

RO1.9bn scheme to finance housing loans

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman Housing Bank launched a programme called Iskan on Monday with support of the Ministry of Finance. Iskan aims to accelerate the provision of financing to applicants on the waiting list of the bank and the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning.

The Ministry of Finance stated that it has approved provision of additional housing loans with the aim of accelerating access to subsidised loans for citizens worth RO1.9bn over the next five years, covering over 61,000 applications on the waiting list of Oman Housing Bank (OHB) and the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning (MHUP).

In a statement, OHB said the Iskan programme has been

launched in line with Royal Directives of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, reflecting his firm commitment to fostering cooperation between OHB and various local banks within the sultanate to accelerate the provision of subsidised housing finance for citizens.

The launch was held under the patronage of Sultan bin Salem al Habsi, Minister of Finance, in the presence of dignitaries, as well as experts and professionals from the business sector.

Following the Royal Directives, OHB adopted innovative digital technologies to streamline the application process and engage national talents in this initiative. Additionally, the bank has signed agreements with various local banks to finance housing applications, covering both conventional and Islamic banking services.



(C) Sultan bin Salem al Habsi, Minister of Finance, launches the Iskan programme on Monday (Supplied photo)

At the launch, Moosa bin Masoud al Jadidi, CEO of OHB, made a visual presentation of a detailed description of the pro-

gramme. He emphasised that the initiative is aimed at cutting short the long waiting period for eligible citizens.

"The programme will speed up distribution of housing finance through the dedicated electronic platform - Iskan - al-

lowing citizens to submit their data and documents, know their turn and choose their preferred bank for securing housing finance, in line with the criteria set by OHB. Additionally, it will outline the eligibility criteria, the targeted income groups and the fees individuals must pay for the interest rate."

OHB will upload lists of eligible citizens on the Iskan electronic platform according to priority. As their turn nears, individuals will receive an SMS alert with a direct link to the application process on the platform. This will enable them to complete all necessary steps to obtain housing finance, including application submission, data entry, financial access, and evaluation of the whole process.

Iskan aims to significantly reduce waiting times from applica-

tion to finance disbursement by utilising advanced digital technologies, efficiently meeting citizens' needs.

Citizen will find comprehensive details about housing finance options on the platform. It will act as a comprehensive umbrella, addressing the requirements of citizens eligible for housing finance through a thoughtful approach ensuring accessibility and inclusiveness.

The maximum amount provided by OHB is RO60,000 and up to RO80,000 for citizens interested in purchasing housing units in Sultan Haitham City and integrated city projects spearheaded by MHUP.

Statistics indicate that since its inception in 1977 till the end of 2022, OHB extended over RO1.5bn in subsidised housing finance.

02



Muttrah Corniche: A haven for tourists in winter

Oman sets sights on becoming regional gateway for space services

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman's national space policy and its executive programme, extending from 2023 to 2033, will position the country as a regional gateway for space services and applications.

The comment was made by Salem Butti Salem al Qubaisi, Director General of UAE Space

The Middle East Space Conference has attracted over 400 experts and CEOs from the space sector

Agency at the Middle East Space Conference that began under the patronage of H H Sayyid Bilarab bin Haitham al Said on Monday.

The three-day event, held at

Oman Convention and Exhibition Center, underscores Oman's vision to establish itself as a regional gateway for space services and applications.

"Over the next ten years, Oman's programme will create countless opportunities to enhance the adoption of space science and technology, because satellites today play a pivotal role in many aspects of modern life such as communications and the Internet to weather forecasting and satellite navigation in improving many of the services and technologies that we depend on

in our daily life," said Qubaisi.

The conference, organised by the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology in collaboration with Euroconsult, has attracted over 400 experts and CEOs from the space sector. With more than 70 speakers presenting, it aims to propel Oman's space programme forward and explore investment opportunities in the sult-

anate as a hub for space services.

H E Said Hamood al Mawali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, outlined key milestones of the programme. These include the launch of a satellite in 2025, development of Earth observation technologies through low-orbit satellites, and incubators for space sector startups expected to start between 2024 and 2025.



Oman LNG is honoured to congratulate His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and the people of Oman on the anniversary of His Majesty's Accession to the Throne. May Allah the Almighty protect His Majesty and guide him to the renewed renaissance and bring Oman further progress and prosperity.



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Muttrah: A haven for tourists in winter

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The quaint waterfront buildings, gentle sea breeze, squawking seagulls and the pleasant winter sun make Muttrah Corniche a major attraction, drawing tourists to witness Oman's breathtaking beauty.

European tourists, in particular, are captivated by Muttrah's enchanting streets. They immerse themselves in the rich tapestry of Omani culture, engaging in traditional activities and savouring local flavours like kahwa and shawarma.

Mark Müller, a German tourist, described Oman in winter as a "hidden gem".

"Mornings along Muttrah Corniche are nothing short of magical and the souq is a sensory delight. English signage for amenities like washrooms and ATMs would make the experience even better," Müller said.

Swiss tourist Victoria Fischer echoed Müller's thoughts. "The atmosphere is unparalleled. The need for English signage is evident, but the warmth of Omani



MUTTRAH CORNICHE

hospitality transcends language barriers. The traditional ornaments and lamps are exquisite, capturing the essence of Omani craftsmanship," she said.

Victoria bought bukhoor for her friends back in Zurich. "I love how people do not force tourists to buy unlike many countries."

Asked how her current visit compared to the last before the COVID-19 pandemic, she said there are more tourists though the basic infrastructure in Muscat remains the same. "The fragrance of bukhoor, the hospitality of the people and the fresh seafood are unforgettable."

Rahman Mohammad, salesman of a shop in the souq, noted the economic upturn during winter season, especially demand for traditional items like bukhoor and ornaments. He enjoys the cultural exchange with tourists.

Muttrah Corniche's allure is not lost on Italian tourist Sofia

Ricci, who admired its natural beauty and cultural richness. However, she pointed out the need for more English signage, additional washrooms and WiFi spots to enhance the tourist experience.

According to Sreedhu Nair, Sales Director of Travel Diaries,



there is significant increase in tourism this season, particularly European cruises for which Muttrah Souq is a highlight of the itinerary.

He cited the high volume of cruise sales as evidence of Muscat's flourishing tourism sector, which is driven by the city's cul-

tural appeal. Besides the serene ambiance, tourists also seek adventure sports, exploring Oman's rugged landscapes and water-based activities. The winter season offers an ideal setting for adrenaline seekers too to experience the stunning natural beauty of Oman.

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Jabal Shams records -1.1°C, the lowest this season

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The mercury plummeted in several parts of the sultanate with Jabal Shams witnessing sub-zero temperatures on Sunday.

According to the Directorate General of Meteorology, Jabal Shams recorded -1.1°C on Sunday, the lowest temperature of the year so far.

In January last year, the hills recorded a minimum of -3.6°C, the lowest in 2023.

According to the met department, the lowest recorded temperature in Jabal Shams was -9.7°C in January 2015, since monitoring began in 2003.

Other places witnessing low temperatures this winter are



Saiq (5.4°C), Muqshin (10.2°C), Mazyunah (10.7°C), Thumrait (11.5°C), Marmul (12.5°C), Sunaynah (13.7°C) and Dalkhut (13.8°C).

The met department informed that the lowest temperature recorded in Masirah Island was 10°C in December 1967, while the highest temperature

recorded in December was 32.5°C in 2016. In December 2023, 30°C was highest temperature recorded and 20°C the lowest on the island.

Speaking to Muscat Daily, Abdullah al Khatri, owner of Jabal Shams Moon Guesthouse, informed that the area is experiencing freezing temperatures and that the hills were laden with frost on Monday.

Currently, Jabal Shams is witnessing a large turnout of foreign tourists, residents and citizens alike.

"We have five rooms and these are mostly occupied, especially during the weekends. Tourists are also going for trekking to explore the area. We have several hiking trails, some of which run up to 12km," Khatri said.

"Jabal Shams is one of the most beautiful places for camping in Oman," he added.



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ANNOUNCEMENT

The Ministry of Health (Al Buraimi Hospital) invites specialized companies to participate in the following Tender:

Tender Ref.	Description	Last date for Collection of tenders Document	Last date for submission of tenders	Eligibility	Tender Fee (Non-Refundable)	Bidding Method
2024/57	Inspection & Service of Generators At Buraimi Hospital	Before 11 AM On 28/01/2024	Before 11 AM On 20/02/2024	Specialized companies and institutions registered with the Tender Board	R.O 25 Per set	Electronically via the Esnad system for electronic bidding

Please note the following:

● Companies wishing to participate in the tender can purchase the tender documents electronically through the website (etendering.tenderboard.gov.om), provided that they are registered in the system.

● Companies must submit their bids electronically via the above-mentioned website, provided that a **Bid Commitment Declaration**, and bids received without the required Declaration will not be considered.

● The concerned entity is not obligated to accept the lowest bid or any other bid.

● For inquiries related to the above tender, please contact the following:

Through the website of the Esnad system for electronic tendering: (etendering.tenderboard.gov.om)

Sohar Nights Winter Camp from Jan 10

Our Correspondent
Muscat

In efforts to stimulate winter tourism and support domestic tourism, an event called Sohar Nights Winter Camp will be held from January 10 to 14. It has been organised by the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MHT).

An official at MHT said, "The winter season makes North Batinah the perfect destination for outdoor activities and the governorate is ready to receive a large number of visitors."

He informed that in the winter season - October to April - North Batinah receives a large number of visitors, both domestic and international. "The desert in the governorate is one of the most beautiful in Oman, especially in the winter season. It is

also one of the most popular destinations for camel riding, desert crossings and camping."

The winter camp will be held in the Al Rifaa area of Sohar and will include a wide array of activities, including theatre performances, stalls displaying camping equipment and food trucks. Events at the camp will be held from 4:30pm to 12pm.

"The camp will include cultural, entertainment and shopping activities, in addition to

competitions. Many stalls have been allocated to families engaged in cottage industries."

The official informed that the event aims to create a cultural and recreational space for citizens and residents, in addition to highlighting the tourism potential of Sohar. "The winter camp also aims to promote the Omani cottage industry in Sohar and market its products, while spreading the culture of camping," he added.

Oman evacuates citizens from Gaza Strip

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The sultanate's embassy in Cairo has announced that it evacuated Omani citizens from the Gaza Strip on Sunday in cooperation with Egyptian authorities.

"Under the directives of the Foreign Ministry, the Embassy of the Sultanate of Oman in the Arab Republic of Egypt was able to evacuate Omani nationals from the Gaza Strip in cooperation and coordination with the Egyptian Ministry of Foreign Af-

fairs. We seize this opportunity to extend thanks and appreciation to the Egyptian authorities for

their cooperation," a statement said. The family arrived home safe and in good health.

Over 1,000 healthcare experts to attend global pharmacy event

Our Correspondent Muscat

The Ministry of Health's Directorate General of Medical Supplies is set to host the Oman International Pharmacy Congress and Exhibition at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre from January 14.

The event, themed 'Shaping the Future of Pharmaceutical

Services', aligns with Oman Vision 2040, Health Vision 2050 and various global health initiatives, showcasing a commitment to advancing pharmaceutical services and universal health coverage.

The congress promises to be a hub of expertise and innovation, featuring local, regional and international participants, including officials of prominent in-

ternational pharmaceutical organisations.

Entities like the International Pharmaceutical Federation, American Society of Health-System Pharmacists and the Institute of Safe Medication Practices from both the USA and Canada will also attend. Additionally, the National Association for Primary Care, UK, and the global Chartered Institute of Procurement &

Supply will bring valuable insights into drug supply chains and pharmaceutical practices.

