violent incidents such as prison seizures and threats causing paralysis in the country. “The airport has been closed for a month; it is not possible to enter or leave, and therefore, a very special operation was required where the Navy ship sailed to waters close to Haiti,” said Foreign Minister Alicia Barcena at a briefing on Monday.

Two flights departed from a heliport at the Dominican Republic embassy in Port-au-

Prince, Haiti, on Sunday at 4am local time. The rescue ship carrying the 34 Mexican nationals is expected to arrive off the coast of Yucatan in southeastern Mexico.

Through the joint statement, the Mexican government reiterated its condemnation of the violence in Haiti and urged the international community to intervene in the crisis.

“Mexico condemns the acts of violence perpetrated by organised crime groups that compromise institutionality and the rule of law in Haiti and urges the authorities and political actors to put the best interests of that nation first to reach agreements that help overcome the crisis and adopt the necessary measures to guarantee order, peace, and security, to call elections and move towards the re-establishment of democratic institutions,” read the statement.

Anadolu Agency

US: Ex-President Donald Trump posts \$175mn bond in NY civil fraud case

New York, US - Former US President Donald Trump has posted a US\$175mn bond as he appeals the judgement against him in the New York civil fraud case brought by state Attorney General Letitia James, CNN reported on Tuesday.

With the submission of bonds, it will pause any action that Attorney General James could take against Donald Trump’s properties in response to the judgement until at least September, when the state appeals court also set a schedule to hear his appeal of the US\$464mn verdicts against him.

The bond has been underwritten by Knight Specialty Insurance, a California-based insurance company, but the court document does not list the collateral that Trump used to secure the bond.

Last month, Trump said at a news conference he would use cash to cover the bond, but claimed that he also wanted to use cash to fund his re-election



Former US President Donald Trump

campaign.

Yet asked if he planned to start personal funds into his presidential campaign, Trump said: “First of all, it’s none of your business,” before adding: “I might do that. I have the option.”

The bond amount was lowered by several hundred million dollars by a state appeals court

defendants, including his adult sons and his company, US\$464mn, finding they fraudulently inflated the value of the former president’s assets to obtain better loan rates.

Trump had been given 30 days to post the bond for the full amount of the judgement while he appealed, as is required by state law, but his attorneys said he could not find an insurance company to underwrite that large of a bond. That prompted James to take steps to prepare to seize Trump’s assets in the event Trump failed to post bond.

When the 30-day deadline hit, however, the New York appeals court stepped in and lowered the bond to US\$175mn, giving Trump an additional 10 days.

“As promised, Trump has posted bond,” Trump attorney Alina Habba said in a statement. “He looks forward to vindicating his rights on appeal and overturning this unjust verdict.”

ANI

MIDDLE EAST CONFLICT

7 aid workers killed in Israeli strike in Gaza

Washington, D.C., US - The World Central Kitchen (WCK) on Tuesday confirmed that its seven humanitarian aid workers were killed in Monday's Israeli strike in the Gaza Strip.

"The WCK team was traveling in a deconflicted zone in two armored cars branded with the WCK logo and a soft skin vehicle," the WCK said in a statement. Despite coordinating movements with the Israeli army, it added that the convoy was hit as it was leaving the Deir al-Balah warehouse, where the team had unloaded more than 100 tonnes of humanitarian food aid brought to Gaza on the maritime route.

"This is not only an attack against WCK, this is an attack on humanitarian organisations showing up in the most dire of situations where food is being used as a weapon of war. This is unforgivable," said WCK CEO Erin Gore. "I am heartbroken and appalled that we - WCK and the world - lost beautiful lives today because of a targeted attack by the IDF. The love they had for feeding people, the determination they embodied to show that humanity rises above all, and the impact they made in countless lives will



Citizens inspect a vehicle of aid team that was targeted by Israeli forces on the coastal road west of Deir al-Balah, Gaza Strip, on Tuesday (WAFA)

forever be remembered and cherished," Gore said in the statement.

WCK pauses operations

The WCK announced that it is pausing operations 'immedi-

ately' in the region. "We will be making decisions about the future of our work soon."

The Israeli military, meanwhile, said it was conducting a thorough review at the highest levels to understand the circumstances of the 'tragic' inci-

dent.

The US expressed sorrow on Monday over the killing of aid workers of the US-based aid organisation.

"We are heartbroken and deeply troubled by the strike that killed @WCKitchen aid

workers in Gaza," White House National Security Council spokesperson Adrienne Watson said on X, urging Israel to 'swiftly' investigate what happened.

Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said on

Tuesday he sought direct communication with his Israeli counterpart over the killing of aid workers in Gaza, while there has been no contact yet.

"I have put in a request to Prime Minister (Benjamin) Netanyahu as well to speak with him directly," Albanese told ABC News during an interview when asked whether Canberra had reached out to Tel Aviv in the wake of the killing of seven WCK members, including an Australian citizen.

Lalzawmi 'Zomi' Frankcom, an Australian aid worker, was among the seven killed while working for the WCK.

The other aid workers were from Poland, the UK, and Palestine, and another was a dual citizen of the US and Canada.

"No," Albanese replied, when asked whether he had spoken to Netanyahu when this story was filed.

The Australian premier, however, said Canberra had put on notice the Israeli ambassador to Australia who 'isn't well today'.

Foreign Minister Penny Wong has "put in" calls to her Israeli counterpart too, he added.

Calling Frankcom's killing a

'loss for our nation', Albanese said Australia stands for a political solution to the conflict with an independent Palestinian state alongside Israel.

Albanese reiterated Australia's demand for accountability from Israel over the killing of the Australian aid worker.

"Australia expects full accountability for the deaths of aid workers, which is completely unacceptable," Albanese said.

WHO calls for protection

The World Health Organization's (WHO) director-general on Tuesday called for the 'sustained protection' of humanitarian workers in Gaza.

"How many more lives will be lost until there's a ceasefire? We are outraged by the killing of humanitarian workers in Gaza," Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said on X.

Stressing that safety is a basic requirement for the delivery of life-saving aid, Tedros extended his deepest condolences to the WCK team and affected families. "We once again call for the sustained protection of humanitarian workers across Gaza," he said.

Anadolu Agency



Rescuers work near the destroyed consulate building of the Iranian embassy in Damascus, Syria, on Monday (Xinhua)

Khamenei vows to punish Israel for attacking Iranian consulate in Syria

Tehran, Iran - Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei vowed on Tuesday that Israel 'will be punished' for an attack on the Iranian Consulate in the Syrian capital, Damascus, that killed seven military officers, including a top commander.

Khamenei said the 'evil regime' will be 'punished at the hands of our brave men', adding that the Iranian military will make Israel 'regret the crime'.

