

Kuwait Emir to pay state visit on Tuesday

Muscat – The Emir of Kuwait will pay a state visit to the Sultanate of Oman on Tuesday.

A statement issued by Diwan of Royal Court read as follows:

'In embodiment of the advanced ties between the Sultanate of Oman and the State of Kuwait, and in affirmation of the cooperation between them in various spheres, Sheikh Mishal al Ahmad al Jaber al Sabah, Emir of Kuwait, will pay a two-day state visit to Oman starting from Tuesday.

'The visit will explore a range of fields and topics of mutual interest in a manner that contributes in achieving aspirations of the two countries towards a more prosperous future.

'The Emir of Kuwait will attend the opening of Duqm Refinery and Petrochemical Industries on Wednesday alongside His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik.

'The opening of the refinery follows the advanced relations particularly those pertaining to fruitful economic cooperation between the two countries.'

Oman, Kuwait eye new horizons of bilateral ties

Relations between Oman and Kuwait have transcended conventional dynamics across various spheres. These ties, celebrated for their robustness



There has been significant uptick in economic relations with Kuwaiti direct investment in Oman reaching RO922.3mn by the end of September 2023 and trade exchange growing 300 % to RO790mn in 2023

DR SALEH BIN AMER AL KHAROUSI

on both official and national fronts, are anchored in the rich historical and social legacies binding the two nations, alongside shared political positions.

The forthcoming discussions at Al Alam Palace on Tuesday,

between His Majesty Sultan Haitham and Sheikh Mishal are poised to usher in a new era aimed at reinforcing the bonds of the two countries and their peoples.

The state visit of Sheikh

Mishal marks his second international delegation since assuming leadership of Kuwait in December 2023, symbolising the leadership's commitment to nurturing the enduring relations founded on mutual principles and

values. This visit is anticipated to catalyse advancements that promise to bring about development and welfare for both nations.

The diplomatic ties between Oman and Kuwait are distinguished by a shared approach towards resolving crises and disputes and a unified stance on regional and international matters through peaceful means. This approach respects state sovereignty and adheres to inter-

national laws and conventions, further supported by the Gulf Cooperation Council's efforts for regional and global stability and peace.

The Omani-Kuwaiti Joint Committee has been instrumental in broadening cooperation across economic, educational, environmental and various other developmental sectors, represented by numerous agreements and memorandums of understanding.

Dr Saleh bin Amer al Kharousi, Oman's Ambassador to Kuwait, said the emir's visit reaffirmed the profound ties and cooperation between the two countries and their peoples. He highlighted the ancient maritime links and the enduring social connections that continue to flourish, underscoring the shared foreign policy and diplomatic fronts on most regional and international issues.

The ambassador also shed light on the multifaceted cooperation within the GCC framework, where citizens enjoy equal rights in education, healthcare and other domains. The bilateral relations are further enriched by high-level coordination in economic, cultural, scientific and sports sectors, notably through initiatives like the Duqm Refinery project and ventures in the real estate, industry and mining.

With nine sessions of the Omani-Kuwaiti Joint Committee yielding numerous collaborative projects, the economic, cultural and scientific exchanges between Oman and Kuwait have seen remarkable growth. Kharousi provided compelling statistics, highlighting a significant uptick in economic relations, with Kuwaiti direct investment in Oman reaching RO922.3mn by the end of September 2023, and a 300 % growth in trade exchange in 2023, reaching RO790mn.

► NEWS BRIEF

61,449 INVASIVE BIRDS ELIMINATED IN SOUTH BATINAH

Barka - Environment Authority (EA) has reported the elimination of 61,449 invasive birds across Barka and Musannah in South Batinah governorate. The campaign, undertaken by EA since December 31, 2023, targeted 2,561 non-native crows and 58,888 mynahs, aiming to protect the local ecosystem and its balance. Musannah saw the removal of 34,880 birds, while Barka accounted for 26,569. These concerted efforts reflect Oman's commitment to preserving its environmental integrity against threats posed by non-native species. The campaign aims to mitigate the adverse effects of these birds on native wildlife, including predation on eggs and chicks of indigenous birds, reptiles, insects and rodents.



Lewis Hamilton determined to race for Ferrari in 2025



Pyramid of Menkaure conservation plans criticised

US strikes pose threat to peace, stability in region: Sayyid Badr

Our Correspondent Muscat

The Sultanate of Oman does not see any benefit in the United States' retaliatory strikes in Syria, Iraq and Yemen. Rather it finds such action jeopardising the safety and stability of the region.

In a statement to ONA, H E Sayyid Badr al Busaidi, Foreign Minister, said that the sultanate is deeply concerned about the ongoing escalation in the region due to the unjust Israeli war in the Gaza Strip.

"The Sultanate of Oman does not see the point in launching such military attacks on sites in the region. These attacks threaten its safety and stability and complicate efforts to find root solutions to the challenges facing the region, including issues of violence and extremism," he said.

The minister added that the war in Gaza has resulted in the deaths and injuries of tens of thousands of innocent civilians, including women and children.

He affirmed Oman's view that the only solution to the conflict lies in addressing its causes and triggers, starting with the recog-



File photo of US aircraft carrier Dwight D. Eisenhower in the Strait of Hormuz

nition of an independent Palestinian state and the withdrawal of Israeli occupation forces from all Palestinian territories.

The US and the UK carried out strikes on Saturday and Sunday on Houthi-controlled positions in Yemen in a new wave of attacks against the Iran-aligned Yemeni group, which has been targeting US and Israeli interests in solidarity with Palestinians.

US airstrikes in Iraq and Syria on Friday targeted armed groups linked to Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps in retaliation

of the killing of three US soldiers in Jordan last week.

Iran denounced the latest US and UK strikes on targets in Yemen, saying these contradict their declared intention of averting a wider Middle East conflict.

Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesperson Nasser Kanaani stated that these attacks are "in clear contradiction with the repeated claims of Washington and London that they do not want the expansion of war and conflict in the region". He accused the US and the UK of "fuelling chaos, disorder, insecurity and instability" by supporting Israel in its Gaza war.

Speaks to Jordan FM

H E Sayyid Badr spoke to Ayman al Safadi, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates of Jordan, on Sunday. They agreed on the need to halt the war and work towards a new approach that leads to achieving a permanent and comprehensive peace by ending Israel's occupation of the occupied territories and establishing an independent Palestinian state.

APSR sets target of 31% electricity from renewables by 2029

Our Correspondent Muscat

The Authority for Public Services Regulation (APSR) has set an ambitious goal to increase the share of renewable energy to 31% by the end of 2029, marking a significant leap from the current 5%, its chairman has stated.

Oman Vision 2040 has laid down clear markers, aspiring to achieve 30% renewable energy by 2030 and 39% by 2040.

The initiative is part of Oman's broader effort to mitigate harmful emissions and pivot towards sustainable energy solutions.

In an interview on Oman TV's *Maa el Shabab* programme, Dr Mansour bin Talib al Hinai, chairman of APSR, highlighted the collaborative efforts underway with various stakeholders to steer the electricity and renewable energy sector towards these national objectives. "Our aim is to enrich Oman's energy mix significantly by the year 2029 through the expanded use

of renewable resources."

Hinai also shed light on the projects and policies implemented to meet these targets, including advancement in renewable energy sources.

Approval of the Manah 1 and 2 solar energy projects, expected to account for 12% of Oman's electricity production by 2025 and each boasting a capacity of 500MW, underscores the nation's commitment to reducing carbon emissions and achieving net-zero by 2050.

Hinai said the Sahim initiative is designed to encourage the adoption of solar panels in residential settings. The initiative has successfully engaged approximately 260 homeowners, integrating grid-connected photovoltaic systems to foster clean energy usage across Omani households. "The Sahim initiative is crucial to realising our vision for a sustainable energy landscape, offering net benefits to residents, the electricity sector and the national economy."



Israel's horrific targeting of civilians continues: Euro-Med

Geneva, Switzerland - Approximately 110,000 Palestinians are reported killed, missing and injured, leaving many suffering long-term disabilities, four months into Israel's genocide in the Gaza Strip, Euro-Med Human Rights Monitor said in a statement issued on Sunday.

A total of 35,096 Palestinians in the strip have been killed as of Friday evening, Euro-Med Monitor estimated. Of those killed in the Israeli air and artillery attacks on the strip, 32,220 were civil-

ians, including 12,345 children, 7,656 women, 309 health personnel, 41 civil defence personnel and 121 journalists.

Meanwhile, 67,240 individuals have been injured, hundreds of them critically. Within a week of the International Court of Justice's ruling, the Israeli army killed over 1,048 Palestinians - most of them civilians - and injured over 1,800 others, and carried out 108 massacres.