The event is expected to attract over 1,000 healthcare professionals from around the world, presenting a platform for 95 distinguished experts and speakers who will offer insights through 105 working papers and 14 workshops over three days. These sessions, including two

panel discussions, will cover the latest developments in pharmaceutical practice.

Accompanying the congress, an exhibition will showcase international medicine manufacturers, medical device companies and leading pharmacies in Oman.

The event will feature 42 posters by health practitioners and pharmacy students.

Registration for Together We Progress forum begins

Muscat - The General Secretariat of the Council of Ministers on Monday started registration for the 'Together We Progress Forum' along with the launch of the 'Idea Makers' initiative for in-

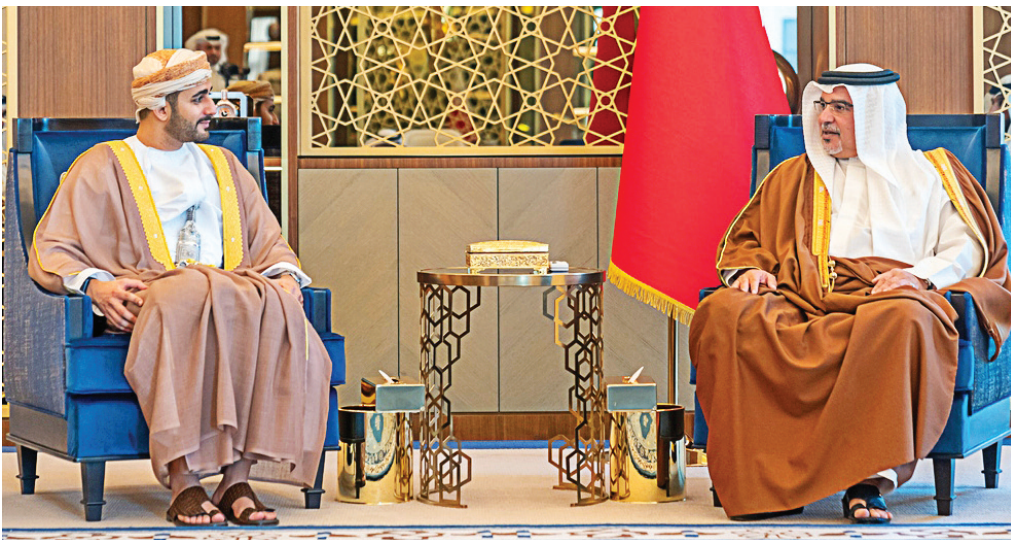
novation and creative thinking. They aim to provide innovative solutions in the two spheres of national identity and belonging, and communication between the government and society.

Sayyid Theyazin meets Bahraini Crown Prince

Manama, Bahrain - H H Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said held a meeting with Prince Salman bin Hamad al Khalifa, Crown Prince and Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Bahrain, at Al Qudabiya Palace in Manama on Monday.

During the meeting, H H Sayyid Theyazin and Prince Salman reviewed relations between the Sultanate of Oman and the Kingdom of Bahrain, as well as means of upgrading co-operation in various fields. They also discussed other matters of common concern.

The meeting was attended by Sheikh Nasser bin Hamad al Khalifa, the Bahrain King's Representative for Humanitarian Works and Youth Affairs, Sheikh



Isa bin Salman al Khalifa, Chairman of Board of Trustees of Isa bin Salman Education Charitable Trust and Chairman of Bahrain

Labour Fund, Sheikh Khalid bin Abdullah al Khalifa, Deputy Prime Minister, Sheikh Salman bin Khalifa al Khalifa, Minister of

Finance and National Economy, and several other senior Bahraini officials. ONA

MAFWR issues alert on shrimp deaths in Rakhyut

Our Correspondent Muscat

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources (MAFWR) has issued a safety alert about the occurrence of shrimp death in Rakhyout in Dhofar governorate, due to changes in sea temperature.

'The shrimp species, which came under threat, is commonly found in the Indian Ocean and the Arabian Sea at depths ranging up to 200 metres,' MAFWR said. 'Notably, such incidents are typically observed during the winter season,' it added.

The ministry confirmed that a nine-month ban on shrimp fishing and trading has come into effect from December 1, 2023.

It has called on public to avoid consuming shrimps during this season.

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Carnival to support children with disabilities from tomorrow

Our Correspondent Muscat

The Association for Children with Disabilities will organise a charity carnival at Oman Automobile Association in Muscat from January 10 to 13.

The sixth edition of the carnival will be inaugurated by Lujaina Mohsin Haider Darwish.

Speaking to *Muscat Daily*, Khadija bint Nasser al Saati, Chairperson of Board of Directors of the association, said, "The four-day carnival, open daily from 4pm to 10pm, aims to raise funds to support children with disabilities. A total of 40 entrepreneurs will participate in the carnival."

It will feature multiple sections offering a diverse range of products, besides electronic games and food corners. Proceeds from the carnival, including space rental fees for small and medium-sized enterprises, will be directed to the association.

Khadija informed that the carnival will also include activities such as horse riding, motorcycle rides, face painting, theatrical performances and a special corner for female vocational students' crafts.

The association currently serves about 400 children, aged five to 14, through nine centres located in the wilayats of Seeb, Barka, Musannah, Azaiba,



We call on everyone to participate in the carnival and support children with disabilities

KHADIJA AL SAATI



Quriyat, Jalan Bani Bu Hasan, Dhank, Yanqul and Saham.

It has been actively promoting human values and a culture of donating and providing voluntary support to children among vari-

ous segments of society and private sector entities.

"We call on everyone to participate in the carnival and support children with disabilities," Khadija urged.



TENDER

REQUEST FOR QUALIFICATION LEADING TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF A NEW SOLAR PV INDEPENDENT POWER PROJECT (IPP) AT IBRI, SULTANATE OF OMAN

Nama Power and Water Procurement (PWP) is responsible for procuring new capacity for power and water and for purchasing and selling the output in the Sultanate of Oman in accordance with the requirements of the law for the regulation and privatisation of the electricity and related water sector promulgated by Royal Decree 78/2004 as amended and the PWP license.

In line with Sultanate of Oman vision to diversify fuel sources and achieving net zero target by 2050 through the use of clean energy for power generation, PWP is planning to develop the fourth solar PV project with a capacity of 500 MW at Ibri ("Ibri III Solar IPP" or "Project") in partnership with the private sector. PWP is announcing the launch of the qualification process for interested developers through the issuance of the Request for Qualification (RFQ) document.

Tender Title	Tender No.	Tender Purchase Price	Statement of Qualification Submission Deadline
Request For Qualification for the Development of Solar PV IPP at Ibri	OPWP/2024/001	RO 350 Last day of purchase is 20 January 2024	19 February 2024 Before 10.00 Am (Gulf Standard Time).

- Disclaimer: This RFQ is for interested developers and is not applicable to interested or potential EPC contractors.
- The tender documents are available for purchase in an electronic format through PWP website: (<https://www.omanpwp.om/new/Default.aspx>) after completion of the registration process via the e-tendering system.
- The supplier user manual can be accessed on the official website of the Company. In case of any queries, please send an email to: (procurement.officer@Omanpwp.nama.om).



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*Rates as on January 08
Source: xe.com

BRIEFS

China's vehicle production reach 30mn in 2023

China's auto industry roared back in 2023, defying challenges to reach a historic milestone: production and sales both surpassed 30mn units, setting record highs for the year. This remarkable achievement showcases the industry's resilience, vast potential, and the power of China's massive market, according to China's Economic Daily.

Though official figures by the China Association of Automobile Manufacturers won't be released until next week, December snapshots and year-to-date data suggest China's auto industry crossed the 30mn production mark in 2023, setting a record high.

This significant leap forward signifies a major turning point for the industry, paving the way for further growth and innovation, the newspaper added.

Non-oil growth momentum remains strong in GCC: IMF

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The GCC region's non-hydrocarbon growth momentum remains strong, driven by higher domestic demand, increased gross capital inflows, and reform implementation, according to the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

In a recent report on GCC economies, the IMF stated that the strong non-oil GDP growth in the GCC region is limiting the overall impact of lower oil production on growth. The non-hydrocarbon GDP of GCC countries grew by a robust 5.3% in 2022 and is expected to continue growing at a buoyant 4.3% rate in 2023, as per the IMF estimates.

The IMF anticipates the highest non-oil growth rates in Saudi Arabia and the UAE. Saudi Arabia's H1 2023 non-hydrocarbon GDP growth averaged around 4.5%, and the UAE published a robust growth of 5.9% in H1 2023, driven by strong domestic demand. In Saudi Arabia, robust non-oil private investment will continue to be the primary driver of growth, fueled by the accelerating pace of non-oil activities, including various mega projects boosting the wholesale, retail trade, construction, and transportation sectors, IMF said.

Non-hydrocarbon growth, according to the IMF, is slowing but



While GCC's hydrocarbon GDP grew by 7.8% in 2022, it is expected to register negative growth of around 1% in 2023 because of oil production cuts in line with the OPEC+ agreement

remaining above 3% in Bahrain and Kuwait and stabilising above 2% in Oman.

'Slower Bahrain and Oman growth is reflecting continued fiscal consolidation, higher interest rates, and a base effect from 2022 growth,' the IMF noted.

Oil cuts lower overall GDP growth

According to the IMF estimates, oil production cuts will lower the GCC's overall GDP growth to 1.5% for 2023. The slowdown in overall growth

from the exceptional 7.9% registered in 2022 mainly reflects oil production cuts slowing hydrocarbon GDP.

'While the GCC hydrocarbon GDP grew by 7.8% in 2022 supported by global cyclical momentum, it is expected to register negative growth of around 1% in 2023 because of oil production cuts in line with the OPEC+ agreement and further unilateral cuts of 1mn barrels per day by Saudi Arabia that were extended to end-December 2023,' the IMF said.

Oil production, which depends on OPEC+ decisions, will be subdued in the near term, the fund added.

Furthermore, the IMF acknowledged that the GCC countries have embarked on wide-ranging reforms to achieve socio-economic transformation. It said GCC countries have set out ambitious reform agendas, as shown in Vision 2030 of Saudi Arabia, UAE Vision 2031, Oman Vision 2040, and Qatar National Vision 2030.

'Implementation has been

progressing well and has accelerated after the pandemic. Main progress areas are social and business-friendly reforms, efforts to enhance fiscal sustainability and resilience, investments in strategic industries, and digital and green infrastructure,' the fund said.

'Going forward, stepped-up implementation of these reforms will be critical to enhancing productivity, diversifying the economies, and preparing for the energy transition,' the IMF added.

Inflation remains contained

The IMF noted that GCC inflation remains contained and is falling across the region. It expects GCC inflation to stay contained at 2.6% for 2023 and 2.3% in 2024, converging with that of the US in the medium term with pegs to the US dollar in place.

'After heavily picking up, non-traded goods inflation has also trended down since February 2023, resulting in inflation slowing down to about 1.6% in August 2023. Spillovers from the war in Ukraine have had a limited impact beyond the resulting increase in global commodity prices' volatility,' the IMF said.

The fund, however, said that non-tradable goods inflation became the main driver of headline GCC inflation in 2023.

ONEIC gets CBO approval for PSP license

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman National Engineering & Investment Company (ONEIC) has announced the receipt of the final approval from the Central Bank of Oman (CBO) to operate as a payment service provider (PSP) in the sultanate.

In a disclosure submitted to the Muscat Stock Exchange, the company stated, 'ONEIC has the pleasure to announce to shareholders and investors that CBO has issued the final approval for the PSP license.'

ONEIC confirmed that obtaining this license aligns with its strategic goal of diversifying its business, particularly in the realms of e-commerce and electronic payments.