Seven officers of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) were killed in a missile strike on Monday that targeted a building housing the consular affairs section of the Iranian Embassy.

Among those killed were General Mohammad Reza Zahedi, a senior commander of the IRGC's Quds Force in Syria and Lebanon, and his deputy General Hadi Haj Rahimi.

Khamenei paid tribute to both IRGC commanders, saying the grief of their killing is 'heavy for the Iranian nation, especially those who knew them'.

Zahedi was a veteran IRGC commander who previously commanded the IRGC's ground force and air force and also served as the deputy commander of the IRGC's military operations.

Iranian Ambassador to Syria, Hossein Akbari, told reporters following the attack on Monday

that the consular affairs building was attacked with F-35 warplanes and six missiles, blaming Israel for it.

Israeli Army Radio, however, said the Iranian Embassy was not the target of the attack, but a nearby building serving as an IRGC military headquarters in Damascus, without taking responsibility for it.

Earlier on Tuesday, Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi strongly condemned the consulate attack and warned that it 'will not go unanswered'.

Raisi said the attack constitutes 'a clear violation of international regulations', adding that Israel has 'put blind assassinations on its agenda in the struggle to save itself' after 'repeated defeats and failures' against the resistance forces.

Raisi's statement came hours after Iran's Supreme National Security Council, the top government security body, held an emergency meeting in his presence to discuss the consulate attack.

Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian, in a phone conversation with his Syrian counterpart Faisal Mekdad on Monday, said the attack was in breach of international conventions and warned that Israel 'will be responsible for its consequences'.

Anadolu Agency

Arab League to convene emergency meeting today

Istanbul, Turkey - The Arab League will be holding an emergency meeting on Wednesday on possible responses to Israel's 'crimes of genocide and starvation' in the Gaza Strip, the 22-member bloc said.

The announcement came on Tuesday from Arab League Deputy Secretary-General Hosam Zaki, who said permanent delegates would convene for the meeting, requested by Palestine, at the league's headquarters in Cairo, according to the Egyptian official news agency.

On Monday, Palestine's representative to the Arab League Muhammad Al Aklouk said he submitted a request to the league's General-Secretariat to hold an extraordinary session at the level of permanent delegates 'to discuss the Arab movement over the continuation of the crime of genocide, the starvation policy and forced displacement of the Palestinians being committed by the Israeli occupation in the Gaza Strip'.

Gaza death toll surpasses 32,900

Meanwhile, the Palestinian



The meeting will deliberate on possible responses to Israel's 'crimes of genocide and starvation' in the Gaza Strip

Arab League's permanent delegates would convene for the meeting, which was requested by Palestine, at its HQ in Cairo

death toll from Israel's ongoing attacks on the Gaza Strip has reached 32,916 people since last October, Gaza's Health Ministry said on Tuesday.

A ministry statement said some 75,494 other people have also been injured in the onslaught.

"At least 71 people were killed and 102 others injured in Israeli attacks in the last 24

hours," the ministry said.

"Many people are still trapped under rubble and on the roads and rescuers are unable to reach them," it added.

Israel has waged a deadly military offensive on the Gaza Strip since a cross-border attack by Hamas on October 7, 2023, which killed nearly 1,200 people.

Anadolu Agency

Japan ends bar on UNRWA funding

Tokyo, Japan - Japan's top diplomat on Tuesday announced to resume funding to the UN agency for refugees in Palestine, or the UNRWA, Kyodo news agency reported.

Foreign Minister Yoko Kamikawa said US\$35mn of the originally planned funding will be released.

"The humanitarian situation in the Palestinian territory of Gaza continues to worsen. It is our country's responsibility to respond to the crisis as a member of the UN Security Council," she said. Earlier this year, Japan joined several of its western allies, including the US and the UK, to halt the funding to the UN agency in the wake of allegations by Tel Aviv against UNRWA.

However, several countries including Australia, Canada, Sweden, and Iceland have since resumed the funding. In February, Japan also announced an additional emergency aid.

Anadolu Agency

Al Jazeera condemns Netanyahu's incitement as 'lies'

Ankara, Turkey - Al Jazeera television on Tuesday accused Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of inciting against its journalists, condemning his accusations against the media outlet as 'lies'.

The Knesset (Israel's parliament) passed a law on Monday allowing the closure of the Qatari-funded television.

Netanyahu said in a statement on X that he intended 'to act immediately in accordance with the new law' to stop the news outlet's activity in Israel.

"Netanyahu could not find any justifications to offer the world for his ongoing attacks on



Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu

Al Jazeera and press freedom except to present new lies and inflammatory slanders against the Network and the rights of its employees," the Doha-based television said in a statement.

In his statement, Netanyahu accused Al Jazeera of being a trumpet for Hamas and accused it of 'actively participating' in the October 7 Hamas attack and inciting against Israeli soldiers.

But the pan-Arab television condemned Netanyahu's accusations as 'dangerous ludicrous lies' and held the Israeli prime minister responsible for the safety of its staff and premises

around the world 'following his incitement and this false accusation in a disgraceful manner'.

"Al Jazeera reiterates that such slanderous accusations will not deter us from continuing our bold and professional coverage, and reserves the right to pursue every legal step," it added.

Al Jazeera has an office in Israel and a team of correspondents working year-round, including covering Israel's ongoing war on the Gaza Strip, which has killed more than 32,900 people since October 7, 2023.

Anadolu Agency

INDIA

SC grants bail to AAP leader Sanjay Singh

New Delhi, India - The Supreme Court on Tuesday granted bail to AAP (Aam Aadmi party) leader Sanjay Singh in a money laundering case related to the Delhi excise policy irregularities case. The court order came after Enforcement Directorate (ED) chose not to oppose Sanjay Singh's bail plea.

A bench led by Justice Sanjiv Khanna directed the release of Sanjay Singh on bail during the pendency of trial.

The ED informed the SC that the agency has no objection to Sanjay Singh getting bail.

The ED response came after the court sought to know from the investigating agency whether it needed further custody of Sanjay Singh in the excise policy case.

The court observed that Singh had spent six months in jail.

The Supreme Court clarified that Sanjay Singh will be released on terms and conditions to be fixed by the trial court. The court also made it clear that concession shall not be cited as precedent.

Meanwhile the court said that Sanjay Singh may continue with his political activities. In the meantime the top court disposed of Sanjay Singh's another plea challenging his arrest and remand in the case observing that it has become infructuous.

The top court was hearing



AAP leader Sanjay Singh

Singh's plea against the Delhi High Court order refusing to grant him bail in the excise policy irregularities case. He was arrested by the ED on October 4, 2023.