The rights group explained that, in addition to the statistics



provided by the Palestinian Health Ministry, its own figures include people who went missing after being arrested and forcibly disappeared by the Israeli army, as well as those who have been trapped beneath the debris of buildings hit by Israeli air and artillery strikes for more than 14 consecutive days now and are therefore presumed dead.

The Euro-Med Monitor team further reported that about 2mn Palestinians, approximately 90% of the total population of the strip,

have been displaced from their homes and residential areas amid a lack of safe shelters, as 79,200 housing units have been completely destroyed and 207,000 housing units have been partially damaged.

The Geneva-based organisation emphasised that Israel is deliberately targeting civilian infrastructure in order to cause as many casualties, material losses and as much general destruction as possible as a form of retaliation and collective punishment.



BREAKING BARRIERS, BUILDING BUSINESSES

Women in Oman have come a long way working shoulder-to-shoulder with men, contributing to the significant growth of the country. Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry launched a platform for women entrepreneurs at a forum called ‘Women at the Top’ on January 30, marking yet another step in supporting and empowering Omani women. What other initiatives should be undertaken by the public and private sectors to encourage female entrepreneurship? Here is what *Muscat Daily* readers said -



? NEXT ON YOUR SAY

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has issued a Royal Order for an annual budget for diabetes care in children. What else needs to be done to encourage healthy lifestyles among school children?

The views stated here are those of the respondents and not endorsed by *Muscat Daily*. If you feel strongly about the issues discussed here, you can email your comments to muscatdaily@apexmedia.co.om You can also log on to our Facebook page or tweet us your comments on the issue.

Suleiman al Balushi
Salesman

To further encourage female entrepreneurship in Oman, the private and public sectors should consider establishing mentorship programmes specifically tailored for and by women. By connecting experienced female entrepreneurs with aspiring ones, these programmes can offer valuable guidance, insights and support. Networking events and workshops can also be organised to facilitate meaningful interactions and skill-building opportunities.

Salma al Abri
Government employee

Extending financial support mechanisms targeted at women-led businesses can significantly bolster their growth. Establishing dedicated funding programmes or grants for female entrepreneurs can help alleviate initial financial barriers and provide the necessary resources for business development. These will contribute to creating a robust financial ecosystem that empowers women to transform their entrepreneurial visions into successful ventures.

Jacob Samuel Joseph
Private sector employee

Oman has brilliant gender equality under the leadership of His Majesty Haitham bin Tarik. Developing a culture of inclusiveness and breaking down gender stereotypes is crucial for encouraging more women to venture into entrepreneurship. Public awareness campaigns, educational programmes and initiatives that challenge traditional gender roles can contribute to changing social perceptions about women in business.

Sunaina Verma
Businesswoman

By promoting an environment where female entrepreneurs are celebrated and supported, both public and private sectors can play a pivotal role in creating a more equitable landscape for women in Oman's entrepreneurial scene.

Mehar Zabin
Private sector employee

To encourage female entrepreneurship, the public and private sectors can establish mentorship programmes pairing experienced female entrepreneurs with newcomers, providing guidance, networking opportunities and access to resources tailored to women's unique challenges in entrepreneurship.

Syed Mohtesan Maqsood
Private sector employee

Educational institutions could introduce specialised courses or workshops focusing on entrepreneurship skills for women, covering topics like business planning, financial management and marketing strategies to equip aspiring female entrepreneurs with the knowledge and confidence needed to succeed.

Nasser al Adawi
Brand manager

Creating networking events specifically targeting women entrepreneurs, where they can share experiences, exchange ideas and build professional connections, can foster a supportive community and provide opportunities for collaboration and growth.

SEND YOUR COMMENTS

Share your comments in not more than 50 words along with your full name and profession before next Sunday, 10am, via WhatsApp, Facebook or Instagram

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Italian academy honours envoy for promoting authentic cuisine

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Italian Academy of Cuisine (Accademia della Cucina Italiana) has awarded honorary membership to H E Pierluigi D'Elia, Ambassador of Italy to Oman, in recognition of his efforts to preserve and advance authentic Italian culinary traditions in the sultanate.

The awarding ceremony was held at Richoux Café, Opera Galleria, on Saturday, in the presence of four members of the academy.

The academy has been a pivotal institution since its foundation - in 1953 - with the primary objective of safeguarding and propagating Italian culinary her-

Awarding H E Pierluigi D'Elia an honorary membership acknowledges his unwavering dedication to the promotion and conservation of Italian cuisine's core values in Oman

FLAVIO FAZZUOLI

itage both domestically and internationally.

A branch of the academy was



established in Oman in 2022, indicating the growing influence and appreciation for Italian cuisine in the region.

Muscat now boasts seven exclusive Italian restaurants, each

periodically reviewed by the academy to ensure they meet the standards of authentic Italian

gastronomy.

These evaluations serve as a reliable reference for tourists

seeking genuine Italian dining experiences in Oman - true taste and atmosphere of Italy accessible far from its shores.

Flavio Fazzuoli, a member of the academy, said, "Awarding H E D'Elia an honorary membership acknowledges his unwavering dedication to the promotion and conservation of Italian cuisine's core values in Oman."

He further revealed plans of the academy to conclude the year with an exhibition showcasing exclusive Italian dishes from the seven accredited restaurants. "This event will not only promote gastronomic excellence but also serve as a cultural bridge between Italy and Oman, celebrating the shared love for the art of Italian cooking."

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Number of vehicles in Oman rose 4% to 1.66mn in 2023

Muscat - The total number of vehicles registered in the sultanate in 2023 was 1,667,393, an increase of 4% compared to 2022, according to the National Centre for Statistics and Information.

Private vehicles constituted 79.6% - or 1,326,587 - of the total vehicles registered.

Vehicles of 1,500cc to 3,000cc engine capacity constituted 54% of the new registrations, totalling 902,244.

Among vehicle colours, white

was the most preferred in the sultanate, comprising 42.7% or 712,073. Vehicles of the colour purple showed the highest increase (21.6%), followed by the colour grey (10.9%).

Commercial registration vehicles constituted 14.7% or 244,486, rental cars accounted for 2% or 33,861, and taxis 1.7% or 27,881. Based on vehicle weight, the number weighing less than three tonnes was 1,510,013, comprising 90.6% of the total registered vehicles in 2023.

Construction begins at Sultan Haitham City

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman has entered into the significant phase of urban development mission with the commencement of the construction work for the first phase of Sultan Haitham City recently.

STRABAG Oman, entrusted with the early phase construction works, is currently laying the groundwork for road infrastructure, streamlining the wadi, and enhancing the area around the city's central park, officials informed.

This marks a significant milestone following last year's agreement to kickstart Sultan Haitham City's development, which has been adopted to catapult the standard of urban living in Oman to a new height.

This project, which envisages establishing a sustainable urban city in alignment with the con-

temporary aspirations of Oman's youth, focuses on incorporating advanced construction concepts, anticipating future urban development methodologies.

The proposed project has brought together expertise from around the globe to craft a city which can duly reflect Oman's rich cultural heritage while enhancing the living standards of its residents.

Spanning over 14mn sqm, the city's master plan is a testament to sustainable urban design, emphasising the integration of green spaces across approximately 3mn sqm, experts commented.

The city will have accommodations for 100,000 residents, offering a mix of 20,000 diverse housing units alongside comprehensive service facilities.

The first phase, to be completed by 2030, will witness de-



velopment of around 6mn sqm to accommodate over 39,000 individuals in more than 7,000 housing units, the project report says.

This phase will see massive infrastructure development, including a sprawling central park, a national centre for women and

children's health, a reference hospital with 1,200 beds, a college of advanced technology for 1,500 students, youth and rehabilitation centres, a cultural centre, school complexes for 6,900 students, health centres, a mosque, and institutions for medical education and health sciences.

The project witnessed the signing of 21 development and partnership agreements in June last year, involving government bodies and the private sector. These collaborations, valued at over RO1bn, cover real estate development, finance, services, and infrastructure, setting a solid foundation for the city's comprehensive development.

The Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning, alongside its partners, is inching close to finalising agreements for construction of main roads, development of other infrastructure, and residential neighbourhoods. These plans include a holistic approach to urban development, integrating water, sanitation, electricity, broadband, and green spaces to meet the city's executive plan's goals.

Particularly notable is the effort to ensure housing affordability within Sultan Haitham City. Through partnerships with eight banks, the city offers attractive financing options, including a discounted rate of 3.5%.

The Oman Housing Bank has raised its financing limit to RO80,000, and 5% of the housing units are earmarked for the residential housing assistance programme, catering to those eligible for government land grants at subsidised rates.

Moreover, provisions have been made to allow non-Omanis and investors property ownership within the city, subject to specific terms and conditions.

OCA inks deal to boost cancer care

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman Cancer Association (OCA) on Sunday signed an agreement with the Oman National Engineering and Investment Company (ONEIC) and the Oman International Hospital, to enhance the scope of cancer care in the country.