'In the upcoming stage, the company will aim to consolidate all its payment services through its electronic wallet. The license will be instrumental in this endeavor, and the company plans to expand into other related services,' ONIEC added in its disclosure.

On Thursday, the CBO also granted its approval and license for Oman Investment & Finance Company (OIFC) to operate as a payment service provider in Oman.

CBO issues treasury bills worth RO58mn

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Central Bank of Oman (CBO) announced the issuance two tenders of government treasury bills worth RO58mn on Monday.

The value of the allotted treasury bills amounted to RO20mn, for a maturity period of 28 days. The average accepted price reached RO99.590 for every RO100 bill, while the minimum accepted price also arrived at RO99.590.

The average discount rate and the average yield reached 5.3446% and 5.3666%, respectively.

The value of the allotted treasury bills amounted to RO38mn, for a maturity of 91 days. The average accepted price reached RO99.660 for every RO100 bill, while the minimum accepted price also arrived at RO99.660.

The average discount rate and the average yield reached 5.3747% and 5.4477%, respec-



tively.

The interest rate on the repo operations with CBO is 6.00% while the discount rate on the Treasury Bills Discounting Facility with the central bank is 6.50%.

Treasury bills are short-term highly secured financial instruments issued by the Ministry of Finance, and they provide licensed commercial banks the opportunity to invest their surplus funds.

The Central Bank of Oman acts as the issue manager and provides the added advantage of ready liquidity through discounting and repurchase facilities (repo).

Furthermore, treasury bills promote the local money market by creating a benchmark yield curve for short-term interest rates. The government may also resort to this instrument whenever felt necessary for financing its recurrent expenditures.

Oman Oil Marketing Company opens 5 new service stations in Saudi Arabia

Muscat - Oman Oil Marketing Company (OOMCO) has continued the acceleration of its expansion program in Saudi Arabia with the inauguration of five new service stations during December 2023.

The new locations in Jeddah, Mecca and Dammam takes the number of fully operational service stations in Saudi market to 30 stations as of end of 2023.

Based on OOMCO's experience in the fuel retail sector that extends for more than 20-years, the company is committed in developing integrated service stations for its customers that extends beyond fuel which are in line with the competitive standards of the market. Each convenient one-stop-shop service station takes into consideration other needs of customers such as a convenience store, ATMs, fast food cafes and specialty coffee shops, in addition to essential automotive services including a car service center and car wash.



The recent opening of these stations in Saudi Arabia is in line with OOMCO's regional and international expansion strategy to enhance the company's presence.

In a press release, Jaber al Wahaibi, general manager - global markets, strategic planning and business development at OOMCO, said, "The progress

we have made towards our regional expansion goals reflects our commitment to connecting with customers across our entire network. It is a result of our cumulative experience in the sector, which undoubtedly contributed to the development of cutting-edge, convenient, and competitive service stations. OOMCO looks to support grow-

ing trade relations between Saudi Arabia and Oman in pursuit of the objectives of both Oman Vision 2040 and Saudi Vision 2030."

"We are pleased to announce the opening of these additional service stations to our network of stations in Saudi Arabia, and we look forward to more achievements by launching new stations during 2024 and the coming years which aims to strengthen our presence," added Nasser al Maawali, regional director of OOMCO's branch in Saudi Arabia.

OOMCO strives to become one of the top five fuel marketers in the GCC by 2027. As it continues to grow, OOMCO's service stations now serve a variety of customer segments and due to its non-fuel growth and retail transformation strategy have become becoming a destination of choice for premium fuel, food, beverages, and other convenient items and quality automotive services.

Oil prices decrease as Saudi Arabia cuts export prices to Asia

Muscat - Oil prices dropped on Monday after Saudi Arabia's decision to cap its prices for Asian markets increased worry over oversupply and expectations about US Federal Reserve's interest rate cuts remain muted.

Global benchmark Brent crude traded at \$78.05 per barrel in morning trade in London, a 0.90% decline from the closing price of \$78.76 a barrel in the previous trading session on Friday.

The US benchmark, West Texas Intermediate (WTI), traded at the same time at \$73.02 per barrel, down 1.07% from Friday's close of \$73.81 per barrel.

Prices started the day with bearish sentiment after Saudi Arabia lowered its crude oil prices for its Asian customers by \$2 a barrel over requests for more competitive prices against other crude oil suppliers in the region.

The decision by OPEC's largest oil producer brought its flagship Arab light crude oil to its lowest level in 27 months.



Tempered expectations on interest rate cuts by the Fed also supported price declines. Lower interest rates tend to reduce consumer borrowing costs, which can boost economic growth and oil demand.

Fed Dallas President Lorie Logan warned on Saturday that in order to prevent inflation from rising following a recent decrease in long-term bond rates, the US central bank may need to start boosting its short-term policy rate again.

The strengthening of the dol-

lar further pressured oil prices, as it makes oil more expensive for investors holding other currencies.

However, tensions in the Red Sea, involving attacks by Houthis and the possibility of an Iranian intervention continue raising concerns about potential supply disruptions and adding on oil prices.

On Sunday, Israel's military chief Herzi Halevi said that the war in Gaza will likely continue throughout the year, adding that 2024 will be "tough."

Also, OPEC+ plans to hold a meeting in early February increases supply uncertainties in the market. If the group decides to extend the duration and amount of the supply cuts, it could lead to an undersupplied market and potentially higher oil prices.

In November, OPEC+ group decided to curtail oil production with voluntary production cuts totaling around 2.2mn barrels per day for the first quarter of 2024.

Agencies

US spending deal reached amid looming shutdown

Washington, US – US Congress leaders have reached a deal over the total amount of spending for the rest of 2024 as they seek to avoid a partial government shutdown, according to media reports.

The \$1.6tn figure includes \$886bn for defense and more than \$704bn for non-defense spending, according to Republican House Speaker Mike Johnson, as reported by BBC.

However, there appears to be some discrepancy over the numbers. The deal now needs approval from the House of Representatives and Senate.

This bipartisan agreement, led by Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer and House Speaker Mike Johnson, significantly reduces the risk of a government shutdown. This deal allows the appropriations committees to commence negotiations on detailed spending bills for federal agencies, ensuring continuity in government operations.

The agreement, however, is not without its controversies. It includes budget maneuvers that some conservative members have criticised as gimmicky, which could potentially hinder full Republican support.

Moreover, the deal doesn't completely eliminate the possibility of a standoff over policy riders, such as those related to funding investigations into former President Donald Trump. House Speaker Johnson outlined the agreement's details in a letter to his colleagues, emphasising the concessions made to finalise the spending cap.



President Joe Biden has welcomed the deal, urging Republicans to ensure funding for essential domestic and national security priorities. The agreement aligns with the June law that set the discretionary spending cap at \$1.59tn

The deal paves the way for detailed budget negotiations by appropriations committees. While it eases immediate shutdown concerns, the accord faces potential hurdles from conservative opposition and policy riders.

The bipartisanship secures a

top-line budget limit but lacks agreement on policy riders, leaving room for future clashes. Democrats has won concessions on domestic spending levels, shielding programs like veterans' benefits and healthcare. Conservatives have raised concerns

about "gimmicks" and side-deal accounting shifts exceeding the original spending cap.

The success of the agreement hinges on navigating conservative pushback and reaching consensus on policy riders. Negotiations on individual agency budgets remain, with deadlines looming on January 20 and February 2.

The deal's reliance on accounting maneuvers might generate criticism, especially if Republicans lose control of the House in November. Despite the hurdle cleared, the battle for 2024 appropriations promises will be a continuous political tug-of-war.

President Joe Biden has welcomed the deal, urging Republicans to ensure funding for essential domestic and national security priorities. The agreement aligns with the June law that set the discretionary spending cap at \$1.59tn.

Notably, the deal includes provisions for \$16bn in spending cuts to be implemented in 2024, including accelerated cuts to the Internal Revenue Service and the cancellation of unspent Covid-19 pandemic funds. This compromise, while protecting key domestic priorities, also adheres to the fiscal discipline required by the previously agreed-upon cap.

Agencies



OPEC+ to use verbal interventions in oil market: Experts

Moscow, Russia – Following the voluntary reduction in oil output announced at a meeting in November, OPEC+ countries will take a wait-and-see strategy against the backdrop of steady prices, according to experts interviewed by TASS.

At the same time, proposals for further measures to limit production will be made, but they will be merely verbal interventions, because new cuts may face resistance inside OPEC+.

At a meeting on November 30, 2023, several OPEC+ members agreed to additional voluntary production cuts of 2.2mn barrels per day for the Q1 2024.

According to Sergey Kondratyev, Principal Director on Economic Studies at the Institute for Energy and Finance, OPEC+ countries are currently in a tough situation. He noted that the alliance members have proved their market impact and ability to stabilise the situation, but they are also on the verge of being locked

in the 1980s, lowering production and making room in the market for other manufacturers.

"I believe that proposals to reduce quotas will be heard, but I am not sure that they will be implemented. Within OPEC+, opposition to new cuts is already strong and will only rise. As a result, I believe we should now expect more verbal interventions," the expert said.

According to Finam analyst Nikolay Dudchenko, additional OPEC+ output restrictions may be essential only if oil prices fall any further. "As long as the oil price is stable, OPEC+ will most likely adopt a wait-and-see attitude," he said.

In turn, Stanislav Mitrakhovich, senior expert at the National Energy Security Fund and a researcher at the Financial University under the Russian Government, predicts that OPEC+ will take further steps to limit oil output in early 2024.

TASS

Gas pipelines worth \$194bn under construction globally

Ankara, Turkey – Natural gas pipelines spanning 70,000 kilometers are under construction worldwide at a cost of around \$194bn.

According to data from the "Global gas pipeline expansion" report by Global Energy Monitor (GEM), a San Francisco-based think tank, most of the ongoing natural gas pipeline construction is based in Asia.

According to GEM data, 83% of the natural gas pipelines under construction are being built in Asia at a cost of \$117.2bn.

In Asia, China and India lead the way as they seek to switch from coal to natural gas and have more extensive connections.

Pakistan also continues to



build pipelines as it focuses on increasing its natural gas import capacity. The length of pipelines under construction increased by 18% by the end of 2023 compared to the previous year.

The length of pipelines under construction in Asia totals 57,600 kilometers. Also, Europe has 5,600 kilometers under construction, followed by 4,700 kilo-

meters in the Americas and 1,800 kilometers in Africa.

The top 10 countries with the most pipelines under construction include China, India, Iran, Russia, Pakistan, the US, Nigeria, Italy, Argentina and Canada.

In China, 30,300 kilometers of pipelines are being built in 150 projects. In addition to the Xinjiang pipeline, the Chaohu-Jiangbei and Hefei Lubei-Chizhou Maya natural gas pipelines are being built in the country.

Iran is also building a 5,000-kilometer pipeline at a cost of around \$18bn. The 1,200-kilometer IGAT 11 natural gas pipeline is expected to be completed in 2026.

Anadolu Agency

Indian rice exporters face challenges amid policy risks and high prices in 2024

New Delhi, India – In 2024, Indian rice exporters anticipate a challenging year marked by policy uncertainties and elevated local prices, hindering normalisation of rice exports from the country.

According to S&P Global Commodity Insights, the Indian government's measures in 2023, including banning non-Basmati white rice exports, imposing a 20% duty on parboiled rice exports, and setting a minimum export price of \$950mn tonnes for Basmati, continue to impact the market.

Despite global repercussions and multi-year high prices, indications suggest that restrictions are likely to persist at least until the first half of 2024.