According to ED, Sanjay Singh was alleged to be involved in creating a special purpose vehicle to launder the proceeds of crime that would have been generated from the business arising out of the policy changes as conspired by him and his co-conspirators.

ED had also stated that Sanjay Singh has been in possession of certain confidential documents pertaining to the investigation of this case that are not in the public domain.

Sanjay Singh in the Delhi High Court denied charges and said that he is not guilty of any criminal wrongdoing or any violation of the provisions of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA).

ANI

Confident on bid for UNSC permanent seat, says EAM

Rajkot, India - Exuding confidence on India's bid for a permanent seat at the United Nations Security Council, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar said that no big achievement ever comes without hard work, and added that the country will have to put in an extra effort this time.

At an event in Rajkot on Tuesday, Jaishankar said: "We will surely get it. But, no big achievement comes without hard work. So we will have to work hard for it. This time, we will have to put an extra effort because what has happened till now is that the UN was formed around 80 years ago...at that time, there were five nations which decided that they will become the permanent members of the UN security Council."

Jaishankar underlined that it is a weird thing to know that the same five nations who have kept their control are being asked whether or not the change should take place in the security council.

He said: "At that time there were 50 independent countries. In the last 80 years, the number of those countries have now reached 193-194. But, what these five nations have done is kept their control...and the weird thing is that you are asking those



External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar (ANI)

India has been a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council for eight terms (16 years). India is a member of the G4, a group of nations that back each other to seek permanent membership

5 nations only that you decide and agree upon whether this change should be carried. Some of them agree to it and some don't. Some put their positions clearly, some do other things in the back-channel...this has been happening for years."

However, there has been a strong rise in the sentiment that the system should change now.

"This system should change and India should get a permanent seat in the UNSC," Jaishankar said, adding that a lot of negotiations are going on in the present scenario and India should be persistent with this.

"These days, a lot of negotiations are going on...multiple ideas have been put forward...some by Arab countries, African countries. We along with Japan, Germany and Brazil have also put forward a proposal. I think we should be persistent with this..." Jaishankar said.

As he further went on to speak, Jaishankar noted that the UN has got very weak.

"Today there is a feeling that the UN has got very weak. There was a deadlock at UN regarding Ukraine conflict, there was no agreement from the UN's side on the war in Gaza," Jaishankar said.

"So, I think as the pressure of this sentiment will rise, our possibility of getting a permanent seat at the UNSC will also rise," he added.

India has long sought a permanent seat on the Security Council to better represent the interests of the developing world.

The nation's quest has gained momentum with support from influential figures like Dennis Francis, who believes in India's capability to contribute positively to global peace and security.

India has been a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council for eight terms (16 years). India is a member of the G4, a group of nations that back each other to seek permanent membership in the UNSC. The countries advocate for reform in the UNSC.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, during his France visit in July 2023, made a strong pitch for India's permanent membership in the UN Security Council, saying the primary UN body cannot claim to be speaking for the world when its most populous country and the largest democracy is not a permanent member.

ANI

LIVING ON THE EDGE



People stand near the houses damaged by the advancing sea and violent waves in the coastal city of Kollam in the southern state of Kerala on Tuesday (ANI)

Saudi: Indian embassy warns its nationals against fake social media accounts

Riyadh, Saudi Arabia - The Embassy of India in Riyadh has issued a public notice cautioning Indian nationals residing in Saudi Arabia about fake social media accounts and email addresses that sought to deceive people by soliciting money for travel arrangements from Saudi Arabia to India.

In the advisory, the embassy emphasised that it has no affiliation with these questionable social media handles and email addresses. It urged all Indian nationals in Saudi Arabia to exercise caution and advised them to verify the authenticity of any communication purportedly from the embassy.

"It has been brought to the notice of the Embassy that some individuals are deceiving innocent Indian nationals in Saudi Arabia through a suspicious Twitter account and email address, by soliciting money for

travel arrangements from Saudi Arabia to India. We would like to inform all Indian nationals residing in Saudi Arabia that the Embassy of India in Riyadh has absolutely no affiliation with these questionable social media handles and email addresses," Indian Embassy in Saudi Arabia said in advisory.

"The official contact information of the Embassy of India, including email IDs, Twitter handle, Facebook ID, and telephone numbers, can be found on our website <https://www.coiriyadh.gov.in>. All are advised to cross verify with the Embassy website thoroughly to avoid falling into the trap laid by unscrupulous elements. All the Indian Missions email IDs always end with domain @mea.gov.in. Twitter Account of the Embassy @IndianEmbRiyadh," advisory added.

ANI

Pakistan-China border reopens after four months of closure

Gilgit-Baltistan, Pakistan - After a four-month closure due to severe winter conditions, the Pakistan-China Khunjerab border has reopened, facilitating commercial and tourist activities, *The Nation* reported.

According to the bilateral agreement, the border closure typically lasts from December 1 to March 31 each year, owing to cold weather and heavy snowfall. According to *The Nation*, the reopening of this border crossing is expected to boost bilateral trade and tourism between the two nations.

While trade and tourism activities were halted during the closure period, transportation of essential goods for Pakistan's

development projects continued uninterrupted across the border.

Notably, alongside the reopening of the Khunjerab border, transportation activities have resumed in the border areas of Gilgit-Baltistan, specifically Sost, and the Chinese city of Tashghargan, as per *The Nation*. This development signals a renewed flow of commerce and connectivity between the two nations, promising economic benefits and strengthening ties.

Earlier, on November 12, the Chinese government announced the closure of Khunjerab Pass for four months in the winter, almost a month after it agreed to keep the high-alti-

tude road open throughout the year, Dawn News reported. Khunjerab Pass is the only place connecting two countries over this mountainous range, at a height of 16,200ft. Khunjerab Pass is the point where the highest paved international road, the Karakorum Highway, enters China, connecting the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region of China and Gilgit-Baltistan of Pakistan.

Under the border protocol agreement signed between the two countries in 1985, Khunjerab Pass remains open for travel and trade between April and November, as per the Dawn News report.

ANI

UN rights chief urges Russia to end Ukraine war

Geneva, Switzerland - The UN human rights chief on Tuesday urged Russia to end its war on Ukraine as armed attacks that have caused 'harrowing stories of human suffering' continue daily for more than two years.

"Despite harrowing stories of human suffering unfolding every day in Ukraine, I fear that the world has grown numb to this crisis," Volker Turk, the UN high commissioner for human rights, said in his video message to the 55th session of the Human Rights Council's interactive dialogue on Ukraine.

"Two years of immense suffering, bloodshed, loss and grief. Countless families have been separated," Turk said, noting that more than 10,500 civilians were killed and over 20,000 injured.