The pact is designed to enhance the treatment options for cancer patients by offering a dedicated donation platform and ensuring treatments are provided at competitive rates.

The initiative, championed by community donations via ONEIC's platform, marks a significant step towards comprehensive cancer support in Oman.

The signing ceremony was graced by H H Dr Mona bint Fahd al Said, Assistant Vice Chancellor for International Cooperation at Sultan Qaboos University, in the presence of Dr Wahid Ali Said al Kharusi, Chairman of OCA; alongside Dr Rashid al Ghailani, CEO of ONEIC; and Marcelo Pareira,



CEO of Oman International Hospital.

In his address, Dr Kharusi underscored the significance of the agreement in safeguarding the current and future generations from cancer's impact. The vision is not only to raise awareness and stress the importance of regular screenings but also to provide robust support for patients and their families, he pointed out.

"This collaboration is expected to foster stronger bonds within the community, offering hope and extended support to those navigating the challenging journey of cancer treatment."

Ghailani highlighted the importance of this agreement in fa-

cilitating community contributions to support individuals battling cancer.

"With ONEIC's vast network, including a specialised app and self-service kiosks across Oman, the initiative promises an accessible avenue for donations."

He expressed optimism about the company's contribution towards awareness and the broader goals of cancer care, leveraging its extensive experience in managing donations in collaboration with the Omani Charitable Organisation.

Marcelo Pareira shared the hospital's commitment to delivering exceptional healthcare services to cancer patients,

emphasising the goal to elevate disease awareness and support through specialised staff.

Yuthier al Rawahi, OCA founder and a cancer survivor herself, reaffirmed her dedication to developing patient advocacy and spreading cancer awareness for early intervention and successful treatment outcomes.

The event also showcased OCA's wide range of services for cancer patients, including mobile screening units and support facilities like Dar Al Hanan. Its successful implementation of various projects, through public-private partnerships, highlights its ongoing commitment to enhance cancer care in Oman.

MTCIT embarks on space industry training programme for citizens

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MTCIT) has unveiled an ambitious training programme for the citizens to bolster Oman's presence in the space industry.

The initiative is set to unfold over the next decade promising significant advancement in the country's engagement with space science and technology - a field that underpins critical aspects of contemporary life, including communication, weather forecasting, and satellite navigation.

According to a statement from MTCIT, the programme will kick off in the first half of 2024 with three specialised workshops, developed in partnership with the Code Academy. It aims to cater to a diverse group of 75 participants, including job-seekers, government employees with specialised roles, startups,



small and medium enterprises (SMEs), and individuals with a keen interest in space science and its applications.

The pioneering programme is designed to cultivate a skilled Omani workforce proficient in space technology, artificial satellite utilisation, and artificial intelligence. The curriculum is comprehensive, covering topics such as artificial intelligence, spatial mapping, Earth observation data analysis, cloud computing for disaster management, space project management, and space entrepreneurship.

H E Said Hamood al Mawali, the Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, highlighted several key milestones anticipated by the programme.

Noteworthy among them is the launch of a satellite by 2025, the development of Earth observation capabilities via low-orbit satellites, and the establishment of incubators for space sector startups, scheduled between 2024 and 2025. For those interested in participating or seeking more information, can contact 97451004, the ministry stated.

Qade film fest celebrates cinematic excellence

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, in collaboration with OQ Company and OMQ Productions, successfully concluded the inaugural Qade Film Festival at the Oman Across Ages Museum in Manah, Dakhliyah. The event, which took place on Saturday, showcased 25 Omani films, highlighting the nation's burgeoning cinematic talent.

Presided over by H H Sayyid Kamil bin Fahd al Said, Assistant Secretary-General of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister for the Council of Ministers, the festival marked a significant stride in fostering the sultanate's cul-



tural and national identity through cinema.

Khalid Abdullah al Abri, owner of OMQ Productions, said that the festival projected cinema as a medium to express diverse cultures and narratives.

The four-day event featured a series of enriching activities, in-

cluding the 'Production House' workshop. This forum served as a melting pot for individuals and institutions involved in filmmaking, facilitating the exchange of experiences and offering a range of services from production to film financing. The festival also hosted seminars and an awards

ceremony, underscoring its comprehensive approach to promoting the cinematic arts.

Abri also announced the launch of the Qade Film Fund, an initiative designed to financially bolster Omani films and foster connections between filmmakers and various institutions. This

move underscores the festival's dedication to nurturing creative talent in the cinematic field.

Highlighting the festival's competitive spirit, the film *Al Banjari*, directed by Musa al Kindi, clinched the Golden Award. *One Day* by Abdel Aziz Sayed received the Silver Award, while *Katm al Anfas* (Holding Breath) by Issa al Subhi took home the Bronze Award.

One Day was lauded for its cinematography, while Musa al Kindi received the best director accolade for *Al Banjari*.

The screenplay of *One Day* was celebrated alongside Mohammed al Khamisi for best artistic direction, and Montaser al Jahouri for best makeup.

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2023
OMAN'S MOST TRUSTED BRAND AWARDS

INTERVIEW

MERCEDES-BENZ OMAN
WINNER: AUTOMOTIVE (LUXURY) CATEGORY

Our Correspondent
Muscat

MERCEDES-BENZ OMAN

Mercedes-Benz Oman has won the Oman's Most Trusted Brand Award in the Automotive (Luxury) Category for the seventh consecutive year at a recent award ceremony held at the Sheraton Oman Hotel. In an interview with Muscat Daily, Shaun Michael, CEO of Mercedes-Benz Oman, discussed the brand's strengths in the Omani market, the outlook for the luxury car segment, and Mercedes-Benz's commitment to supporting Oman's transition towards electric vehicle adoption.

What do you think are the core strengths of the Mercedes-Benz brand that have enabled it to consistently earn the trust of Omani customers and win the Oman's Most Trusted Brand Award for seven consecutive years? Mercedes-Benz stands out as a reputed and trusted brand, and customers across Oman appreciate that we will consistently deliver on our promise to offer reliability, safety, high quality, and sublime comfort, resulting in an enhanced overall driving experience. Throughout the years, we have been perfecting the customer experience, not just in terms of offering a superior driving experience but across every touchpoint with Mercedes-Benz as a luxury brand and with meticulous attention to every detail.

Mercedes-Benz traces its history in Oman back to the 1970s. At the same time, the brand has a distinctive and long-standing global reputation of over 130 years, defined by exceptional luxury, technology, innovation, and comfort. As a worldwide brand, Mercedes-Benz is committed to providing top quality and always strives for constant improvement as it prioritises investment in research and innovation. At Mercedes-Benz Oman we channel this commitment and reputation into the products and services we offer our new and existing customers in Oman.

We offer a collection of vehicles that are a fine blend of classic elegance and modern aesthetics, luxury, and sustainability. All of our vehicles embody features that are distinctly Mercedes-Benz. We also pride ourselves for our excellent customer services. We have many relationships with customers in Oman that span generations, and they are part of the 'Mercedes-Benz family.'

Trust is a pivotal factor in maintaining strong customer relationships. Could you elaborate on the strategies and initiatives that the brand has employed to build and sustain trust with customers, both during and after the sales process? Our motto is to remain laser-focused on our customers, whose requirements are at the heart of everything we do, and customer retention is one of the main pillars of our corporate strategy. After all, the trust of our customers, as well as of our business partners and our team members, is the foundation of our continued success.

We attach great importance to reaching our existing and potential customers directly in their surroundings in Oman and offering the best possible driving experience tailored to their needs. Plus, we are committed to making every point of contact with our brand a unique experience.

We are also consistently focused on the needs and expectations of our customers across all channels. Customers can use our websites or visit our state-of-the-art showrooms. It's all about what is most convenient for them. We have dedicated experts who are available to help customers select a suitable vehicle that surpasses their needs. At the same time, our after-sales service care performed by certified technicians remains a top priority.

What is your perspective on the future of the automotive industry in Oman, and how does Mercedes-Benz aim to contribute to its growth? At Mercedes-Benz, we believe that the future will be electric, including in Oman. Customers continue to redefine luxury, while Oman is trying to reduce its carbon footprint. Hence, I expect a future growth in the demand for luxury electric vehicles with high-tech features that can provide a highly personalised and sustainable driving experience.

There is a wide variety of trends in the automotive industry where comfort, innovation, safety, electrification and sustainable mobility are all playing a key role. Drivers are increasingly becoming more environmentally conscious, while being drawn to attractive new

Paving the way for electric mobility



Our motto is to remain laser-focused on our customers, whose requirements are at the heart of everything we do. The trust of our customers, as well as of business partners and team members, is the foundation of our continued success

SHAUN MICHAEL
CEO OF MERCEDES-BENZ OMAN

models and the allure of lower energy costs. With Oman committing to reach net-zero carbon emissions by 2050, customers can also expect further improvements in public charging stations across the nation.