India's rice stocks in the Food Corporation of India's central pool stood at 56mn tonnes as of December 1

The Indian government's decision to curb rice exports was prompted by escalating domestic prices and the desire to ensure adequate supply for the country. Most industry experts anticipate

that the government won't ease restrictions before the general election scheduled for April-May 2024.

The fall in rice production during the 2023-24 kharif season, in-

fluenced by El Nino-induced dry weather conditions, further complicates the supply situation.

The US Department of Agriculture's projection for total rice production in India for the October-September period is 128mn tonnes, down from 135.5mn tonnes the previous year.

Despite trade curbs, local rice prices have remained robust, leading the government to issue warnings to retailers. However, millers and exporters foresee a sustained high-price environment until the next kharif harvest season, driven by high procurement prices offered by certain state governments and strong demand from southern Indian states.

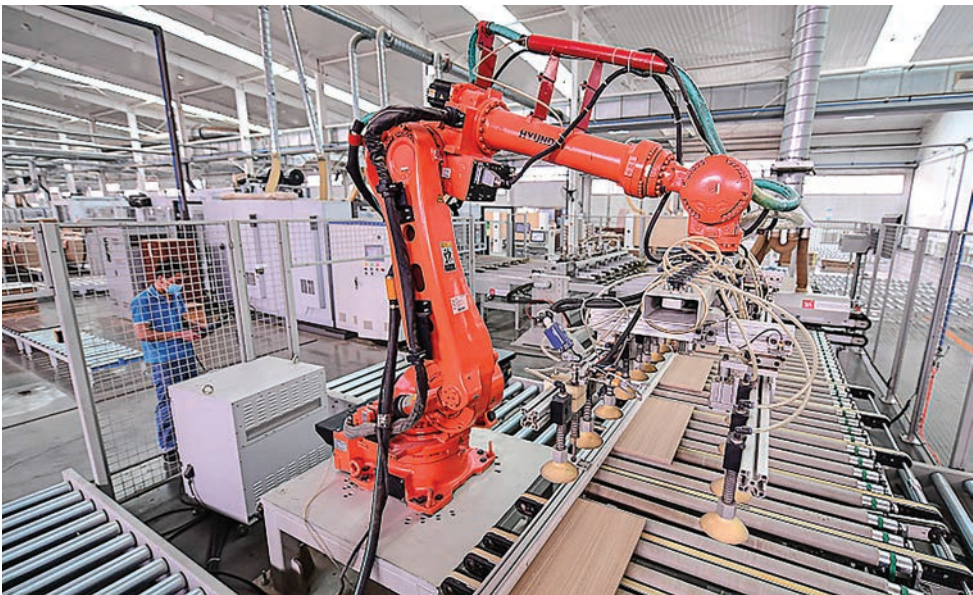
ANI

Shanghai plans hundreds of intelligent factories to reinforce manufacturing

Shanghai, China – Shanghai plans to build 200 new smart factories and 20 demonstration sites by end of 2025 after 70 intelligent plants in 2023, officials announced, solidifying its intelligent manufacturing stronghold, according to China Daily report.

Covering auto, equipment and IT, this year's batch features life-cycle, process and supply chain enhancements. As the nation's largest smart solutions provider and a core equipment hub, the city sees such innovation as vital for industrial competitiveness.

"Intelligent manufacturing plays a key role in new industrialization and is pivotal for Shanghai's digital economic transition," said Vice Mayor Chen Jie. Over 19 national-level intelligent factories now operate alongside 100 municipal and 1,000-plus smart applications, with over 70 percent of firms passing evaluations.



Benefits abound – average efficiency exceeding 50% higher, costs 30% lower and energy consumption cut nearly 14%. "With government support, we've achieved automation heights," said parts maker Aptiv Electrical's Ops Director Xu Xiaoying.

Output value of Shanghai's world-class system integration segment has topped \$8.5bn. Its 383 robots per 10,000 workers also leads globally. Accelerated nurturing of marquee clusters reinforces the upgraded, tech-driven industrialisation push.

"By integrating innovation, Shanghai exemplifies next-gen manufacturing led by technology," said Chinese Academy of Engineering Academician Qian Feng.

WAM

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Bank Muscat opens Green Sports field in Ibra

In emphasis of its stance of leadership in the Corporate and Social Responsibility (CSR) and support to the youth and society, Bank Muscat continues to enhance the Green Sports programme through the inauguration of more green sports fields across the sultanate.

The bank recently inaugurated the lighting project for Al Shabab Sports team in Ibra, North Al Sharqiyah. The event was hosted under the patronage of Sheikh Abdullah bin Hamad al Harthi, Shura Council Member, Ibra, with the presence of Badr bin Mohammed al Hajri, assistant regional manager - North al Sharqiyah, Khalil bin Suleim al Habsi, head of Al Shabab Sports team, and a number of invitees and team members, a press release said.

Hajri expressed his happiness about the successful execution of Al Shabab Sports team's lightening project as part of the 'Green Sports' programme. He congratulated Al Shabab Sports team for the successful completion of the project which will contribute to the development of the main infrastructure of the team. The field will also represent a suitable venue for the team to organise events in the evening and to organise different cultural and sports activities contributing to the enhancement of their sports skills.

Furthermore, a large segment of the Omani youth with differ-



ent age groups are keen to join the events related to the sports and social arenas. Bank Muscat will remain committed to serving the youth through its CSR programme 'Green Sports' to keep pace with the developments that

contribute to the growth of the Sports teams all over the sultanate.

Khalil bin Suleim al Habsi, head of Al Shabab Sports team, said, "I would like to take this opportunity to thank Bank Muscat

for the continuous support to enhancing the 'Green Sports' programme which represents a major social initiative for developing the talents of youths and sports teams in the sultanate. The fields of local sports teams

constitute strategic and convenient areas to organise various sports and cultural events and sports activities. Therefore, the new lighting project of Al Shabab Sports team was the dream of the Omani youth while it has

now become a reality that would provide the team with an ample opportunity to develop their talents and sports potential through hosting multiple sports and cultural events, activities, and competitions in the evening."



41st issue of Scientific Insights published

The Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation (MoHERI) published the 41st issue of Scientific Insights magazine which explored a number of different reports and articles in the fields of science and innovation.

In this issue of Scientific Insights, the cover story explored current national efforts to develop the pharmaceutical industry and achieve national pharmaceutical security. It also delved into the importance of pharmaceutical security and the local production of pharmaceuticals as well as the role of scientific research in achieving pharmaceutical security, a press release said.

The issue also covered topics such as artificial intelligence in the education sector, new methods to utilise agriculture waste, development of smart gas regulator to reduce risks associated with using LPG cylinders.



Mall of Muscat hosts winter thrills

Mall of Muscat, a leading leisure and entertainment destination, extends an invitation to visitors to immerse themselves in the wonders of the winter season, offering experiences that go far beyond the traditional shopping journey.

As part of this enchanting winter allure, the mall recently hosted a memorable musical evening, featuring the renowned Omani singer Haitham Rafi. This event, a highlight of the Mall's magical winter weekend, was a resounding success, captivating a massive audience with Rafi's dynamic performance.

Haitham Rafi, a prominent figure in the Omani music industry and a celebrated winner of a popular Indian reality show, showcased his extraordinary talent at the Mall of Muscat. His performance included a mix of iconic Arabic and Hindi songs, demonstrating his versatility and appeal across diverse musical



genres.

The audience was captivated by Rafi's infectious energy and impressive vocal range. The singer performed his iconic numbers while also interacting with the crowd, inviting them to join in the singing, creating a uniquely interactive and memorable ex-

perience.

A Mall of Muscat spokesperson said, "We are thrilled to have hosted Haitham Rafi, a singer who embodies the spirit of Omani talent and cultural diversity. His concert was a celebration of music that brought together people of all ages.

Ooredoo reveals first Manzili winners

The first winners of Ooredoo's Mega Home Internet Prize Draw have been announced. Up for grabs were free Home Internet subscriptions for three months, six months, nine months and for

life, along with Smart TVs, Mesh WiFi devices and PlayStation 5 consoles.

The next draw will be held on 8 February, where more Home Internet subscriptions, Smart

TVs, Mesh Devices and PlayStation 5 consoles will be given away, a press release said. The grand prize draw will be given away on March 7 - a brand new luxury apartment.

New or existing customers can simply subscribe or upgrade to any new 5G or Fibre Home Internet connection for RO28 per month and above and be automatically entered into the draw.



ISG-International learners shine in 2023 Cambridge Learner Awards

Ten students from ISG-International have received prestigious awards from Cambridge Assessment International Education in acknowledgement of their outstanding performance in the June 2023 Cambridge examination series.

The Outstanding Cambridge Learner Awards programme celebrates the success of learners

taking Cambridge examinations in over 40 countries around the world. Cambridge places learners at the centre of their international education programmes and qualifications which are inspired by the best in educational thinking, a press release said.

The principal of Indian School Al Ghubra, Papri Ghosh said that the awards recognised the tal-

ent, dedication and commitment of both learners and staff. She said, "Once again, the students of ISG-International have emerged with flying colours in the Cambridge examination series. The hard work and diligence of our students and their mentors have borne fruit thus cementing our place among the premier Cambridge institutions.

GCET holds first summit on creative technologies

Under the patronage of Dr Ali Amur al Shidhani, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Transport, Communications, and Information Technology for Communications and Information Technology, the Global College of Engineering and Technology (GCET) concluded its first Summit on Creative Technologies 2024.

The event, held on January 3 at the Crowne Plaza Muscat, featured keynote speakers, experts, and representatives from government and private sectors. The sessions covered vital topics in technology, a press release said.

Dr Salim al Shuali, director of AI and AT Projects Unit, presented a session on 'Exploring the Future: The Transformative Impact of Artificial Intelligence on Everyday Life', focusing on the importance of the artificial intelligence industry and the necessity of its adoption and implementation across all sec-



tors while ensuring its alignment with information security strategies.

Dr Haitham al Hijri, executive - Cybersecurity Projects, focused on the Cybersecurity In-

dustry and the growing challenges. Additionally, the summit included a panel discussion about the cybersecurity challenges in the creative technologies world. During the panel

discussion, the experts emphasised the importance of developing local applications or platforms that serve the community and operate on special algorithms.

GAZA WAR

Palestinian Christians pray for end to war

Palestinian clergymen worried over exodus of Christians from Palestine amid ongoing war

Gaza City, Palestinian Territories - Palestinian Christians taking shelter in the St Porphyrius Church in Gaza City, which witnessed major destruction as a result of Israel's violent attacks, said they pray for the war to end.

Israeli attacks, which have been going on for more than three months, have destroyed the bells of the St Porphyrius Church, which dates back to 425CE and is considered the third-oldest church in the world.

Nowadays, no church bells are heard, only warplanes and bombing sounds.

Christian denominations following the Eastern calendar, including the Orthodox denomination, celebrate Christmas on January 6 and 7 every year. Approximately 70% of Christians in the Gaza Strip belong to the Greek Orthodox denomination, while the rest are of the Latin Catholic denomination.

The joy that Palestinian Christians feel during the holidays has been replaced by grief over their losses and fear and anxiety regarding their future.

Christians in the Gaza Strip, like all other Palestinians, could not escape Israel's devastating attacks and heavy and intense



Orthodox Christians celebrate Christmas at the St Porphyrius Church in Gaza City on Saturday (Anadolu Agency)

bombardment, which led to the death of many.

Rimon Kattan (45) took shelter in the St Porphyrius Church with about 20 of his relatives due to Israel's attacks on the Gaza Strip.

"Christian families took shelter in churches, the houses of God, to protect themselves from the bombardment," Kattan said. "We no longer dream of any-

thing other than the end of the war," he said, adding: "The holiday is a sacred day for us, but the end of the war is now more important."