UN high commissioner for human rights Volker Turk

Stressing that actual figures are likely significantly higher, he said: "The conflict increasingly is becoming entrenched and protracted, punctuated by recurring waves of attacks, as seen across the country last week."

He reiterated his call on Moscow to 'cease its armed at-

tack', and added: "The violations of international humanitarian and human rights law by the Russian armed forces and administrative officials in occupied territory must stop, at once."

"The occupation must come to an end," he urged. He also expressed concern regarding Rus-

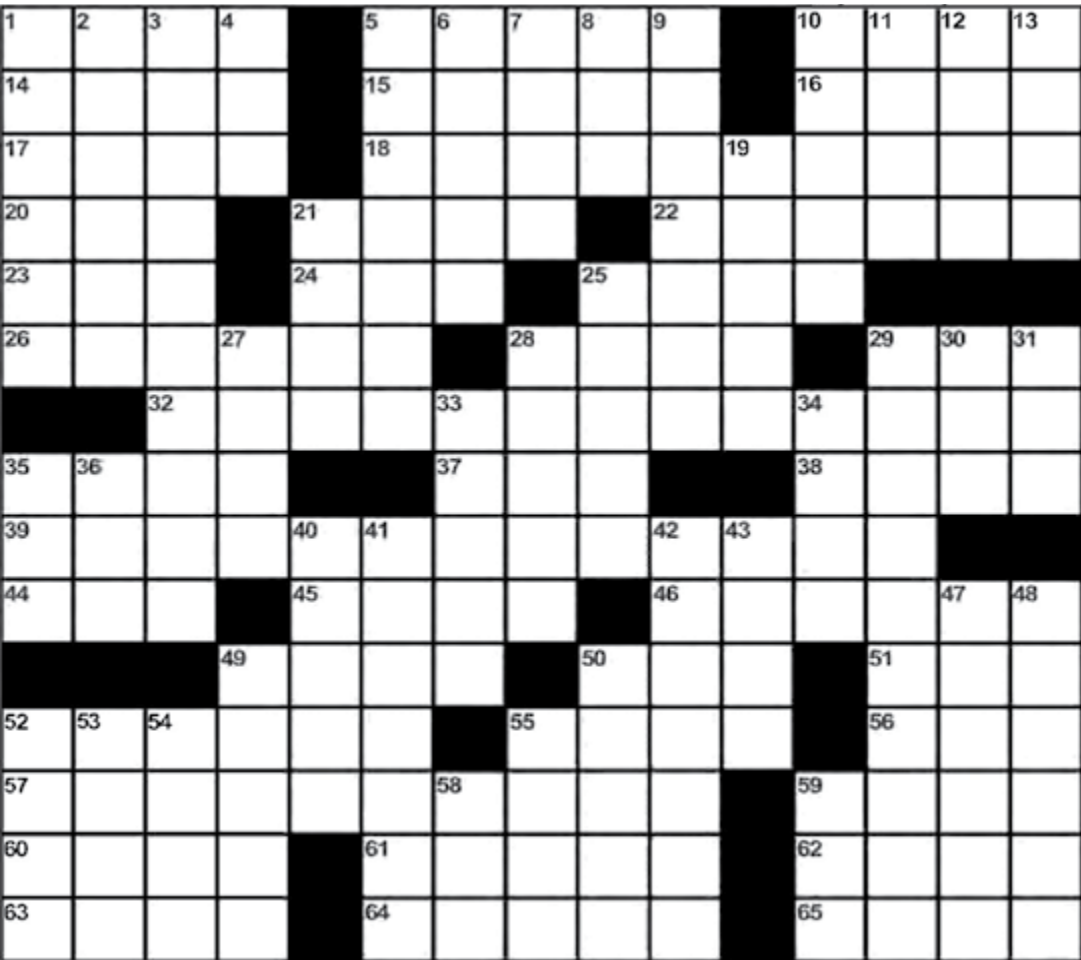
Noting that more than 10,500 civilians were killed and over 20,000 injured, Turk said that actual figures are likely significantly higher

sia's 'brutal treatment' and executions of prisoners of war.

"I implore the Russian Federation to take immediate action to conduct effective investigations into each allegation of execution of PoWs, and to take steps to end their torture and ill-treatment."

Anadolu Agency

DAILY CROSSWORD



ACROSS

- 1) Dinner's often on him
- 5) Defibrillator output
- 10) Winter transport
- 14) Poet Angelou
- 15) Flu variety
- 16) Be concerned
- 17) Beat in a tournament
- 18) Olympic figure skater
- 20) Fido's dinnertime extra
- 21) Betwixt and between
- 22) More humane
- 23) Unsatisfying game re-sult
- 24) Disburden
- 25) King Solomon had one
- 26) One of the Munsters
- 28) Give food to
- 29) Take credit?
- 32) Legendary multi-sport star
- 35) Brother of Cain
- 37) Deposit in a lode-bearing wall?
- 38) Like summer tea
- 39) Legendary Olympic gymnast
- 44) Some are classified
- 45)_ Linda, Calif.
- 46) Short sock
- 49) "The way to a _ heart."
- 50) "... _ Bravo"

- 51) It has a long ann
- 52) Stands by for
- 55) Buddies
- 56) Is expanded?
- 57) Legendary track star
- 59) Sicily's mountain
- 60) "Laugh-In" comedian Johnson
- 61) Loyal subject or city in Belgium
- 62) Chicken man, in the circus
- 63) Back of the pack
- 64) White-plumed heron
- 65) Betting figures
- DOWN**
- 1) Word often used in razor ads
- 2) Metcalf of "Roseanne"
- 3) Pearl production locales
- 4) Club at Camden Yards
- 5) Pale-yellow color
- 6) Egg-shaped
- 7) Jenny the "Swedish Nightingale"
- 8) _Mahal
- 9) With more curves
- 10) Public commotion
- 11) Come back to earth
- 12) "Fifteen Miles on the _ Canal"
- 13) Antlered mammal
- 19) Indian language

- 21) Dubai denizen
- 25) Tragedy by Euripides
- 27) Ivory Coast neighbor
- 28) Terra_ (dry land)
- 29) Moved like a fan?
- 30) Misfortune
- 31) Wind up or wind down
- 33) Ensures the failure of
- 34) Try for three points
- 35) Mexican general Santa_
- 36) Poorly behaved
- 40) Get_ start (be tardy)
- 41) Videogame system, say
- 42) Carpenter's punch
- 43) Son of Seth
- 47) Wasn't just given
- 48) Fine-tunes
- 49) Tight-fisted person
- 50) Where to hit a bucket of balls
- 52) Slightly open
- 53) Contraction with number one
- 54) "The Thin Man" pooch
- 55) Word before "group" or "pressure"
- 58) Store-bought hair
- 59)_ trip (self-indulgent activity)

NOTE PAD



YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE



ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

You've got a lot on your plate, but look closer. There is still enough room for one more thing. Stop fighting the urge to start any new projects. If something exciting comes along today, embrace it and get involved. Ignore warnings from concerned friends: They are well meaning but paranoid. This is a good time to initiate new things and explore new ideas. Your mind is hungry and all fired up for new input, so go out and get some. Things could get very exciting very quickly.



LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

You have an unbeatable combination of flexibility and maturity today that makes you pretty much unbeatable. You'll be able to rise above any petty dramas with ease. You're too grown up to get involved in the childish antics of others. Taking this attitude will gain you respect and more than a little admiration from a former foe. Things are about to shift in your direction, and you will have a chance to gain a lot more power a lot earlier than you thought.



SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

Working with another person today will be just as much fun as you were expecting it to be, but it could also create a critical turning point in your life. If you are ready for change, it is ready for you. You are all set to have a good time with creative brainstorming, and you will definitely not be disappointed. However, your tasks will not be all about play. There is some serious advancement going on in your life, and the transition you're in is no laughing matter.



TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

Getting caught up in a routine can be a comforting thing, and having things your way makes this crazy world feel a little bit more manageable. Don't worry that you're getting stuck in a rut. Maybe that's not such a bad thing. Besides, you'll start trying new things when the mood hits you. Eventually, your routine will start to create too much monotony in your life and you'll start getting curious about new things. You don't have to rush it.



VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

The idea of partnership is very appealing to you right now. Working with another person will be challenging, but it's the kind of challenge that you are craving. You will showcase all your strengths, and they will showcase theirs. Try to put together some sort of task for a duo today, even if it's simple. Okay, so you two might not solve all the world's problems, but you will at least be able to make progress.



CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

Despite your humble nature, your exuberant personality may be intimidating people more than you realize. Make an effort to candy coat what you say and amp up the diplomacy. Some of the people around you are especially thin-skinned now. They value your critical eye, but they may not be ready for the truth. Keep in mind all the times they've focused more on your gifts than your challenges and return that generosity without hesitation. Show them your warmhearted nature.



GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

Just because someone is out of sight doesn't mean they're out of mind. A former coworker may reappear on the scene now, and they might offer the missing link between you and several opportunities, including greater wealth and even romance. Keep an eye out for unfamiliar phone numbers or email addresses, because everything isn't as you assume it to be. Sometimes relationships or other types of connections are circular and come back around to make things complete.



LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

You've been working hard, so you deserve a break. It's not that you're tired and need a rest. It's more likely you need space and time to gain perspective on all you've done. You deserve a big pat on the back, and you need to realize that you are capable of truly amazing things. Plus, there are a few people who want some social time with you! Rack up some leisure time. You know how to appreciate all of your success without focusing exclusively on it.



AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

There is going to be a lot of overlap between your family responsibilities and your work responsibilities today, which is a good thing. You will be able to get a lot done in very little time. While you're taking care of the errands you need to run for work, you can take care of a few personal errands as well without anyone thinking twice about it. No one at the office is going to care if you pick up the dry cleaning on your way back from a meeting.



CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

Your hard work always pays off. Sure, it might take longer than you'd like to reap the rewards of your sweat equity, but it will come. You must have faith. If you see a chance to get a little further in a goal or on a project, go for it. So what if you've already got a lot on your plate or are feeling tired? The harder you work now, the sooner you will be able to relax. Dig down to unearth that Type A personality lurking inside of you. It will help you power through and persevere.



SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

Good luck is not a passive experience. You can't just wait for a generous genie to arrive at your doorstep and grant you three wishes. In order to enjoy more luck in your life, you have to create it, starting today. Put some more positive energy out there, and do your own best impression of a fairy godparent for someone who needs one. An anonymous gift or good deed will go a long way toward bringing more happy coincidences to your life.



PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

You've stepped back and have been letting life move on around you without getting involved, and that was smart. It kept you out of the current drama. But today, you might need to consider getting back into an active role. But if you decide to rejoin this rat race, just be sure to take things slowly. Baby steps will lead you down the right path and possibly into the right person's arms. Let yourself be taken care of a little while longer. You deserve the attention.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

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

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

3. What is Hilary Clinton's maiden name?
A. Rodham
B. Bouvier
C. Roosevelt
D. Kennedy

Answers: 1. A 2. B 3. A

KIDS COLOURING



BOGGLER

I	M	N	L
G	R	I	D
F	U	A	P
U	N	N	A

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

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

A LEAGUE OF THEIR OWN

Inter beat Empoli to close in on Serie A title

Milan, Italy - Runaway leaders Inter Milan continued their seemingly unstoppable march to the Serie A title after an early goal from Federico Dimarco and a late effort from Alexis Sanchez secured a 2-0 win at home against Empoli on Monday.

Inter are top of the table with 79 points, 14 ahead of city rivals AC Milan in second place with eight matches left to play. Their sizeable lead means that Inter could potentially clinch the Scudetto during the city derby against Milan on April 22.

The result pushed 18th-placed Empoli into the relegation zone, level on 25 points with Frosinone in 17th and one point ahead of 19th-placed Sassuolo.

Inter manager Simone Inzaghi, who celebrated his 100th victory with the club, lost his voice during the match, with assistant coach Massimiliano Farris taking over the post-match duties.

"The tactics are working very well, the mobility of our defenders, but also the ability of the midfielders to cover the spaces



Inter Milan's Federico Dimarco celebrates after scoring against Empoli

The tactics are working very well, the mobility of our defenders, but also the ability of the midfielders to cover the spaces when the defenders go forward, that is all teamwork

MASSIMILIANO FARRIS

when the defenders go forward, that is all teamwork," Farris told DAZN. "We did better in the second half and the substitutions gave us a big hand to bring home the result, confirming the strength in depth of this squad."

Dimarco broke the deadlock for Inter in the sixth minute when he fired the ball left-footed into the bottom corner from the edge of the box.

The rest of the first half ebbed and flowed, with Inter pressing to

extend their lead, and Empoli goalkeeper Elia Caprile standing firm to deny them. Yet Empoli gained momentum towards the end of the half, creating chances that were narrowly off target.

Inter came back with renewed vigour after the break and Nicolo Barella was inches away from scoring after beating three Empoli defenders. Substitute Sanchez was left unmarked to tap home Denzel Dumfries' cross and double Inter's lead in the 81st minute.