At Mercedes-Benz Oman, we will continue to offer a variety of high-end, premium passenger vehicles. Customers are currently able to choose from the latest models, with cutting-edge features, such as the new E-Class, the new GLC Coupé and the new GLC SUV. Meanwhile, we continue to strive for technological leadership in electric driving, and we are looking forward to meeting the increasing demand for electric vehicles by introducing innovative and

powerful models in the near future.

What are the current trends in the luxury car segment in Oman, and how is Mercedes-Benz positioned to meet the evolving demands of this market? Traditional elements such as craftsmanship, safety, performance and quality remained powerful buying factors, while customers are also increasingly interested in the latest technologies and a more personalised experience. It all should feel very unique, high-end and modern to them, while driving relatively long distances on the road, whether for business or pleasure.

During the Covid-19 Pandemic, the car mar-

ket around the world, including in Oman, has seen many disruptions. In contrast, and despite the current global economic uncertainty, industry figures demonstrate the significant impact and potential growth of the luxury cars market worldwide.

Relatively speaking, we achieved robust sales in Oman throughout 2023. We gain a considerable number of insights in the needs of our customers, including from the Internet and on social media. Plus, we leverage modern technology to understand our customers' needs even better. We know their purchasing history and we can anticipate what the customer is looking for.

Are there any new models or technologies that Mercedes-Benz plans to introduce in the Omani market in the near future? We recently introduced the new 2024 Mercedes-Benz E-Class in Oman, an exemplary and redesigned version of its prestigious kind with its executive comfort, effortless style, new dimensions of digital customisation, and spaciousness. Earlier in 2023, we launched the new GLC Coupé, combining sporty performance with high efficiency. The new GLC SUV is another vehicle we introduced in 2023 and which is defined by its confident looks, luxurious comfort, advanced technological features.

Mercedes-Benz is focused on changing the future of technology and our planet for the better. In this context, Mercedes-Benz is in the process of shifting from an electric-first to an electric-only strategy. This decision was a significant and bold step as it means a massive transformation as we aim to transform into the world's most sustainable luxury car brand.

As I mentioned earlier, we look forward to meeting the increasing demand for electric and plug-in hybrid vehicles by introducing innovative and powerful models soon. Meanwhile, as we continue to perfect the customer experience and not just in their vehicle, other key focus areas include further digitalisation and the e-commerce journey to make it more convenient for customers to select their new Mercedes-Benz vehicle.

As emerging technologies like EVs gain momentum, how do you foresee their impact on Oman's automotive market in the years to come? Could you provide insights into Mercedes-Benz's plans for the electric vehicle segment? Do you anticipate EVs capturing a significant market share in the Middle East in the next few years? Customers in Oman and the wider region have a growing interest in electric vehicles. The Oman Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology revealed that by 2035, at least 79% of all vehicles on the road should be electric, which is aligned with the national strategy for reducing carbon emissions.

We aim to play our part and contribute in supporting Oman to achieve its net-zero objective by 2050, while climate protection is a high priority for most of today's customers. Economic, environmental, and social responsibility go hand in hand — along the entire value chain. Hence, we look forward to receiving more innovative electric vehicles and promoting the transition from conventional hydrocarbon-based fuels to renewable energy.

In the transition to EVs, what challenges do you foresee in markets like Oman, and how is Mercedes-Benz equipped to address them? Combustion engines still power most vehicles on the road today; and deciding to buy an electric vehicle instead takes a lot of consideration. We need to continue to build more public trust when it comes to encouraging EV adoption; for example, drivers want to know if they can drive long distances and if the technology used is environmentally friendly.

The progress of electric vehicle adoption varies significantly from one region to another globally. The adoption of electric vehicles and its charging infrastructure in the wider GCC region still needs to catch up to China, the United States, and European countries, for example. However, the transition to hybrid and even all-electric vehicles has steadily been picking up speed, especially in the luxury segment, as more and more people want to choose a vehicle that can help them save money and reduce their carbon footprint at the same time.

With Oman's focus on sustainability and its net-zero emissions target for 2050, how does Mercedes-Benz plan to integrate these priorities into its operations and offerings in Oman? As I mentioned, we continue to play our part in contributing and supporting Oman to achieve its net-zero objective by 2050, while climate protection is a high priority for us and our customer base.

From 2025 onwards, the plan is to enable customers to choose an all-electric alternative for almost every Mercedes-Benz model. All global markets are expected to switch to electric-only by 2030, provided individual market conditions allow for this to happen.

We will continue to communicate the top reasons why one should consider buying an electric car, which include, but are not limited to, cost-efficiency, a greener lifestyle, and convenience. At the same time, customers do not have to compromise on style nor on performance.

Salalah Free Zone inaugurates 3 projects worth RO23.4mn

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Salalah Free Zone, operated by Asyad Group, on Sunday celebrated the inauguration of three new export-oriented projects in the foods, petrochemicals, and mining industries.

The total value of these three projects is RO23.4mn, contributing to the existing investments and businesses within the free zone, according to a press statement.

Under the patronage of H E Dr Mahad Said Baowain, Minister of Labour, the inauguration ceremony saw the presence of H E Dr Ali Masoud al Sunaidy, Chairman of the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ), and several high-ranking government officials.

During the event, Salalah Free Zone provided an overview of the three high-value projects. The first project is a RO9.6mn food processing plant by the Special Integrated Food Company (SIFCO). The second project is the first phase of Al Namariq Mining Company's quicklime plant, a RO10mn Omani-Iraqi joint venture.

The third project is a RO3.8mn fabric and plastics manufacturing and packaging plant established by Apex Transgulf Manufacturing, targeting local and regional markets in various industries, including healthcare, food, and



Dr Ali Mohammed Tabouk speaks at the inauguration ceremony

beverages.

Dr Ali Mohammed Tabouk, CEO of Salalah Free Zone, commented on the latest investments, saying, "These new project additions reflect the critical role of Salalah Free Zone in driving industrial progress and stimulating economic growth in Oman. We are proud of the strategic transnational partnerships unveiled today with market players from Yemen, Iraq, and Pakistan, which will bolster the manufacturing and value-added capabilities in the sultanate."

All three new plants are equipped with the latest production technology and hardware,

These new project additions reflect the critical role of Salalah Free Zone in driving industrial progress and stimulating economic growth in Oman

DR ALI TABOUK

optimising production capacities and product quality while capitalising on the unique competitive advantages offered by Salalah Free Zone, he said.

"Such new ventures enable sustainable development in Oman by enhancing the country's industrial infrastructure, increasing exports, and boosting trade. We look forward to supporting our partners' growth and contribution to Oman's economy," Tabouk said.

Aligned with Asyad Group and OPAZ's investment strategy, the inauguration of these new projects further demonstrates the stakeholders' commitment to creating an attractive and stable investment environment that unlocks business opportunities and stimulates growth across Omani free zones.

Ras Markaz terminal receives 22 oil shipments

Duqm – Eng Salim Marhoon al Hashmi, DG of the Ras Markaz Terminal Project, said that, since January, the terminal has received more than 22 shipments of Omani and Kuwaiti crude oil.

He added that a total of 35mn barrels of crude oil were also imported and pumped from Ras

Markaz to Duqm Refinery via an oil transportation pipeline.

Hashmi said that the local added value of OTTCO stood at about \$75.4mn and that the project enhanced In-Country Value (ICV) in Oman with an estimated volume of about \$40mn. ONA

VEHICLES & EQUIPMENT FOR SALE

Company Owned commercial vehicles and equipment available for sale in running condition.

■ CRANE 30 TON	3 Nos.
■ TRUCK 7 TON	2 Nos.
■ TANKER -DW BLUE 5000GL	1 Nos.
■ PRIME MOVER & TRAILER	2 Nos.
■ TANKER FUEL 650GL	1 No.

Sale is on "As is Where is" condition.

Interested parties may inspect the assets at Ghala yard from Monday, 5th February to Tuesday, 13th February between 8.30 am & 4.30 pm.

The offers shall be deposited in the tender box latest by 13.02.2024 .

Successful bidder will be invited for immediate cash deposit & will be given 10 days time for moving out the units from our Ghala yard.

Contact: Biju 78597655.