Kattan said he hopes that the Gaza Strip will see peace soon.

Prevented celebration

Kattan emphasised that Israeli attacks prevented Christians liv-

ing in Gaza from attending the Christmas celebrations held at the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem in the occupied West Bank.

"Gazan Christians used to pass through the Beit Hanoun (Erez) border crossing with Israel's permission and attend the celebrations held at the Nativity Church," Kattan said. "We would turn on the church lights,

pray on the night of the holiday, visit family and friends, and go to places to celebrate."

The Palestinian Christians announced the cancellation of all Christmas celebrations, including not lighting Christmas trees for the first time in Palestine's history since the Nakba of 1948.

Exodus of Christians

Issa Thaljieh, a Greek Orthodox

priest in the city of Bethlehem in the occupied West Bank, said Israel's attacks on the Gaza Strip caused the exodus of Christians from Palestine.

"Jesus Christ's message of love and peace was sent to the world from Bethlehem, but today there is no peace in his own land," he told Anadolu.

"The situation is currently very difficult, massacres are carried out against children, people are killed, and the survivors are trying to live without food, water and shelter," Thaljieh said, stressing that "all of this is happening for no reason".

"The number of Christians in the Gaza Strip has decreased due to wars, and it has decreased in Bethlehem due to economic hardship," he said.

Thaljeh pointed out that "the Israeli army bombed mosques, churches, hospitals and houses in Gaza," adding that "there is no safe place in the region anymore."

"Our prayers are with Gaza. Our hearts are with our people there," the priest said.

Attacks on churches

Israeli attacks have targeted a number of churches in the Gaza Strip.

An Israeli sniper on December 16 killed a mother and her daughter and injured seven others in the only Catholic church in the Gaza Strip, said the local Latin Catholic Church authority.

The St Porphyrius Church was bombed by Israel on October 19, in which 18 Palestinians, most of them children and women, lost their lives.

The casualties included both Christian and Muslim Palestinians sheltered in the church.

At least three churches were severely damaged due to the ongoing war in the Gaza Strip, according to previous statements by the government media office in Gaza.

Christmas, one of the oldest holidays in Christianity, is celebrated on December 25 by Protestants, Catholics and some Orthodox Christians who follow the Gregorian calendar, and on January 7 by Orthodox Christians who follow the Julian calendar. Around 45,000 Christians live in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967, including 40,000 in the West Bank, 850 in the Gaza Strip, and 4,000 in Jerusalem, according to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics.

Anadolu News Agency

Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital targeted

Gaza City, Palestinian Territories - The Israeli army is targeting the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital in the central Gaza Strip with drones, the Gaza Health Ministry said.

'The Israeli occupation is terrorizing the patients and medical staff at the facility by attacking it with drones,' the ministry said in a statement.

'The Israeli drones intensively fire towards the buildings and areas of the hospital, targeting anyone in motion,' it added.

The statement further said that the wounded and patients are fleeing the hospital under the fire of the drones.

The Israeli army's attempt to take the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital out of service constitutes a death sentence for thousands of wounded and patients inside, the ministry also said.

The Doctors Without Bor-



ders, a medical charity, announced late on Saturday its withdrawal from the Gaza Strip, including the Al-Aqsa Hospital in the face of increasing Israeli army attacks.

Israel launched air and

ground attacks on the Gaza Strip since a cross-border attack by Palestinian resistance group Hamas on October 7.

At least 22,800 Palestinians have since been killed and more than 58,400 others injured, ac-

cording to Gaza's health authorities. Nearly 1,200 Israelis are believed to have been killed in the Hamas attack.

The Israeli onslaught has left Gaza in ruins.

Anadolu News Agency

Israel detains 40 more Palestinians in West Bank

Ramallah, Palestinian Territories - The Israeli army rounded up 40 more Palestinians in military raids carried out across the occupied West Bank since Sunday evening, according to prisoners' affairs groups.

According to a joint statement by the Prisoners and Ex-Prisoners Affairs Authority and the Palestinian Prisoners Society, the new arrests brought the total number of Palestinians detained by the Israeli forces since October 7 to 5,730.

During the arrest campaigns, Israeli soldiers also beat and abused Palestinians, in addition to damaging their homes and other properties, it said.

The figure does not include the Palestinians arrested in Gaza, whose numbers are not



specified by Israeli authorities, the statement added.

Tensions have been high across the West Bank since fighting broke out in Gaza.

According to the Palestinian Health Ministry, 337 Palestinians have been killed by Israeli

forces in the West Bank since October 7.

The UN agency for Palestinian refugees on Friday said that 2023 was 'the deadliest year on record' for Palestinians in the West Bank.

Anadolu News Agency

Germany 'must spare no effort for two-state solution'

London, UK - German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock underscored the critical need for a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in a statement on Sunday, asserting that Israelis and Palestinians can only live side by side in peace 'if one's security equals the other's'.

"This can only be achieved when everyone is willing to acknowledge the others' suffering. We must spare no effort on the path towards a two-state solution," she said on X.

"For this to happen, there must be no more threat from Gaza to Israel's existence. Hamas must lay down its weapons and Hezbollah and the Houthis must cease their dangerous provocations. Palestinians direly need the chance for a life in safety, dignity and self-determination," she added.

Israel has launched air and ground attacks on Gaza following a cross-border incursion by



Palestinians direly need the chance for a life in safety, dignity and self-determination

ANNALENA BAERBOCK

the Palestinian resistance group Hamas on October 7 last year, killing at least 22,800 Palestinians and injuring more than 58,400 others.

Nearly 1,200 Israelis are believed to have been killed in the Hamas attack.

Anadolu News Agency

UN rapporteurs criticise ICC for being slow in prosecuting

Ankara, Türkiye - The UN special rapporteur on Palestine, Francesca Albanese, and UN special rapporteur on the right to adequate housing Balakrishnan Rajagopal criticised the International Criminal Court (ICC) on Sunday for being slow in prosecuting those responsible for war crimes committed by Israel in Gaza.

Albanese quoted a post on X from a Save The Children official saying "more than ten children per day, on average, have lost one or both of their legs in Gaza since (the) conflict erupted three months ago".

"Trials will also be needed. Criminals who have planned, ordered and executed such crimes must be brought to justice," she said.

"National courts with jurisdiction over war crimes, CAH (crimes against humanity) and genocide must be activated, as the ICC is proving slow and ineffective on the situation of Palestine," she added.



Criminals who have planned, ordered and executed such crimes must be brought to justice

FRANCESCA ALBANESE

Rajagopal also shared a post on X to support Albanese's call,

saying: "Yes we need action now. Today. ICC is proving to be

too slow."

UN rapporteurs and human rights organizations have called Israel's recent attacks targeting civilians in Gaza and acts of collective punishment 'genocide'.

The failure of ICC Prosecutor Karim Khan to take preventive measures such as issuing arrest

warrants against those responsible, including Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, has been widely criticised by officials.

Israel attacks on Gaza killed at least 22,800 Palestinians, injuring more than 58,400 others.

Anadolu News Agency

2024: A pivotal year for Lunar exploration including Artemis Program

Ankara, Türkiye - The year 2024 is shaping up to be exciting for space exploration and research. After 55 years since Neil Armstrong's historic first steps on the Moon, missions to the lunar surface are once again in full swing.

In 2023, the world witnessed several major space missions, including the return of NASA's OSIRIS-REx spacecraft to Earth after collecting samples from the asteroid Benu and India's Chandrayaan-3 mission, which conducted an exploration of the Moon's south pole. In 2024, the focus will be on missions to explore the Moon's unknowns, such as the Artemis Program to return humans to the Moon.

Artemis II

NASA's Artemis Program aims to return astronauts to the Moon following the historic Apollo 11 mission in 1969 and the last crewed lunar flight with Apollo 17 in 1972.

The first phase, Artemis I, concluded in December 2022, lasting 25 days, with the Orion spacecraft completing a lunar orbit and successfully landing in the Pacific Ocean.

The upcoming crewed mission, Artemis II, slated for November 2024, plans to return astronauts to Earth without landing on the Moon.

The programme's final stage, Artemis III, if successful, will mark the first human exploration of the Moon's south pole.



ration of the Moon's south pole.

Additionally, NASA's VIPER project, set to investigate surface water ice and potential resources, is scheduled to land on the lunar surface later this year.

CLPS

In addition to crewed lunar mis-

sions under the Artemis Program, NASA has comprehensive plans for lunar exploration using robots. As part of the Commercial Lunar Payload Services Program, which aims to investigate the use of lunar resources as fuel, NASA will send four vehicles to the Moon in 2024.

In 2023, world witnesses several major space missions, including return of NASA's OSIRIS-REx, India's Chandrayaan-3

SLIM

Japan's Smart Lander for Investigating Moon (SLIM) mission, designed to test precise landing technologies on the lunar surface, was launched into space in Sept. 2023 as part of JAXA and NASA's X-Ray Imaging and Spectroscopy Mission (XRISM)

to study the speed and structure of galaxies.

Having successfully entered orbit in Dec. 2023, SLIM is expected to begin its descent toward the Moon on January 20.

Manufactured by Mitsubishi Electric and weighing 700kg, the lander can move on the lunar surface using the probe it carries. The data collected by Japan will be used in the Artemis Program.

Chang'e 6

As part of the China Lunar Exploration Program (CLEP), the China National Space Administration (CNSA) plans to send the Chang'e 6 exploration vehicle to space in May, aiming to

collect rock and soil samples from the dark side of the Moon by 2030.

Chang'e 6 will carry research instruments, including negative ion and gas detectors, for France, Italy, Pakistan, and the European Space Agency (ESA).

Furthermore, the Queqiao-2 (Magpie Bridge-2) communication satellite, developed to establish communication with the far side of the Moon, is set to be launched into space in the first half of 2024.

In addition to the Chang'e missions, the China Manned Space Program Agency (CMSA) plans to send astronauts to the Moon before 2030.

Anadolu News Agency

Five police officials killed, 22 hurt in Pakistan blast

Islamabad, Pakistan- Five police officials were killed and 22 people were injured on Monday in a blast near a police van in Mamund, in Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the country's leading newspaper Dawn reported.

Local police spokesperson Israr Ahmed confirmed the police casualties. According to hospital officials, 22 people were injured in the blast, according to the report.

Wazir Khan Safi, the medical superintendent at Khar District Headquarters Hospital (DHQ), said that 12 out of the 22 people who were injured were being treated at the hospital.

Furthermore, ten others who were seriously injured were referred to a Peshawar medical facility.

Malakand Division Commissioner Saqib Raza said that the ongoing polio campaign in the area was suspended after the blast. He further said that seriously injured people were air-



lifted to Peshawar and that the area has been cordoned off, Dawn reported.

In a statement, Rescue 1122 said rescue teams in Mohmand and Lower Dir districts were put on "alert".

In a statement, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa caretaker chief minister Justice (ret'd) Arshad Hussain Shah condemned the blast and expressed his grief on the death of police officials. Shah prayed for the speedy

recovery of the injured and directed the district administration to ensure the provision of timely aid to them. 'The police morale would not be defeated by such cowardly incidents', he was quoted by Dawn.

He stressed that Khyber Pakhtunkhwa police have given 'eternal sacrifices' to protect the lives of people and vowed to provide 'every possible support' to the bereaved families.

ANI

Thousands of German farmers block roads to protest subsidy cuts

Berlin, Germany - Thousands of farmers in Germany began nationwide protests on Monday against the government's plans to cut agricultural subsidies.