Mehran Khan took three wickets for 17 runs for Oman

Oman beat Namibia in second Twenty20

Muscat - Oman rebounded from their defeat on Monday to seize victory in the second T20I against Namibia, levelling the five-match series 1-1 at the Oman Cricket Academy ground on Tuesday.

In a low-scoring match, Oman edged Namibia by six runs. Facing a target of 138 for victory, Namibia found themselves contained at 131/9 by the formidable bowling attack of the hosts. Led by medium-pacer Mehran Khan, who secured figures of 3/21, Oman's bowlers executed their plans effectively.

Namibia captain, Gerhard Erasmus, stood as a solitary force, crafting a sturdy half-century (58 off 56 balls, 5x4s, 1x6). However, his dismissal by Mohammad Nadeem in the 17th over tilted the scales in favour of the hosts.

Oman began their defence of 137 with gusto, as pacer Kaleemullah dismissed opener JP Kotze in the second ball of Namibia's innings.

A pivotal double-wicket over from Mehran within the powerplay further dampened the visitors' spirits, as he sent back Malan Kruger and Jan Frylinck.

However, Erasmus and Zane Green (12) built a 29-run stand to steady the ship before skipper Zeeshan Maqsood broke the partnership with the dismissal of Green.

Erasmus then along with David Wiese (14) orchestrated a 47-run partnership for the fifth wicket, and threatened to take the game away but Mehran picked the crucial wicket of Wiese in the 16th over to shift the momentum back to Oman.

Saul Niguez goal hands Atletico win at Villarreal

Villarreal, Spain - Substitute Saul Niguez scored a late winner to give Atletico Madrid a hard-fought 2-1 victory at Villarreal on Monday, as Diego Simeone's side climbed back into LaLiga's top four with eight games left in the season.

It was a much needed win for Atletico after two consecutive losses and two wins in their last seven league matches had left them in danger of missing out on a Champions League spot next season.

They were facing an in-form Villarreal side, who were on a four-game winning streak and unbeaten in their last nine league matches, a run that earned Marcelino Garcia LaLiga's Coach of Month award in March.



Atletico Madrid's Saul Niguez celebrates after scoring against Villarreal on Monday

Atletico moved to fourth in the standings on 58 points, two ahead of Athletic Bilbao, who lost 2-0 to leaders Real Madrid

Atletico moved to fourth in the standings on 58 points, two ahead of Athletic Bilbao, who lost 2-0 to leaders Real Madrid on Sunday. Girona are third on 65 points, two behind second-placed Barcelona. Real are comfortably ahead at the summit on 75 points while Villarreal are 10th on 38.

Atletico started well and were

in control when defender Axel Witsel headed in from a corner by Rodrigo Riquelme to give the visitors the lead in the ninth minute.

Villarreal goalkeeper Filip Jorgensen made two fine reflex saves from efforts by Samuel Lino and Marcos Llorente to keep the hosts in the game and Gerard Moreno wasted a great chance from close range to level just before halftime.

But Alexander Sorloth took advantage of a mistake by Antoine Griezmann to equalise five minutes after the break. The French forward stepped on the ball and lost possession before Villarreal found Sorloth who fired a tidy finish past goalkeeper Jan Oblak.

Germany will change No. 4 on jerseys to avoid Nazi symbolism

Frankfurt, Germany - The design for the number four on Germany's national team shirts will be changed over concerns that the number '44' resembled the symbol used by Nazi 'SS' units, the German Football Association (DFB) said on Monday.

The new kit, launched before Germany host the European Championship in June and July, debuted during their 2-0 friendly win over France last month.

"The DFB checks the numbers 0-9 and then submits the numbers 1-26 to UEFA for review. None of the parties involved saw any proximity to Nazi symbolism in the creation process of the jersey design," the DFB said in a statement on X.

"Nevertheless, we take the comments very seriously and do not want to provide a platform for discussions... we will develop an alternative design for the number 4 and coordinate it with UEFA."

The DFB's official supplier Adidas had earlier said that they would remove the number 44 from their range of customisation options.

"We will block the number 44 as quickly as possible," Adidas spokesman Oliver Bruggen told German media.

"As a company we actively oppose xenophobia, anti-Semitism, violence and hatred in any form," the spokesman added.



Trabzonspor fans attack Fenerbahce players during a match last month

Turkish club Fenerbahce to vote on Super Lig withdrawal threat

Istanbul, Turkey - Fenerbahce are set to vote on whether they will go through with their threat of withdrawing from the Super Lig on Tuesday, with the Turkish top-flight club's future hanging in the balance.

In March, Fenerbahce said they would consider withdrawing from the league after their players were attacked by Trabzonspor fans during a match.

Trabzonspor supporters stormed the pitch and brawled with security forces and Fener-

bahce players after their team lost 3-2, the latest in a number of incidents that have dogged the Turkish league that this season.

Fenerbahce will hold an Extraordinary General Assembly Meeting on Tuesday, at which their members will vote on a motion to withdraw the club from the league.

Fenerbahce, who won their 19th league title in 2014, are second in the standings after 30 games - two points behind Galatasaray.

Liberty Media announces MotoGP takeover

Colorado, US - Formula One's US-based owner Liberty Media announced a takeover of MotoGP's parent company Dorna on Monday, valuing the world's leading motorcycle racing championship at 4.2 billion euros (\$4.53 billion).

Dorna will stay an independently run company attributed to Liberty Media's Formula One Group tracking stock and continue to be based in Madrid, with long-serving Dorna CEO Carmelo Ezpeleta remaining in his position. "This is the perfect next step in the evolution of MotoGP, and we are excited for what this milestone brings to Dorna, the MotoGP paddock and racing fans," Ezpeleta said in a Liberty Media statement.

The deal will see Liberty Media acquiring approximately 86 per cent of Dorna, with Dorna management retaining around 14 per cent of its equity. The deal is expected to be completed by the end of 2024. The transaction re-



The takeover is the 'perfect next step in the evolution of MotoGP'

flects an enterprise value of 4.2 billion euros for Dorna/MotoGP and an equity value of 3.5 billion euros, the statement said.

Dorna Sports, which was roughly 40 per cent owned by

British private investment company Bridgepoint Group, also promotes the World Superbike Championship and all-electric MotoE as well as Moto2 and Moto3 junior categories.

"We are thrilled to expand our portfolio of leading live sports and entertainment assets with the acquisition of MotoGP," Liberty Media President and CEO Greg Maffei said. "The business has significant upside, and we intend to grow the sport for MotoGP fans, teams, commercial partners and our shareholders."

Maffei noted, in an interview with CNBC television, that Formula One had only one grand prix in the United States when Liberty took over and now has three.