TENDERS ADVERTISEMENT

Oman Electricity Transmission Company (OETC) announces the following tenders:

SR. NO.	TENDER NO.	TENDER NAME	LAST DATE FOR OBTAINING THE DOCUMENTS	BID SUBMISSION DATE	REQUIREMENTS FROM PARTICIPATORS	TENDER DOCUMENT'S FEES (INCLUDING VAT) (RO)
1	15/2024 (International)	Construction of 400kV Harweel Wind Farm Grid Station along with Associated 400kV LILO from Shaleem GS to Dhofar GS	19/02/2024	19/03/2024	Local & International companies with experience in same field Local companies have to provide a valid Commercial & OETC Registrations.	2,625/-
2	16/2024 (International)	Construction of 132kV JBB Ali Wind Farm Grid Station along with Associated 132kV LILO from JBB Hassan GS to Al Jawabi	19/02/2024	19/03//2024	Local & International companies with experience in same field Local companies have to provide a valid Commercial & OETC Registrations.	2,625/-
3	19/2024	Supply and installation Air Conditioning of Split Units (2.5Tons) and Standalone Units (5 Tons) in Batmah & Buraimi Governorate.	19/02/2024	19/03//2024	Local Companies with Experience in Same Field, Have A Valid Commercial Registration.	26/250
4	20/2024	Replacement of defective and aged silicon rubber insulator with accessories for Dhofar Network - Phase 1	19/02/2024	19/03//2024	Local Companies with Experience in Same Field, Have A Valid Commercial Registration.	52/500
5	22/2024	Consultancy Services for Design and Supervision of 400kV Ras Mastraka Wind Farm GS along with Associated 400kV LILO from Duqm Industrial GS to Al Jazzier GS	19/02/2024	19/03//2024	Local Companies with Experience in Same Field, Have A Valid Commercial Registration.	105/-

Participation	Interested Companies may obtain Tender Document with the necessity Apply on E-tendering
Buying the Tender	By E-Tendering System.
Fees	Against non-refundable payment as mentioned above against each set of document. (Payment Through Bank Transfer). SMEs are exempted from tender's fees.
The deadline for clarification	Before (21) Days from bid submission date.
Submission	The submission of hard copy will be only for Bid Bond & other documents by E-Tendering
Terms and conditions	- Specifying the name of the Company or whatever refers to in the Bid Guarantee Envelope. - The bid should be valid for not less than (90) days from bid submission date. - The Tenderer should enclose a bank guarantee issued by any bank in the Sultanate of Oman for the value of 1% of the bid value and should be valid for (90) days from bid submission date, addressed to Oman Electricity Transmission Company (SAOC). Small & Medium Enterprises are exempted from the submission of 1% of the bid bond. - Any bid not comply with the required guarantee will not be accepted. - OETC is not bound to accept the lowest or any other offers.
Offer	The bid bond should be submitted in Tender Box No. (1) at the company's building before 11:00 am on the assigned date for submission of the Tenders.
Company Address	Muscat - Al Mawaleh Road No: 2153 - Building No. 423 0 Block No: 321 Contact Details: 91777378, 93515198, 99105413
Email Website	tenders@omangrid.com www.omangrid.com / Link of E-Tendering System https://www.omangrid.com/en/Pages/Services.aspx

إعلان طرح مناقصات

تعلن الشركة العمانية لنقل الكهرباء ش.م.ع.م عن طرح المناقصات التالية:

رقم المناقصة	عنوان المناقصة	آخر موعد للحصول على مستندات المناقصة	آخر موعد لتقديم العطاءات	الدرجة	ثمن الوثيقة (شامل ضريبة القيمة المضافة)
2024/15 (دولية)	إنشاء محطة هرويل جهد -ع- ك.ف. المرتبطة بمحطة طاقة الرياح وخطوط الكهرباء جهد -ع- ك.ف. المصاحبة لها من محطة شليم إلى محطة ظفار.	2024/02/19	2024/03/19	الشركات المحلية والدولية العاملة في هذا المجال ، على أن يكون لدى الشركات المحلية سجل تجاري و تسجيل الشركة العمانية لنقل الكهرباء ساري المفعول	2,625/-
2024/16 (دولية)	إنشاء محطة جعلان بني بو علي جهد ١٣٢ ك.ف. المرتبطة بمحطة طاقة الرياح وخطوط الكهرباء جهد ١٣٢ ك.ف. المصاحبة لها من محطة جعلان بني بوحيلى إلى محطة الجواي.	2024/02/19	2024/03/19	الشركات المحلية والدولية العاملة في هذا المجال ، على أن يكون لدى الشركات المحلية سجل تجاري و تسجيل الشركة العمانية لنقل الكهرباء ساري المفعول	2,625/-
2024/19	توريد وتركيب مكيفات مركزية سعة (٢٠ طن) وسعة (٥ طن) لمخاضات الباطنة والبريمي.	2024/02/19	2024/03/19	الشركات المحلية العاملة في هذا المجال ولديها سجل تجاري ساري المفعول.	26/250
2024/20	استبدال عوازل التسليكون المطاطية المتضررة والقديمة بمحطات شبكة ظفار - المرحلة الأولى.	2024/02/19	2024/03/19	الشركات المحلية العاملة في هذا المجال ولديها سجل تجاري ساري المفعول.	52/500
2024/22	الخدمات الاستشارية لإنشاء محطة رأس مدركة جهد -ع- ك.ف. المرتبطة بمحطة طاقة الرياح وخطوط الكهرباء المصاحبة لها جهد -ع- ك.ف. من محطة الدقم إلى محطة الجازر	2024/02/19	2024/03/19	الشركات المحلية العاملة في هذا المجال ولديها سجل تجاري ساري المفعول.	105/-

الإشراك	يمكن للشركات والمؤسسات المتخصصة الحصول على مستندات المناقصة بعد تقديم الطلب عن طريق نظام المناقص الإلكتروني.
طريقة الشراء	من خلال نظام المناقص الإلكتروني.
الرسوم	مقابل دفع المبلغ المحدد أعلاه للنسخة الواحدة. لا ترد. (الدفع عن طريق التحويل البنكي، تعفى المؤسسات الصغيرة والمتوسطة من دفع ثمن الوثيقة.
آخر موعد للاستفسارات	قبل (٢١) يوم من تاريخ آخر موعد لتقديم العطاءات
تقديم العرض	يتم تسليم النسخة الأصلية فقط من الضمان البنكي للعطاء في الصندوق. أما العرض فيتم تسليمه من خلال نظام المناقص الإلكتروني.
الشروط والضمائم	- تحديد اسم صاحب العطاء أو ما يشير إليه على المظروف. - أن تكون العروض سارية المفعول لمدة لا تقل عن (٩٠) يوما من تاريخ تقديم العطاء. - رفق تأمين في صورة ضمان مصرفي من أحد البنوك العاملة في البلاد قدره (1%) من قيمة العطاء ساري لمدة (٩٠) يوما من تاريخ تقديم العطاء. ومعنوا باسم الشركة العمانية لنقل الكهرباء. تعفى المؤسسات الصغيرة والمتوسطة من تسليم الضمان المصرفي. - كل عطاء لا يستوفي التأمين المطلوب لن يخطر فيه. - الشركة العمانية لنقل الكهرباء غير مقيدة بقبول أقل العروض أو أي عطاء آخر.
العرض المقدم	يجب وضع الضمان البنكي للعطاء فقط في صندوق المناقصات رقم (1) بمبنى الشركة قبل الساعة 11 صباحاً من التاريخ المحدد لتقديم العطاءات
عنوان الشركة	Muscat - Al Mawaleh Road No: 2153 - Building No. 423 0 Block No: 321 Contact Details: 91777378, 93515198, 99105413
البريد الإلكتروني والموقع الإلكتروني	tenders@omangrid.com www.omangrid.com / Link of E-Tendering System https://www.omangrid.com/en/Pages/Services.aspx



OETCOMAN



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Bank Muscat opens mega branch in Sohar

The new branch underscores commitment to innovation and creativity in delivering services

In line with the bank's vision 'To serve you better, everyday' and commitment to providing the best services and facilities to all segments of customers, Bank Muscat, the leading financial service provider in the Sultanate of Oman, celebrated the inauguration of Sohar mega branch in North Batinah governorate.

The new branch is inclusive of exceptional features and a full suite of banking services and facilities catered to meet the needs of Bank Muscat's individual and corporate customers, the bank stated.

The new branch was inaugurated under the patronage of Mohammed bin Suleiman al Kindi, North Batinah Governor, and in the presence of Sheikh Waleed bin Khamis al Hashar, the CEO of Bank Muscat, and a number of executives and officials from the public and private sectors.

During the inauguration ceremony, all attendees were taken through an introductory tour during which, they were introduced to the range of banking service and facilities provided to customers at the branch. They were also introduced to the sections and modern features of the new branch which reflect the bank's dedication to keeping pace with the current and future developments in the Sultanate's banking sector.

The Sohar mega branch represents a typical example underscoring the bank's commitment to implementing strategic plans set to enhance financial inclusion and extend the bank's network of branches, aiming to fortify customers' banking experience and contribute to the prosperity of the economic landscape in the country.

Considering that the bank's branches represent the main point of contact with customers from across the Sultanate, Bank Muscat ensured that the new branch is equipped with qualified and experienced staff servicing customers.