In the capital Berlin, hundreds of farmers parked tractors in front of the city's landmark Brandenburg Gate, and blocked traffic for hours in the government district. 'I would rather die than be a slave,' one farmer wrote on his tractor.

German Farmers' Association said the protests will continue throughout the week, in order to make it clear to the government that they will not accept cuts in agricultural subsidies.

"This is the only way to ensure the supply of high-quality, local food," the association's president Joachim Rukwied told local media.

Protests were also organised in other major cities, including Hamburg, Cologne, Munich, and Stuttgart.

Chancellor Olaf Scholz's left-liberal coalition had announced last month that it is planning to cut agricultural fuel and vehicle subsidies, as part of new austere-



Farmers stage protests across Germany, expressing their anger at government's policies

ity measures to meet budget rules.

Last week, the government revised its planned spending cuts, but the farmers' association said these changes were far from sufficient to address their problems.

Anadolu News Agency

Saudi envoy to chair International Women in Defence Program

Riyadh, Saudi Arabia - Princess Reema bint Bandar bin Sultan bin Abdulaziz, the Saudi Ambassador to the United States, will chair the International Women in Defence Program, which aims to promote women's participation and celebrate their significant role in the defence sector.

The programme is part of the upcoming World Defence Show 2024, scheduled to be held in February under the patronage of Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Salman bin Abdulaziz al Saud.

A release from the organisers of the show quotes Princess Reema as emphasising the kingdom's commitment to promoting and supporting women's endeavours in all sectors, including in defence and security. She highlights the importance of empowering and integrating women in the Saudi labour market, as outlined in the Saudi Vision 2030, mentioning that there have already been successful examples of women achieving excellence in different fields.

She further highlights that such programmes generate global momentum, and reflect the Saudi government's commitment to empowering and boosting women's participation in all



Saudi is committed to promoting and supporting women's endeavours in all sectors, including in defence

PRINCESS REEMA

spheres.

The Women in Defence Program serves as a platform that increases opportunities to contribute to this ongoing success, she says. The programme brings together women CEOs and leaders from different countries to highlight their achievements, address challenges, and explore their contributions to the defence sector through a series of seminars and discussions.

SPA

Rua al Madinah launches Islamic Civilisation Village project to enrich visitors' experience in Madinah

Madinah, Saudi Arabia - Rua al Madinah Holding has launched the Islamic Civilisation Village project as a contribution to actively engage with Islamic heritage and enrich visitors' experience in Madinah.

The project aims to be an attractive and distinctive Islamic destination, enhancing the experience for guests from around the world visiting Madinah.

It provides a rich cultural and edutainment experience, featuring diverse activities, exceptional hospitality services, and valuable historical shows that depict various facets of Islamic world history.

Unveiling the narrative of the ancient Islamic civilisation, it delves into intricate details and the profound history that shaped its rich tapestry.

The project comprises eight distinct geographical zones, including the Arabian Peninsula, Mashriq, Islamic South Asia, Maghrib, SEAN, the Silk Road, Al Andalus, and Africa.

It also delves into the deep roots of the Kingdom's history, representing the cradle of history and the stronghold of Islam.

The project features diverse retail outlets, various dining options, culturally distinctive cafes, unique designs, interactive



shows, various activities, and green spaces.

On this occasion, the CEO of Rua al Madinah Holding, Eng. Ahmed Al-Juhani, highlighted that the Islamic Civilisation Village project would function as an educational and entertaining cultural hub, enabling visitors to delve into the scientific brilliance

and unique contributions of Muslims throughout the ages through its cultural components and interactive content.

He underscored the project's significance as a transformative addition, aiming to evolve into a premier Islamic destination.

It seeks to enrich the Islamic and cultural experience for visi-

tors and pilgrims, thereby elevating Madinah's status as a prominent Islamic tourist destination, aligning with the goals of the Saudi Vision 2030.

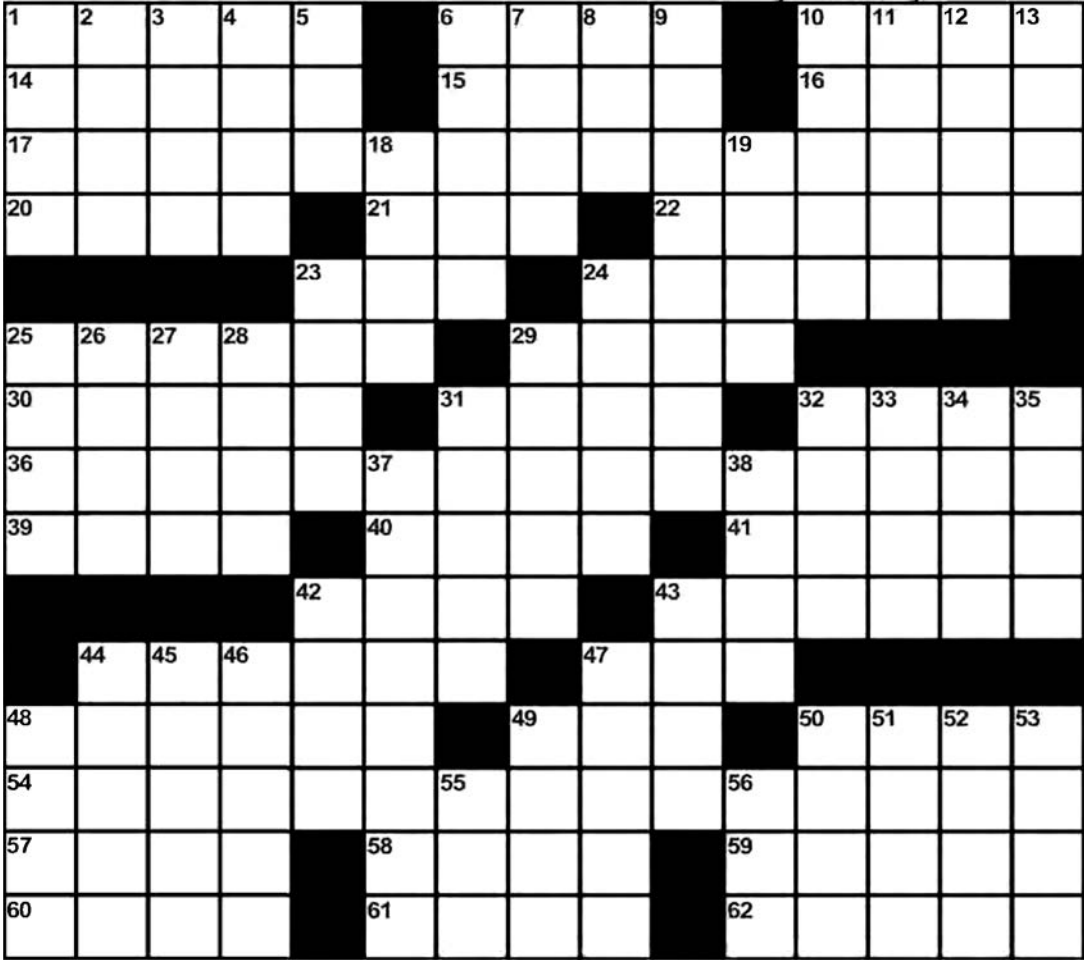
The Islamic Civilisation Village project, spanning over 257,000 square metres, holds significance due to its diverse Islamic cultural content, aligning

with Madinah's esteemed status and its proximity to the Prophet's Mosque.

Additionally, it presents opportunities for private sector involvement, offering promising investment prospects and contributing to job creation for Saudi nationals.

SPA

DAILY CROSSWORD



- ACROSS**

 - 1) Certain sorority woman
 - 6) Catchall abbr.
 - 10) Soon, to a bard
 - 14) Everglades bird
 - 15) Colored part of the eye
 - 16) _ Scotia
 - 17) Three smart things
 - 20) Highland head warmers
 - 21) "For_ a jolly ... "
 - 22) Large sea ducks
 - 23) "Emergency!"
 - 24) Avian sounds
 - 25) Duplicate a duplicate, e.g.
 - 29) Persia, now
 - 30) Sometimes consumed bacteria
 - 31) Husk relative
 - 32) Have a decisive chess win
 - 36) Three smart things
 - 39) Performance for one
 - 40) Wordplay-based jokes
 - 41) Address a convention
 - 42) Mental keenness
 - 43) Human's first home?
 - 44) 7-Up alternative
- 47) Land of presidents
 - 48) Enter a pool
 - 49) Lt's subordinate
 - 50) What bodybuilders count
 - 54) Three smart things
 - 57) Advocate
 - 58) Unit of pressure
 - 59) Encourage
 - 60) "_ of the d'Urbervilles"
 - 61) Unattractive pond feature
 - 62) Batman's Bruce

DOWN

 - 1) Didn't offer for sale
 - 2) _Khan
 - 3) Big event for a senior
 - 4) Composes or authors
 - 5) Absorbed, as a cost
 - 6) Some farm beasts
 - 7) Singer and actor Burl
 - 8) "Hold on a_!"
 - 9) Easy victory
 - 10) Battery terminal
 - 11) Fairly large-sized musical group
 - 12) Do-_ (replays)
 - 13) Some House votes
 - 18) "Hello, sailor!"
 - 19) Way of carrying oneself
- 23)_ & Span (household cleanser)
 - 24) Performing threesomes
 - 25) 45s and 78s (abbr.)
 - 26) Sound rebound
 - 27) Refrigerate
 - 28) Mishmash
 - 29) Works on wrinkles
 - 31) Between 0 and 90 degrees, as an angle
 - 32)_ mortals
 - 33) Biology lab gel substance
 - 34) Ballerina's garb
 - 35) Visual pair
 - 37) Bad names?
 - 38) Little amount
 - 42) "When You_ Upon a Star"
 - 43) " Back in the_" (Beatles hit)
 - 44) Fern-to-be
 - 45) Promotes
 - 46) Hotel posting
 - 47) Deprive of weaponry
 - 48) Censored material
 - 49) Almond or eggshell relative
 - 50) Capital in the Baltics
 - 51) Trendsetting
- 52) Menial laborer

53) All there mentally

55) Med school grad

56) Morning drops on blades
- NOTE PAD**

H	A	M	S		A	P	A	C	E		S	N	O	W
U	V	E	A		N	I	X	O	N		T	O	T	E
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H	I	G	H		C	A	L	O	R		I	E	D	I
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O	M	E	N		A	T	E	I	N		A	L	O	E
D	A	M	E		N	O	E	L	S		Y	E	W	S

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE

ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

Skip the small talk today. It's better suited for people who don't have anywhere near the charm, wit, and curiosity you have. As early on as possible you need to get to sharing what's on your mind and finding out what other people have to say about their lives. The exchange of ideas is going to take little if any effort, so it can be an easy day full of smiles and interesting conversations. Why waste it being safe when you can be fully engaged?

LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

Someone who is usually quite a party animal is going to be much more introverted than usual today, but don't let it throw you for a loop. They just need to go back into their shell for a while and think some things through. Things are changing in their life, and believe it or not you are an inspiration for some of that change, so stick with them through this period. This is your chance to be someone's personal cheerleader. Get out there and give them a hand.

SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

Don't rush ahead with any major purchases right now. Something is coming in the near future that could make you regret any extravagant outlays of money that you make today. And examine your motivation for this sudden urge to spend. Are you trying to put forth an image of yourself that isn't genuine? Not only is that a loser's game, it's an expensive loser's game. So stop shopping and start being true to who you are, because who you are is pretty darn special.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

01. Which kingdom, established by King Wickramabahu in the 14th century, repelled invasions by the Portuguese and the Dutch in the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries and the British in the 19th century, until the signing of a treaty with the British in March 1815?