MotoGP currently has one U.S. race on a 21-round calendar that includes Asia and the Middle East but with a European heartland dominated by Spain and Italy.



THUNDER BOULT

New Zealand pacer shines as Rajasthan beat Mumbai to go top of table

Mumbai, India - Hardik Pandya's return to the Wankhede Stadium as Mumbai Indians captain was far from a fairy tale, as the five-time champions lost their third game in a row, this time with 27 balls to spare. Rajasthan Royals - led by superb performances from Trent Boult, Yuzvendra Chahal and Riyan Parag - gave them a thorough hammering to move to No. 1 on the points table with a hat-trick of victories.

Boult left Mumbai gasping within minutes of the start of the match when he dismissed Rohit Sharma, Naman Dhir and Dewald Brevis for first-ball ducks in his first eight balls. His 3 for 22 was only matched by the 3 for 11 taken by Chahal, who controlled the middle overs to ensure Mumbai did not stage a batting comeback.

Chasing 126 for victory, Parag dragged Royals out of some early trouble and shepherded the chase. He finished the game with six, six, and four to stay unbeaten on 54 to take the No. 1 spot on the orange cap leaderboard - tied on runs with Virat Kohli but ahead of strike rate.

Rohit had all the support from the crowd, who chanted his name even as they booed Hardik, but his time with the bat lasted only one ball when Boult got one to swing away from him and get him to edge it behind. Next ball, Boult swung it the other way, getting a full ball to nip into Dhir.

With two wickets gone inside the game's first six balls, Mumbai brought in impact sub Brevis in the second over itself, but he too fell prey to the ball angling across, edging it to Nandre Burger at short third.

With three wickets in his first eight deliveries of the game, Boult gave Royals an advantage that they never let go.

After Boult's searing opening spell, Burger got in on the action. Playing as a replacement for the



Trent Boult dismissed Rohit Sharma, Naman Dhir and Dewald Brevis for first-ball ducks in his first eight balls

injured Sandeep Sharma, Burger came around the wicket to pick off Ishan Kishan with a length ball that angled away and took his edge.

With Mumbai Indians 20 for 4 in three-and-a-half overs, Tilak Varma and Hardik looked to build a recovery, almost succeeding with a 56-run fifth-wicket stand, but Chahal dismissed both batters to snuff out any chance of a comeback.

After hitting six boundaries early in his innings, Hardik fell on 34 when he holed out at mid-on trying to hit Chahal. Tilak was sent packing on 32 soon after when Chahal's googly was edged to R Ashwin at short third.

Chahal finished his spell with the wicket of Gerald Coetzee late in the innings. In all, 16 of Chahal's 24 deliveries were dots, and his four-over spell ended with an

TODAYS MATCH

MATCH 16

6 PM

DELHI CAPITALS VS KOLKATA KNIGHT RIDERS

economy of only 2.75.

A late wicket for Avesh Khan and a second for Burger ensured Mumbai finished on 125 for 9, a score too low on a surface that is traditionally batting-friendly.

Only wickets could save Mumbai after that batting effort, and they played their trump card early when Jasprit Bumrah shared the new ball, with Kwen Maphaka, for the first time this season.

But even though Bumrah bowled three of the six power-play overs, the Royals batters did not give a wicket away to him. Yashasvi Jaiswal fell to Maphaka in the first over itself, while the other three wickets went to Akash Madhwal, playing his first game of IPL 2024.

Madhwal struck with the second ball of his spell when he got Sanju Samson to chop on to his stumps, and added a second when Jos Buttler pulled him to fine leg. He added a third later, in the 13th over, when Ashwin sent a leading edge off a short delivery to point.

Madhwal was the standout bowler for Mumbai Indians with 3 for 20.

Parag walked in ranked No. 5 on the orange cap list and finished the day with the cap on his head. With no real scoreboard pressure on this occasion, No. 4 Parag played risk-free cricket early on, but tore into Coetzee with four fours and two sixes.

It all started with back-to-back boundaries off Coetzee in the eighth over, followed by another lofted four over the covers in the 11th. He then smoked Bumrah through mid-off in the 14th over before depositing Piyush Chawla over long-on in the 15th.

Parag then put the finishing touches on the result by hammering Coetzee for 16 runs off the first three balls of the 16th over.

ESPNCricinfo



Riyan Parag hit an unbeaten 39-ball 54 to steer Rajasthan Royals to victory against Mumbai Indians on Monday

Parag relishes success at No. 4 with Royals

Mumbai, India - Riyan Parag's promotion to No. 4 is paying dividends for Rajasthan Royals. It's a position familiar to 22-year-old Parag, who topped the run-scoring charts - with 510 runs at an average of 85 and strike rate of 182.79 - in the latest edition of the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy. He has carried that form into IPL 2024.

Coming into the game against Mumbai Indians on Monday on the back of a 29-ball 43 and an unbeaten 45-ball 84, Parag, with Royals in just a bit of trouble at 42 for 2 chasing 126, kept his calm and took them over the line with an unbeaten 39-ball 54. With 181 runs in three innings, he also became the joint-highest run-getter in IPL 2024 along with Virat Kohli, but ahead on the list because of a superior strike rate.

"When I play domestically, this is the exact type of situation I go in to bat," Parag told the host broadcaster after the game. "When Jos [Buttler] bhai got out and Ash [R Ashwin] bhai got out a little after, I was like 'this is what I do, this is what I've been doing for the

last six months playing domestic cricket'. So it was pretty simple to calculate everything."

Royals had restricted Mumbai Indians to 125 for 9 but were rocked early by Kwen Maphaka and Akash Madhwal. But Parag carried on unfazed and stitched a 40-run stand with Ashwin to calm down the camp.

Parag had been used primarily as a finisher by Royals in the past, and his returns had been patchy.

"I have had three to four years of not performing at all," Parag said. "And you really go back to your hotel room and you think... that when you know you can do something and the performances are not coming, you get back to the drawing [board]. I tried finding what was wrong, and I figured out that I was not practicing at this level enough."

"So I went back after the [last] season and practised very hard, and I think that's showing now. I've practiced [against] these types of quick balls and these kinds of scenarios a lot, hence the performances."

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MOON ROVERS

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NASA's mini moon rovers go for a test drive ahead of 2025 private lunar launch

NASA test drove the mini autonomous rovers that will soon fly to the moon and collectively map the lunar surface.

The rovers are part of a technology demonstration called Cooperative Autonomous Distributed Robotic Exploration (CADRE), which is designed to show that a group of robotic spacecraft can work together without direct human control. NASA took the suitcase-sized rovers for a test drive across Mars Yard at the agency's Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL) to simulate the rugged terrain they'll experience on the moon.