The new branch is built in a distinctive and spacious area alongside the main street in Sohar, and it features modern



designs, safety standards, and infrastructure aiming to better serve its customers from individuals (enabled for disabled customers as well) and corporates. The mega branch provides a comprehensive suite of services and products provided through desks customized to serve customers applying for home financing 'Baituna' and 'Sayyarati' financing, and other desks for 'Najahi' Business Banking, 'Asalah' Priority Banking, and Private Banking & Wealth Management customers.

Speaking on the inauguration of the new branch, Abdulnasir al Raisi, General Manager, Personal Banking, Bank Muscat, said, "Sohar mega branch is a typical and unprecedented example of the strategic steps taken by the Bank to enhance its branch network across the country. The new branch is designed with the best business safety and security standards and is equipped with the latest technologies that keep pace with the recent developments to ensure that all seg-



ments of customers are easily served according to their diverse needs."

Raisi was assertive in saying that his bank will continue implementing its strategy of widening its branch network and embracing innovation throughout the

course of business practices in commitment to its vision 'To serve you better, everyday'.

"I would like to take this opportunity to thank Bank Muscat's staff for their dedication to work and embracement of the bank's vision when serving its cus-

tomers and contributing to enriching their banking experience. I would like to thank all our customers for their trust and patronage to the Bank," he added.

On the online banking services, Raisi informed that the bank's network of branches dis-

tributed across the sultanate features modern technologies enabling fast and efficient transaction processing. The bank is also pioneering in implementing advanced technologies and digital systems with high security standards for transaction processing, indicating that the field of information technology plays a pivotal role in developing the manner businesses are run, which results in the bank's customers and referrals enjoying an enhanced and unique banking experience.

Hence, Raisi pointed out, the new branch is equipped with self-service machines including ATMs, CDMs, multi-use machines, account statement printers run by a team of experts in the field.

Adding to the various banking services available at the branches distributed across the sultanate, Raisi explained that Bank Muscat's Internet Banking and Mobile Banking platforms have become a primary choice for over 1.8mn users of these

channels to initiate transactions and avail the offerings provided to them.

Furthermore, the bank has over 850 ATMs, CDMs, and multi-use machines distributed across the sultanate and that customers may also use to complete their transactions. Bank Muscat continues to develop its digital and online platforms to keep pace with the increasing number of users and to ensure a strategic implementation of innovative and better customer-serving channels in line with the bank's vision and the digital transformation perception within Oman vision 2040.

Taya Bait Sabeea, Deputy General Manager, Interior Regions, Bank Muscat, highlighted that the governorates are highly populated and they witness great development and growth in many commercial sectors. Likewise, North Batinah is characterised by a large population density and commercial and economic growth.

Hence, Bank Muscat has taken proactive steps to keep pace with these developments in the governorate through expanding its network of branches currently reaching 14 branches to ensure customers' easy and fast access to various services. Considering that it is close to multiple governmental institutions and the free zone area, the Bank takes pride in the number of branches in Sohar counting four branches, backed with dedicated teams to introduce customers to the Bank's various services and solutions.

It is worth noting that Bank Muscat has recently inaugurated multiple branches where customers are serviced with a full range of banking services and products. The newly inaugurated branches are in Al Hail, Amerat and Al Khoudh 6. The bank has also celebrated the opening of several Asalah centers and relocation of some branches equipped with modern designs and features.

The bank represents the first choice of over 2.5mn customers who have been enjoying the services offered to them.



Sri Lankans mark 76th Independence Day

Sri Lankan Embassy in Muscat celebrated their country's independence on Sunday, at its premises, in the presence of Sri Lankan expatriates in Oman.

The 76th Independence Day celebration commenced with the hoisting of the National Flag by H E A L Sabarullah Khan, the Ambassador of Sri Lanka to the Sultanate of Oman, followed by the singing of the National Anthem.

'A two-minute silence was observed in remembrance and honour of all patriots who sacrificed their lives for our motherland,' the embassy stated in a release.

Thereafter, community representatives joined the lighting of traditional oil lamp, which was followed by religious sermons and blessings by Priests of four major faiths in Sri Lanka through digital media.

The Independence Day message of President Ranil Wickremesinghe was read by the Counsellor/Head of Chancery of the Embassy of Sri Lanka in Sinhala language and Prime Minister Dinesh Gunawardena was read by the Ambassador in Tamil language while the Independence Day message of Foreign Minister M U M Ali Sabry was

read by Counsellor/Employment & Welfare in English.

Addressing the gathering, H E Khan greeted the Sri Lankan community in Oman, extending his gratitude for their great support and paid tribute to His majesty the Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, the government and the people of Oman for the continued support extended to Sri Lanka.

H E Khan highlighted the activities of the embassy and achievements in the bilateral relations during the past one-year period, including the labour welfare facilities extended, exhibi-

tions and trade enhancing initiatives launched by the Embassy.

He invited all members of the Sri Lankan community living in Oman to join hands by extending their cooperation to work for the peace and prosperity of Sri Lanka. Here, he spoke about the embassy's year-long action plan and his ambition for the promotion of Sri Lankan Tourism and economic ties with the sultanate.

A vote of thanks was offered by Counsellor, Head of Chancery Anodya Chirasrie.

The event was concluded with Sri Lankan traditional breakfast for all guests.

Al Qurum Jewellery opens first Seiko Boutique at Mall of Oman

Al Qurum Jewellery, a renowned and trusted name in the luxury watches and jewellery industry, inaugurated Oman's first Seiko Boutique at the Mall of Oman.

The special ceremony was held under the auspices of H E Jota Yamamoto, Ambassador of Japan to the Sultanate of Oman; and attended by representatives from Seiko Watch Corporation and Al Qurum Jewellery.

This milestone marks a significant collaboration in Oman between two respected brands, promising a unique and immersive experience where watch enthusiasts and connoisseurs can explore Japan's timeless traditions. The Seiko Boutique at the Mall of Oman showcases an exquisite collection of timepieces from Seiko's global collections renowned for their precision, craftsmanship, and innovative technology.

Seiko has established a legacy spanning over a century and consistently pushed the boundaries of watchmaking, earning a global reputation for excellence.

Hamza Ali Awadh, Director of Al Qurum Jewellery, said, "Bringing Oman's first Seiko Boutique to the Mall of Oman is a huge step forward in our mission to offer customers the very best in Japanese craftsmanship, aes-



thetics and tradition in a landmark year for the brand. This boutique is not just a store - it is an immersive space where patrons can explore and appreciate the artistry and precision that define Seiko timepieces, delve into the rich history of the brand and be able to sample the singular commitment to innovation that has defined the brand since its inception."

The Seiko Boutique is located on the second level at the Mall of Oman and promises a curated shopping experience with a wide array of premium Seiko watches that cater to diverse tastes and

preferences from diver's watches in Prospex to GPS solar powered watches in Astron to traditional mechanical watches in Presage, King Seiko and 5 Sports.

This year, marks the 100th anniversary of the first wristwatch with 'Seiko' on the dial, signifying the beginning of the Seiko brand.

The occasion has been celebrated worldwide with the launch of creations that pay homage to this milestone. The commemorative timepieces will be available at the Seiko boutique.

ISG bids farewell to Class 12 batch of 2024

Indian School Al Ghubra organised a formal farewell ceremony for the students of Class 12 on January 29, a release stated.

The event, which was graced by the founder Dr P Mohamed Ali, began with the singing of the school song.



Dr Ali was accorded a warm welcome in a traditional way, as principal Papri Ghosh welcomed the distinguished gathering.

In her address, the principal highlighted the contributions of the batch of 2024 towards community service in the form of beach cleaning drive, collecting funds through bake sale, friendly cricket matches, football matches to name a few.

She recalled how passionately they followed up to make ISG Girls Football Team a reality. She also wished them the very best for the board examinations and their future endeavours.

In his exhortation, Dr Mohammed Ali spoke about the importance of discipline and possessing an attitude of gratitude in moulding an individual. He advised the students to build a brand for themselves, based on the principles of hard work, trust and empathy. He also emphasised on the need to remain focused, to dream big and above all to be a good human being.

The 154 students of the batch were presented with mementoes by Dr Mohamed Ali.

Sixty-seven students who had completed 14 years of schooling in ISG were specially felicitated by the president of the school

management committee Ahmed Rayees.

On this momentous occasion, Aditi Guru, the head girl, spoke of the many memories made at ISG. Daksh Saraf - the head boy - spoke of how the life lessons learnt at ISG will remain the bedrock on which they will build their future.

In her speech, Shaivi Kumar, president of the Student Council said each one of her batchmates feels prepared to take on the challenges of the real world.

Simran Kawatra, the head girl - ISG International, said that the values imbibed and the memories made at ISGI will remain with them forever.

Nithin Krishnan Muthukrishnan, the head boy of ISGI, expressed his gratitude to the teachers and parents and assured them that he and his batch will make the school proud.