- A. Burma
- B. Goa
- C. C. Andy
- D. Siam

02. Which Apollo mission was the first to land on the moon?

- A. 11
- B. 12
- C. 10
- D. 13

03. In the first half of the 18th century in Great Britain, what drug became so popular, particularly in London, that several laws were passed trying to restrict its use?

- A. Gin
- B. Laudanum
- C. Morphine
- D. Brandy

Answers: 1. C 2. A 3. A

KIDS COLOURING



BOGGLER

E	O	S	A
A	G	I	R
C	U	S	T
N	T	I	P

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

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

WORD BUILDER



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

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

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER

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

ICONS AIM FOR FINAL FLOURISH

Veterans like Chhetri, Al Haydos and Maatouk could be playing their last Asian Cup

Doha - As the AFC Asian Cup Qatar 2023 draws ever closer to the big kick-off on Friday, some of Asia's most decorated and recognisable players may be about to appear in the competition for the last time.

From the host nation's captain to India's talisman and many others, a number of veterans will take to the pitches across Qatar as they look to inspire their countries to a successful campaign.

Whether it will be the last time we see them in AFC Asian Cup action is yet to be determined, but the-AFC.com shines the spotlight on five players who could be appearing in the continent's most prestigious tournament for the final time of their illustrious careers.

Sunil Chhetri (India)
India's leader Sunil Chhetri first appeared in the AFC Asian Cup back in 2011 in Qatar and showed flashes of brilliance by scoring against South Korea and Bahrain in the group stage.

He went on to become a prolific goal scorer for club and country, firing his long-serving side Bengaluru FC to the AFC Cup final in 2016 and winning a host of domestic honours. He returned to the AFC Asian Cup in 2019 and netted a brace in India's 4-1 win over Thailand, marking the nation's first continental win in 55 years. Fast forward five years and the 39-year-old remains pivotal to the Blue Tigers' challenge having become the third-highest active men's international goal scorer, behind only Cristiano Ronaldo and Lionel Messi. Chhetri netted nine goals in the past calendar year and is now set for what is surely his swansong AFC Asian Cup.

Hassan Maatouk (Lebanon)
Another veteran forward, Hassan



Sunil Chhetri

Maatouk is approaching the twilight of his career as Lebanon's all-time top scorer and most capped player will lead the team to their second successive AFC Asian Cup appearance in Qatar.

Having participated as hosts in 2000, Maatouk led his nation to qualify for the competition for the first time in 2019 while finding the back of the net and providing a brilliant assist against DPR Korea as the Cedars registered their maiden AFC Asian Cup victory.

The 36-year-old left-sided forward's creative play and ability to take on defenders is crucial to

Lebanon's attack and Maatouk, who has appeared for his country more than 110 times since debuting in 2006, will be aiming to deliver the goods once again ahead of the tournament's curtain-raiser against Qatar.

Zhang Linpeng (China)
A mainstay of the Chinese defence since 2010, Zhang Linpeng scored on his AFC Asian Cup debut against Kuwait in 2011 in what would turn out to be the first of many significant moments of his career on the continental

stage. In his prime, Zhang won two AFC Champions League titles with Guangzhou FC in 2013 and 2015 as well as numerous domestic honours as he proved to be a key cog in a side that dominated Chinese football for the best part of a decade.

Success for the national team has been scarcer, however, with the EAFF East Asian Football Championship in 2010 his only major honour. Now 34, Zhang is set for his fourth AFC Asian Cup appearance and will look to at least match his best-ever quarter-final showing.

Hassan al Haydos (Qatar)
One of the stars of Qatari football's most successful generation, Hassan al Haydos will be remembered as the player who captained the Gulf nation to their greatest achievement when he led his country to a maiden AFC Asian Cup title in 2019.

While the nine-goal Almoze Ali and Akram Afif may have grabbed most of the headlines, Al Haydos was excellent throughout the triumphant 2019 campaign and was on the score-sheet in the 4-0 semi-final win over hosts the United Arab Emirates.

Qatar's record appearance maker, who also tasted continental glory by winning the AFC Champions League with Al Sadd SC in 2011, skippered his nation at the FIFA World Cup in 2022 and will once again lead his side out on home soil as he looks to write another chapter in what has been a glittering career.

Ehsan Hajsafi (Iran)
Yet another national team captain, Ehsan Hajsafi has been a regular for the Islamic Republic of Iran since 2008, amassing well over 135 caps and appearing at three FIFA World Cups and three AFC Asian Cups.

The versatile left-back has spent the majority of his club career between his homeland and Greece, and last season completed arguably his finest domestic campaign by clinching the domestic double with AEK Athens. Now 33, Hajsafi has been part of Iranian sides that have reached two AFC Asian Cup quarter-finals and a semi-final. But there is no doubt he will head to Qatar with the aim of ending Team Melli's long wait for a fourth continental title in what may be his last chance to do so. AFC



Faisal al Ghamdi

Al Ghamdi determined to propel Saudi Arabia in Qatar

Doha: Midfielder Faisal al Ghamdi is setting his sights on helping Saudi Arabia make a deep run into the AFC Asian Cup Qatar 2023 as the three-time champions look to claim the continental title for the first time since 1996.

Buoyed by their performance at the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022, when the Saudis secured a famous win over eventual champions Argentina in their opening game, Al Ghamdi believes the Green Falcons can again have a significant impact in Qatar.

"We want to make the nation proud and go as far as possible," says the 22-year-old Al Ittihad midfielder. "The 2022 FIFA World Cup showed that anything is possible and that we can compete with the very best."

"Confidence is growing heading into the competition. We've made a bright start to our 2026 FIFA World Cup qualifying campaign with wins against Pakistan and Jordan. The aim now is to carry this momentum forward into the tournament."

Much has changed for Saudi Arabia since goals from Saleh Al Shehri and Salem Al Dawsari took Saudi Arabia to victory at Lusail Stadium against Lionel Messi's side in their first game of the 2022 FIFA World Cup.

Renard departed in March to take charge of his native France ahead of last year's FIFA

Women's World Cup Australia and New Zealand 2023 with serial trophy winner Roberto Mancini taking over in his place. Results have been mixed, however, since the Italian arrived in August.

Losses against Costa Rica and South Korea were followed by a draw with Nigeria and a defeat against Mali before back-to-back wins in the Preliminary Joint Qualification - Round 2 for the FIFA World Cup 2026 and AFC Asian Cup Saudi Arabia 2027 over Pakistan and Jordan.

Al Ghamdi featured in central midfield for the first time under Mancini against the Nigerians and was also in the line-up in the 4-0 victory over Pakistan before making a late substitute appearance against Jordan as the Saudis made a perfect start to life in Group G.

In Qatar, Saudi Arabia, attempting to add a fourth crown to those won in 1984, 1988 and 1996, have been drawn in Group F to face Oman, Thailand and Kyrgyz Republic.

"It will be tough, but we have some great players, excellent coaching staff, and a top-class manager in Roberto Mancini alongside incredible support wherever we play," Al Ghamdi says of the task at hand.

"The ingredients are there for us to be successful and have a good tournament."

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GUNNERS FAIL TO FIRE

Liverpool strike late to knock wasteful Arsenal out of FA Cup

London, England - An own goal by Jakub Kiwior and a thumping late strike by Luis Diaz sealed a 2-0 victory for Liverpool at Arsenal in the weekend's headline FA Cup third-round tie as the hosts' dismal form extended into the New Year on Sunday.

Arsenal wasted a sackful of chances in the first half and were made to pay as Liverpool captain Trent Alexander-Arnold's free kick glanced off the head of Kiwior in the 80th minute.

Diaz then made sure of eight-time winners Liverpool's place in the fourth round draw as he lashed home in stoppage time.

Arsenal have now lost three games in a row in all competitions and the wayward finishing that has seen them drop down to fourth in the Premier League was evident again as they squandered a flurry of first-half chances.

"The performance was there and the amount of chances too," Arsenal manager Mikel Arteta told reporters. "We just have to



Liverpool players celebrate Arsenal defender Jakub Kiwior's own goal in their FA Cup match on Monday

win the game, but we lost it and we are not capitalising. To win games we need to capitalise."

Reiss Nelson latched on to a punt forward by Arsenal keeper Aaron Ramsdale in the fourth minute but could only shoot into the side netting and captain Martin Odegaard then rattled the crossbar with a fierce drive after a mistake by Joe Gomez. Kai Havertz could not capitalise on two good chances as Arsenal failed to punish a lacklustre Liverpool who were without a host of

players including Mohamed Salah who is on international duty and an ill Virgil van Dijk.

Arsenal continued to make chances in the second half with Bukayo Saka volleying clumsily over from Declan Rice's cross.

Liverpool then woke up with Ramsdale saving from Diaz and Diogo Jota heading against the crossbar before the unfortunate Kiwior inadvertently glanced in Alexander-Arnold's inswinging delivery from a free-kick.

Colombian winger Diaz then sent the 7,000 visiting fans wild as he slammed an unstoppable shot past Ramsdale.

"Everything was better in the second half," Liverpool boss Jurgen Klopp told reporters. "I'm really happy and proud we could win this game. Arsenal could have won it without a doubt. We finished it off and it spoke for the character of the boys."

"That's a really good football team we missed. Football is like that. Sometimes you have them all available, it's pretty rare, and sometimes you don't have them available. I'm super-happy," Klopp said. "First half you could see it didn't click. It was not because of new players or whatever, it was just the timing was bad and that doesn't help. I said to the boys in the meeting before the game: humans are like that. It's a tough game, nobody comes to Arsenal and wins just like this (clicks fingers)."

De Bruyne returns as Man City cruise

Manchester, England - FA Cup holders Manchester City began the defence of their trophy with a comfortable 5-0 win over Championship side Huddersfield Town at Etihad Stadium to book their place in Monday's fourth-round draw.

Kevin De Bruyne made his return as a second half substitute, having been out injured since the opening weekend of the season.

Determined defending from Huddersfield helped them keep City out until just after the half-hour, when Phil Foden fired in his first of the match after Julian Alvarez's initial effort had been blocked.

Moments later, Alvarez doubled their lead as he stretched to tap in after a slick passing move.

De Bruyne was introduced to applause on 57 minutes and 60 seconds later it was 3-0, when a pass from Oscar Bobb deflected in off Ben Jackson and into his own net.

Foden smashed in his second with a low drive on 65 minutes, before Jeremy Doku (above) marked his comeback with the final goal of the afternoon when



Manchester City's Phil Foden scores against Huddersfield Town

he swept home a dinked cross from De Bruyne.

Man City return to Premier League action on Saturday 13 January with a trip to Newcastle United.

Gibbs-White stunner

Nuno Espirito Santo maintained his unbeaten start in charge of Nottingham Forest after they came from 2-0 down to draw 2-2 with League One side Blackpool at the City Ground.

Two goals in two first-half minutes from Jordan Lawrence-Gabriel and Albie Morgan put Blackpool in control, before Nicolas Dominguez reduced the deficit six minutes before the break when he headed in.

Forest piled on the pressure in search of an equaliser, which came on 56 minutes as Morgan

forced to settle for a replay after Bristol City fought back to earn a 1-1 draw at London Stadium.

Jarrod Bowen scored his 14th goal of the season in all competitions in the fourth minute, rounding the goalkeeper before firing beneath the defender.

However, the Championship side were far from deterred and their battling display culminated in a deserved equaliser from Tommy Conway. The two will meet again, this time at Ashton Gate, commencing the week of Monday 15 January.

The Hammers are next in Premier League action on Sunday 21 January as they travel to take on Sheffield United. Luton Town were left frustrated after they were held to a 0-0 draw at home to Bolton Wanderers.

Despite the Premier League side dominating much of the match, they were unable to find the breakthrough.