A series of tests, performed in August 2023 using two full-scale development models while the spacecraft were still under construction, confirmed the mini CADRE rovers were able to drive in unison and adjust their coordinated path to avoid obstacles, according to a statement from NASA.

The moon-bound rovers will be powered by solar panels and equipped with cameras, sensors and ground-penetrating radar to map the lunar surface in 3D. During the August 2023 test drive, only one of the rover models was fitted with a stand-in for solar panels. The other two were able to read one another's battery levels to determine when a break was needed to recharge their solar arrays before continuing their trek together.

Additional tests included night drives at Mars Yard under large flood lamps to simulate the extreme shad-

ows and lighting that the rovers will encounter during the lunar daytime, NASA officials said in a statement this month.

Following the Mars Yard tests, the rovers underwent vibration and thermal tests in November 2023 to ensure their hardware could survive the trip to the moon. A rover was clamped to a special "shaker table" that vibrates intensely in different directions. It was also placed in a thermal vacuum chamber that simulates the airless conditions of space and its extreme hot and cold temperatures.

The team also performed electromagnetic interference and compatibility testing in November 2023 in a specialised chamber designed to absorb radio waves. This confirmed that the rovers' electronic subsystems did not interfere with each other nor with those on the lander, and that the rover can survive expected electromagnetic disturbances, according to NASA.

In early March, NASA announced that construction and testing of the three CADRE rovers was complete and the trio was ready for integration with Intuitive Machines' Nova-C lander, which will deliver the mini explorers to the lunar surface later this year or early next year as part of the company's third lunar lander mission, IM-3.

The rovers will explore the moon's Reiner Gamma region, where they will spend the daylight hours of a lunar day, or the equivalent of about 14 days on Earth, and work together to study the lunar surface.

A development model rover that is part of NASA's CADRE (Cooperative Autonomous Distributed Robotic Exploration) technology demonstration took its first autonomous drive around the Mars Yard at the agency's Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Southern California



Engineers prepare three small Moon-bound rovers for a drive test in a clean room at the agency's Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Southern California in December 2023

The rovers will explore the moon's Reiner Gamma region, where they will spend the daylight hours of a lunar day, or the equivalent of about 14 days on Earth, and work together to study the lunar surface



In a special chamber at NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory, engineers prepare to test a small rover that will go to the moon as part of a NASA technology demonstration called CADRE (Cooperative Autonomous Distributed Robotic Exploration)



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RAMADAN STYLES

FASHION FITS IN RAMADAN AS PART OF CULTURE AND CIVILISATION, SAY SAUDI DESIGNERS. IT PLAYS A MAJOR ROLE IN GIVING THE SEASON A DISTINCTIVE CHARACTER AND A SPECIAL IDENTITY

Aside from the religious and spiritual duties that Muslims strive to complete during Ramadan, the fasting month is also a time for gatherings and maintaining kinship. This means it is also an occasion to dress up and look one's best.

Women put away their jeans and shirts and put on their jalabiya or dar'aa, quintessential dresses for Ramadan. And, Saudi fashion designer Wafa al Jaffali has created a Ramadan collection inspired by the environment.

"My design for this Ramadan season combined traditional works from the environment of the south inlaid with beads, as well as the sun's rays in many of my pieces in addition to the waves of the sea,"

Wafa explained, "Ramadan is the month of mercy, devotion, and closeness to the ties of kinship, which requires us to contribute in one way or another to meet the demand of female citizens and residents in a variety that uses a decorative and cultural character in our diverse homeland with its 13 regions."

The month of Ramadan is the month of fasting and the main purpose is detachment from a materialistic life, and this reflects in the simplicity of the jalabiya and its special characteristics that it is light, comfortable, and mini-



MODEST makeover



mal at the same time.

Women and girls have an emotional relationship when it came to clothing for special occasions, she said, adding, "This is followed by the economic situation of each woman, and it puts pressure on us to go along with everyone and meet their needs."

Wafa's collection predominantly comprises simple materials that can be embroidered. "In our grandmothers' era they used taffeta, rama, silk, and other fabrics, which all enabled them at the time to work manually with needles, threads, sequins, and beads from their environment, to draw patterns of palm trees, the sun, and the moon."

She said, the jalabiya was an iconic fashion piece during Ramadan because it was how women dressed back in the day, and it was being modernised with contemporary designs.

"It's a historic fashion item that tells the history of our mothers and grandmothers and carries pictures of the past while updating it with everything new, whether hand-sewn or made with a tailoring machine."

Lian Bahddad, 23, is a Saudi marketing graduate who taught herself fashion design. She said fashion was an integral part of people's culture and civilisation.

"Fashion in Ramadan plays a major role in giving the season a distinctive character and a special identity that distinguishes it from the rest of the seasons," she said, "especially in the Middle East, which is distinguished by its wide easy to wear cuts, modesty, and cool airy fabrics."

Bahddad said the fashion industry was growing globally every year and that, not so long ago, international brands began designing Ramadan collections targeting the Arab market.

It was doubling in size every year, she added, with designs inspired by the jalabiya, the kaftan, the thobe, and the dar'aa. "And this would not have happened without the direction of local designers every year to add their creative touches to it, to add style to the characteristic of the fashion in Ramadan which led to the high demand."

The young designer said the clothes people wore were an expression of their personalities and moods. "Clothes and their styling are an art in itself. A lot can be said about our appearance for each occasion. An awareness of the dress code on every occasion is important. In some cultures, it can indicate a lack of respect for the people and the occasion itself."

She further disclosed that the jalabiya started out as a men's robe from

Occasions usually have a special theme or spirit that gives that occasion its identity

Wafa al Jaffali

Egypt, Sudan, and Morocco, with its origins going back to the Ottoman Empire, but that these days it was a minimalist and loose-fitting women's outfit.

"The month of Ramadan is the month of fasting and the main purpose is detachment from a materialistic life, and this reflects in the simplicity of the jalabiya and its special characteristics that it is light, comfortable, and minimal at the same time. And the gatherings between family and friends at the time of breaking the fast is what led designers into taking advantage of this season to innovate different styles, but the concept is the same," she said.

Saudi freelance designer Darin Basyoni said as Ramadan was a month of gatherings, and its spiritual atmosphere gave people the energy to go out, they needed to look elegant and fashionable in a special way for these gatherings.

"To look good you need to dress nicely. Occasions usually have a special theme or spirit that gives that occasion its identity," she said. Her Ramadan collection is inspired by traditional Saudi patterns and the environment.

"I wanted my first collection to represent my country's tradition, therefore, my main inspirations were the Sado pattern and nature."

(Courtesy: arabnews.com)



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