The function concluded with a special prayer by principal Papri Ghosh, seeking the grace of the Almighty for the success of the batch of 2023-24.



Lincoln offers experience of luxury

Lincoln Oman has recently unveiled a campaign where Lincoln luxury enthusiasts can own their favourite Lincoln vehicle and get exclusive benefits. The benefits include service up to five years/100,000km and one year registration, a release stated, adding that the vehicles from Lincoln come with assertion on luxury and comfort.

Lincoln has an impressive array of vehicles in the range, including the Aviator, Corsair, Nautilus and Navigator, the company stated.

The Aviator is one of Lincoln's popular models that is engineered to offer heightened experiences. The Aviator is equipped with a standard twin-turbocharged 3.0-litre V6 engine that is paired with a 10-speed SelectShift automatic transmission. This helps the Aviator dish out an impressive 400hp and 563Nm of

torque for effortless acceleration. The three-row luxury SUV is equipped with all-wheel drive capability. Maximising the driving experience is the Lincoln Drive Modes' five signature settings - Normal, Conserve, Excite, Slippery and Deep Conditions.

This feature allows owners to further customise their driving experience, while a 10.1" standard configurable LCD instrument cluster confirms their choices with beautiful, easy-to-read dynamic graphics and prompts.

The Lincoln Corsair exudes class with its distinct design and luxurious interior details. The two-row Lincoln Corsair SUV combines refined power and a wealth of purposeful technologies. Staying true to its Quiet Flight DNA, Corsair is engineered to deliver an effortless drive experience and sensation of gliding over the road.

Turbocharged four-cylinder engine options are available - a standard 2.0-litre with a targeted 250 horsepower and 275 lb-ft. of torque. Each is paired to a new 8-speed automatic transmission for agile performance.

The Corsair is designed to give luxury customers technology to make their drive effortless, such as Lincoln Co-Pilot360 2.1 Vision driver-assist features. Breaking up the elements, particularly the cantilevered console, emphasizes volume and enhances practicality with additional front-row storage. A 10-speaker premium audio system is available for the Corsair.

Delivering a luxurious driver environment with SUV flexibility, the Nautilus offers a stunning exterior design with a new Lincoln signature grille, new tail lamps, and applique light bar, spoiler and upper rear fascia. Complement-

ing the new design features and affording the Nautilus a more luxurious stance, is an all new wheel lineup featuring the standard 18" premium painted aluminium, 20" bright machined aluminium with premium painted pockets available for the Reserve trim. The Lincoln Nautilus is equipped with a turbocharged engine line-up. A 2.7-litre twin-turbo V6 engine boasts an AWD drivetrain with adaptive suspension and all-wheel drive disconnect. It delivers 335 hp and 515 Nm of torque and includes standard Auto Start-stop capability, plus a new eight-speed automatic transmission with SelectShift capability.

One of the largest luxury family SUVs - the Navigator offers impressive space, exceptional luxury and advanced features. The Lincoln Navigator is equipped with a twin-turbo V6 engine that can produce 440

horsepower and provides smooth power whenever you need it, delivered through a 10-speed Automatic transmission.

The Navigator combines modern luxury with advanced technology. Navigator's lighter, high-strength aluminium-alloy body helps create a more refined ride. The Navigator is equipped with a clean and uncluttered interior layout, with a simple, soothing ambience.

At night, interior ambient lights sequentially illuminate each of the SUV's three rows. During the day, a panoramic roof fills the cabin with natural light. Inside, spaciousness comes in all three rows, including storage in each to keep the cabin clean and organised. Occupants can enjoy Revel Ultima audio with 28 speakers that work in concert with Navigator's interior design and acoustics.

Aster Royal Al Raffah offers residents advanced care locally

Aster Royal Al Raffah Hospital, a part of GCC's leading integrated healthcare provider Aster DM Healthcare, is transforming healthcare accessibility in Oman through its 'Treat in Oman' initiative.

The goal of the initiative is to educate the local residents that world-class healthcare services are now available within the Sultanate, eliminating the need for residents to travel abroad for advanced medical care.

Spanning across 25,000sqm, the 175-bed multispecialty tertiary care hospital is a beacon of excellence in healthcare innovation. Equipped with cutting-edge technology, the facility offers specialised centres, including a Cath-lab for Advanced Cardiac Care, Interventional Radiology Centre, Sports Medicine and Orthopaedics Centre, and Oman's first Thulium Laser in the Advanced Urology Centre.

The hospital also houses a Neurosciences Centre, a Centre of Excellence for Interventional Gastroenterology and Advanced Therapeutic Endoscopy. The hospital also has a strong and



comprehensive approach towards women's health.

The Centre for Women and Child Health provides comprehensive Gynaecology services, including High-risk pregnancy, Ectopic delivery, Hysterectomy, Lap procedures, Uterine Fibroid Embolization (UFE), Endometrial Ablation, Nurture Program, and

3D/4D scans.

Commenting on the initiative, Alisha Moopen, Managing Director and Group CEO at Aster DM Healthcare GCC, underscored the importance of healthcare, which "should know no boundaries".

Aster's Treat in Oman initiative, Alisha said, highlights their

commitment to make world class medical care easily accessible for the people of the country.

"At Aster Royal Al Raffah Hospital, we have already introduced top-notch treatment solutions which are being delivered by the best medical professionals in the region and have curated the patient experience in align-

ment with our network's top benchmark. We are also looking to bring in innovation in healthcare through introduction of surgical robot and more advanced laparoscopic solutions to further enhance clinical delivery in Oman," she added.

The hospital has established Centres of Excellence in Cardiol-

ogy, Gastroenterology, Ortho & Spine Surgery, Urology, Minimal Invasive Surgery, Stroke, Gynaec Surgeries, Vascular, run by experienced doctors and medical professionals, supported by an exceptional Emergency Room (ER) team.

This underscores the hospital's dedication to providing unparalleled healthcare services, eliminating the need for patients to travel abroad for specialised treatments.

At the forefront of medical innovation, Aster Royal Al Raffah is pioneering unique clinical procedures and advanced treatment facilities, setting new benchmarks in healthcare excellence. Leveraging cutting-edge technologies such as Spy.

Glass Cholangioscopy and Fibroscans, along with groundbreaking services like the first 24-hour GI Bleed unit and therapeutic ERCP, the hospital solidifies its position as a true pioneer in healthcare.

Patients now have access to world-class healthcare within Oman at Aster Royal Al Raffah Hospital.

Zimmer Biomet launches Innovative Care

Zimmer Biomet Holdings, a global medical technology leader, announced its mymobility care management system to be available in the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia this year. The big step forward has been made public at the Arab Health Congress.

mymobility empowers patients through smartphones and smart devices as they prepare for and recover from surgery. It delivers support and guidance to patients and captures continuous data and patient-reported feedback for care teams.

"Zimmer Biomet continues to show how combining technology, implants and data can improve patient outcomes and increase clinical efficiency," said Farah Hamdan, Zimmer Biomet General Manager, Middle East North Africa and Turkey.

With mymobility, she said, clinicians can engage patients through the entire episode of care, enhancing and personalising their experience even further.

Flagship annual event 'French Weeks' to begin in sultanate tomorrow

The Embassy of France in Oman has announced the 6th edition of its flagship annual event 'French Weeks' to be held from February 6 to March 5.

Just ahead of the official commencement of the celebration, a conference by French archeologist Vincent Charpentier, head of the French archeologic mission 'Archaeology of the Arabian Seashores' was held on Sunday at 6:30pm.

On the sidelines of the 'Meet the French Archeologists in Oman' conference, the visitors had a Virtual Reality experience on 'Dawn of Art' by Novelab.

Since its inception in 2018, French Weeks event has consis-

tently pursued its ambition to spotlight French savoir-faire and culture, to strengthen French-Omani cooperation in multiple fields and to consolidate the deep and long-lasting friendship between our two countries, the embassy stated.

This year's edition will revolve around the theme 'Make it Iconic: Choose France'. Ranging from the fields of gastronomy, to arts, education, and business, a series of cultural events will showcase different facets of French talents that contribute to France's renown.

'This varied programme aims to satisfy everyone's curiosity and tastes, with concerts, fes-

tive evenings, a conference, and other cultural events not to be missed,' the embassy pointed out.

The month-long programme will open with a concert by the Muscat Royal Philharmonic Orchestra at the French Embassy, on Tuesday at 6pm. There will be a repertoire that will intertwine classical French compositions with Arabic music.

This event is on invitation, the embassy, however, clarified.

On February 13 at 7pm, an electronic music and cinematic concert by the French-Lebanese group 'Love & Revenge' will be held at the Crowne Plaza Muscat, in Qurum. Drawing on the

large repertoire of Middle-eastern pop and Egyptian film from the 1940s to 1990s, the 'Love & Revenge' creates a fertile hybrid between the joys of the past and modern aesthetics.