With Luton needing a replay, commencing the week of Monday 15 January, their trip to Burnley in the Premier League has now been rescheduled for Friday 12 January.



Barcelona's Raphinha scores against Barbastro in their Copa del Rey match

Barcelona edge Barbastro to make Spanish Cup last 16

Madrid, Spain - Barcelona were made to work hard against fourth-tier opponents as they booked their place in the last 16 of the Copa del Rey on Sunday with a 3-2 win at Barbastro, while Sevilla, Real Sociedad and Valencia earned narrow victories to progress.

Fermin Lopez opened the scoring for Barca in the 18th minute with a tap-in from a low cross from Raphinha, who then made it 2-0, collecting a fine long ball from young debutant Hector Fort in the 51st minute.

Despite Barcelona looking dominant, Adria de Mesa lifted the spirits of the home crowd when he capitalised on a loose ball in the box to pull one back for Barbastro in the 60th minute.

Barbastro went close to equalising, before substitute Robert Lewandowski made no mistake from the penalty spot to extend Barca's lead with two minutes to go. Barbastro's Marc Prat made it 3-2 in stoppage time also with a penalty, but the hosts could not prevent Xavi Hernandez's side sealing the win.

Elsewhere, an own goal by Einar Galilea early in the second half was enough for Real Sociedad to claim a 1-0 away win over Malaga.

LaLiga side Las Palmas were beaten 2-0 at second-tier Tenerife with first-half goals from Jose

Maria Amo, who was later sent off for a second booking, and Luismi Cruz. The visitors were also reduced to 10 men after Julian Araujo was sent off in the 76th minute.

Sevilla beat Racing Ferrol 2-1 thanks to a goal from Brazilian defender Marcao, who dedicated his first-half effort to his father who passed away on Saturday, and another from Juanlu Sanchez, who scored late in the game.

Villarreal's clash against Unionistas Salamanca was suspended after power failures at the Reina Sofia stadium.

Fran Manzara had equalised for Racing but received a second yellow card to be sent off in the 75th minute.

Villarreal's clash against Unionistas Salamanca was suspended after power failures at the Reina Sofia stadium. Villarreal had taken the lead with a goal from Ilias Akhomach before Alfred Planas's late penalty sent the game to extra time.

The Spanish FA later announced the match would resume on Monday.

Ten-man Napoli crash to 3-0 defeat against Torino

Turin, Italy - Napoli's Serie A title defence suffered another setback as they lost 3-0 at Torino on Sunday, with strikes by Antonio Sanabria, Nikola Vlasic and Alessandro Buongiorno moving the hosts into the top 10.

With only one win in their last six league games, Napoli fell to ninth in the standings with 28 points, trailing leaders Inter Milan by 20 and only one point ahead of Torino at the halfway stage of the season.

The hosts pounced on the advantage once Napoli were reduced to 10 men when second-half substitute Pasquale Mazzocchi, recently signed



Torino players celebrate after scoring against Napoli

from Salernitana, was sent off for a high-boot challenge on Valentino Lazaro just five minutes into his debut.

"It is not the most beautiful victory," Torino head coach Ivan Juric told DAZN.

"With the sending-off it all became a bit easier today, but I have experienced many beautiful matches at the helm of Toro. Even in Florence (in a 1-0 loss to Fiorentina) we dominated without being able to win it; today it went well... we had a good match, we have to keep working like this and the guys have to keep believing in their means."

Torino's methodical offensive finally broke through just before halftime when Ivan Ilic's free kick took a deflection from Duvan Zapata and fell to Sanabria for a quick finish.

"Perfect week with renewal and goals, I am very happy to have extended with this club," said Sanabria, who signed a two-year contract extension on Thursday.

The hosts doubled their lead early in the second half when Vlasic got the ball from Zapata and dribbled his way into an opening before finding the corner of the net.

Torino sealed their first win over Napoli since 2015 when Lazaro's corner kick was headed home by Buongiorno.

NUTRITION RESOLUTIONS



Wake up each day in the new year to your favourite foods, from coffee to chocolates, but remember to exercise moderation. No amount of nutrition advice can be helpful until you set your goals and work towards them diligently

Forget the past year and all the fitness mess-ups – the new year now presents a fresh opportunity to take up fitness on a serious note, and you have a whole year ahead to work towards your goals. Here are a few nutrition tips from Dr Mona Mobarak for a healthy new year.

Dr Mobarak, a pharmacist and certified nutritionist collaborating closely with Abu Dhabi 360, emphasises the importance of relying on tried-and-true nutritional wisdom, cautioning against falling for fleeting food trends.

“Watch enough food fads come and go, and you realise that the most valuable nutrition guidance is built on decades of research,” she notes.

Whether you’re looking to boost your immune system with the foods you eat or take control of your gut health, her advice will help you head into the new year on solid footing:

The morning coffee

Addressing the common concern about drinking coffee on an empty stomach, research indicates that there’s no evidence to suggest it harms digestion. On the contrary, studies have linked this morning ritual to a longer life and a decreased risk of heart disease and Type 2 diabetes. Enjoying coffee on an empty stomach can be a comforting and health-conscious practice, offering a daily boost without compromising digestive wellbeing.

Balanced breakfast

In the rush of morning routines, the importance of a balanced breakfast often takes a back seat. However, nutrition experts stress the significance of starting the day with a mix of protein, fibre, and healthy fats. Research consistently shows that in-

dividuals who prioritise breakfast enjoy a range of health benefits. These include a lower risk of cardiovascular disease, Type 2 diabetes, and obesity.

Mediterranean diet

The Mediterranean diet stands as a pillar of health, supported by extensive research. This dietary approach revolves around an abundance of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, legumes, olive oil, nuts, herbs, and spices. Celebrated for its heart-health benefits, embracing this lifestyle significantly lowers the risk of Type 2 diabetes, cognitive decline, and certain cancers. By adopting the Mediterranean diet, individuals not only experience improved overall wellbeing but also build a solid foundation for long-term health success.

Gut health

A well-maintained digestive system goes beyond preventing discomforts like heartburn and bloating – it actively contributes to overall happiness and wellbeing. Prioritising fibre and incorporating a variety of plant-based and fermented foods into one’s

diet is crucial for optimal gut health. This approach not only shields against digestive issues but also fosters a robust and resilient digestive system, resulting in lasting health benefits.

Smoothies

Blending fruits and vegetables into a smoothie doesn’t compromise their nutritional value. Contrary to the notion that pureeing might strip away essential vitamins, minerals, or fibre, research indicates that the blended form doesn’t cause a spike in blood sugar levels compared to consuming these foods whole and can even result in faster and easier ingestion.

Abandon protein bars

While protein bars are often marketed as convenient and healthy options, they frequently come loaded with added sugars. Nutrition experts recommend substituting these bars for whole foods to fulfil your protein needs. Options like yogurt, nuts, beans, or eggs provide not only a rich source of protein but also essential nutrients without the drawbacks associated with excessive sugar consumption.

Dark chocolate

Dark chocolate, celebrated for its potential health benefits, comes with a caveat – moderation is key. Despite its positive attributes, dark chocolate contains higher levels of lead and cadmium compared to other foods. To strike a balance between indulgence and health consciousness, it’s advisable to limit daily consumption to about an ounce. This measured approach allows individuals to savour the delights of dark chocolate while minimising potential risks associated with excessive intake.



Eat right in



SLIM AND TRIM

A slimmer waistline means a flatter stomach. Some hit the gym, while some do freehand exercises to achieve this most desired fitness goal

A flat stomach and a slim and trim waistline is not something you see in the fitness glossies – if you desire the same and work towards it, you can see lasting results in just weeks.

There’s no need to get into hardcore dieting or strenuous routines in the gym, just get down to some simple exercises at home and you can achieve it within a short span of time.

The key guideline, however is consistency – be consistent and determined to get there and stay there.

Results don’t happen overnight, neither do they need great equipment or training – with a little conviction and commitment, one can, indeed, craft a slim waistline that not only enhances your physical appearance but also facilitates easy movement for daily activities.

Toe-touch exercise

This exercise helps in burning the fat around the waist.

How to do:

- Stand straight with an erect spine.
- Take a deep breath as you raise your arms towards the roof over your shoulder, and then gently bend down to touch your toes as you exhale without bending your knees.
- You may not be able to bend down till your ankle or feet in the first attempt.
- Don’t exert yourself. Try bending as much as you can without causing any discomfort to your back or knees.
- Bend at least ten to fifteen times. Repeat three sets.

Forearm plank

This exercise focuses on the abdominal muscles. As you hold on to the plank position, much of the muscles around the waist get activated.

How to do:

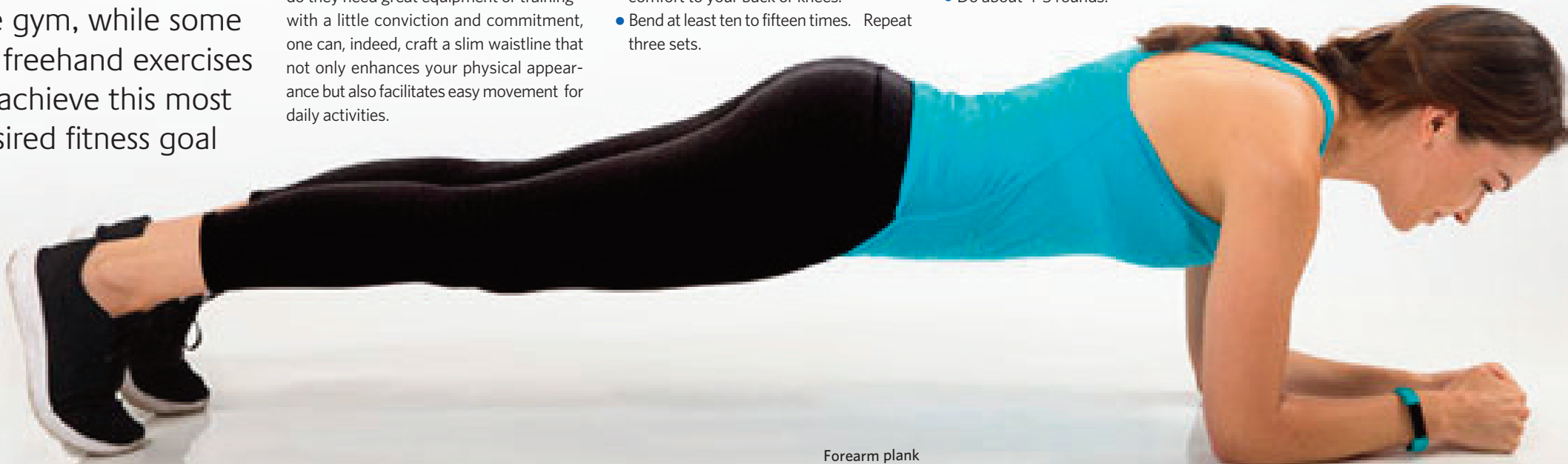
- Rest your elbows on the yoga mat in such a way that the fists are aligned with the shoulders.
- Then gently balance the entire weight of your body as you raise your lower body while resting on your toes on the floor.
- Keep your spine and neck erect. Remain in this position for about 5-10 seconds.
- Do about 4-5 rounds.

Crossed leg ab crunches

This exercise is ideal for flat abs.

How to do:

- Lie comfortably on your back and tuck your arms under your head.
- Bring your legs closer to the body by bending the knees. Then raise the lower legs in the air and cross them.
- Now cross your legs and let them stay suspended in the air as you lift your torso to do the ab crunches.
- Do at least 5-6 crunches and relax for about half a minute.
- Repeat and do 4-5 more sets.



Forearm plank

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