'A hypnotic musical performance not to be missed,' the French embassy asserted, adding that the 1h-30m long programme will offer free entry with mandatory registration.

On February 22, the French-Omani Friendship Association (OFA) will organise Oman France Clean Energy Conference during the first half of the day. The venue for the event is yet to be decided, officials informed.

The first edition of the Oman France Clean Energy Forum aims at enhancing the bilateral cooperation between the two countries at companies and institutions' level in the clean energy sector. Discussions will address technical challenges and solutions, as well as other important topics where bilateral cooperation is needed.

The embassy confirmed that the entry for this conference will be free entry for members and students, or upon registration with the OFA.

SOUFFLE ARIDE photography exhibition will be opened at Stal Gallery on February 25 at 7pm, in the presence of French

photographer Laura Bonnefous, whose photo portraits and landscapes from Duqum embark us on a poetic and inspiring journey.

The exhibition will be open to the public until March 7 in the first phase, with a reopened phase from March 14 to 21.

As part of this, there will be an hour-long talk and presentation by Laura Bonnefous on her photo series in Oman, the following day. This too is open to public.

For its first participation at Muscat's International Book Fair, the French Booth will offer a range of activities and encounters with French graphic novel-

ists working in Oman from February 22 to March 2.

There will be a film screening Anatomy of a Fall on March 4 at 6pm. It will be done in partnership with the Muscat International Film Festival's 11th edition and will be free entry, on invitation and mandatory registration.

On March 5, Closing evening of the French Weeks will be held with a musical and gastronomic night to get a taste of France. Entitled 'Good France', this evening of festivities intends to bring light to French gastronomy, in partnership with the chefs from the best hotels and restaurant in Muscat. Entry on invitation.

US: President Joe Biden wins first Democratic primary in S Carolina

Washington, US - US President Joe Biden won the South Carolina primary on Saturday, giving him the kind of emphatic result he no doubt envisioned when he made the state the first contest on the Democrat's presidential nominating calendar, *The New York Times* reported.

The leading US daily reported that Biden won an overwhelming majority of South Carolina Democrats, more than 96 per cent with 80 per cent of the vote counted, dominating every county with more than 95 per cent of the vote, including in heavily Black areas.

President Biden vowed that South Carolina would once again send him to the White House.

"The people of South Carolina have spoken again, and I have no doubt that you have set us on the path to winning the presidency again - and making Donald Trump a loser again," the president said in a statement released by his campaign.

His campaign had wanted South Carolina to prove that the party's base, particularly Black voters, remained devoted to Biden and would turn out for him in large numbers. The state's open primary system means voters are free to choose which primary to vote in, and the stakes are far higher in the Republican contest pitting Trump against Nikki Haley, the former South Carolina governor - and there had been some concern from party



Voters cast their ballots at a polling station during the Democratic presidential primary in Charleston, South Carolina, US on Saturday (Xinhua)

Biden won an overwhelming majority of South Carolina Democrats, more than 96 per cent with 80 per cent of the vote counted, dominating every county with more than 95 per cent of the vote

officials about voters waiting to participate in that contest on February 24 instead.

The New York Times reported that the Black voters are critical to Biden's success in battleground

states, but transposing South Carolina's results in February to November voting in Detroit, Milwaukee and Philadelphia is a tricky proposition, given that Saturday's primary was viewed by

most observers - correctly, as it turned out - as non-competitive.

The primary was on pace to have about 150,000 votes, at the low end of the primary eve projection from Representative James E Clyburn, Biden's most important South Carolina surrogate whose 2020 endorsement helped propel him to the nomination that year. The Biden campaign itself studiously avoided making public predictions about how many Democrats would vote in Saturday's primary.

There is little data to measure Saturday's Democratic turnout.

The last time an incumbent Democratic president sought reelection, in 2012, President Barack Obama went unchallenged in South Carolina and the state did not hold a primary.

Four years later, when former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton defeated Senator Bernie Sanders of Vermont in the state's primary, 370,864 people voted. In 2020, with no competitive Republican primary and 12 Democrats on the

ballot, 536,949 people voted.

The South Carolina Democratic Party said early vote data showed that the share of Black voters in the electorate was 13 per cent higher than in 2020, when people of colour made up about half of the voters in the Democratic primary and there was no Republican primary to siphon off voters, *The New York Times* reported.

In 2016, the last year in which both parties held presidential primaries in South Carolina, voters of colour made up two-thirds of Democratic primary voters.

Christale Spain, the chair of South Carolina's Democratic Party, spearheaded much of the state party's organising operation. Late on Saturday, she said she felt 'very encouraged' by the state's early vote numbers, which showed that more than 51,000 voters cast early Democratic primary ballots.

"We might not see that enthusiasm, but they are mission-driven," she said of South Carolina's Democrats. "They know that this is a choice between progress and regression and freedom and anti-freedom."

By moving South Carolina from the party's fourth contest to its first, Biden elevated the influence of Black voters in choosing the Democratic nominee and insulated himself from potential primary challengers in a state that saved his 2020 campaign.

ANI

Senegalese president postpones election

Kigali, Rwanda - Senegal's President Macky Sall on Saturday announced the indefinite postponement of the presidential election scheduled for February 25.

In a televised address to the nation, Sall said he repealed the relevant electoral law, citing 'a dispute over the candidate list', and 'an open conflict' over alleged corruption of constitutional judges which he said could lead to pre- and post-election disputes. Sall promised to 'initiate an open national dialogue bringing together all political forces to guarantee the conditions for a free, transparent and inclusive election in a peaceful and reconciled Senegal'.

The announcement came on the backdrop of an investigation by lawmakers against two Constitutional Council judges over alleged corruption.

Last month, the Senegalese Constitutional Council had approved 20 candidates for the presidential election which excluded two opposition candidates, Ousmane Sonko and Karim Wade, son of former President Abdoulaye Wade.

Sonko, popular among youth voters, finished third in the 2019 election against Sall.

Anadolu Agency

Chile: At least 46 people killed in forest fires in Valparaiso region

Santiago, Chile - At least 46 people were killed after fires engulfed the Valparaiso region in central Chile, Chilean President Gabriel Boric said on Saturday.

"So far, 40 people have been killed in the fires, and six others have died from burns at medical centres," the president told a news conference, adding that the figure will increase.

The Chilean government imposed a curfew on the Quilpue, Villa Alemana, Vina del Mar and Limache communes in the Valparaiso region from 9pm on Saturday (0000 GMT on Sunday) to 10am on Sunday (1300 GMT) to combat the fires.

Local authorities have confirmed that more than 1,200 houses have been destroyed in Quilpue and Villa Alemana, some 120km northwest of the capital, while at least 9,000 hectares throughout the Valparaiso region have been consumed by fires. Boric declared on Friday night a state of emergency for the catastrophe in the Val-



Chilean President Gabriel Boric (left), aboard a helicopter, views damages in Valparaiso region on Saturday (Xinhua)

paraiso region to deploy extra resources and allow the intervention of the military. The fires are

the deadliest in recent decades in the South American nation.

Xinhua

O'Neill is Northern Ireland's 1st nationalist first minister

London, UK - Sinn Fein's Michelle O'Neill made history on Saturday after she was appointed as Northern Ireland's first nationalist first minister.

Politicians gathered in Stormont, Northern Ireland's parliament, to appoint a series of ministers to the devolved executive, as a deal was reached for power-sharing after almost two years of political deadlock.

Michelle O'Neill has been appointed Northern Ireland's first minister, while the Democratic Unionist Party's (DUP) Emma Little-Pengelly will serve as deputy first minister.

In her first address as the first minister in parliament, O'Neill said that today 'opens the door' to a shared future.

"This is an assembly for all Catholic, Protestant and dis-senter, despite our different outlooks and our different views and the future constitutional posi-



Michelle O'Neill

tion," she said.

O'Neill said that they must make power-sharing work because collectively, they are charged with leading and delivering for 'all our people, for every community'.

"As an Irish republican I pledge co-operation and genuine honest effort with those colleagues who are British, of a

unionist tradition and who cherish the union," she added.

O'Neill noted that it is the first time that a nationalist has taken the post of first minister in Northern Ireland, saying: "Such a day would ever come would have been unimaginable to my parents and grandparents' generation."

Anadolu Agency

UK citizens told not to travel to Afghanistan

Kabul, Afghanistan - The UK's Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) advised British nationals against travelling to Afghanistan, TOLO News reported.

According to an FCDO statement, there is a 'significant risk of detention of British nationals' and 'terrorists are very likely to try to carry out attacks' in Afghanistan during the month of Ramadan.

The statement read: "You should not travel to Afghanistan. Terrorists are very likely to try to carry out attacks in Afghanistan. There is a heightened threat of terrorist attacks in or around religious sites and during religious

events and celebrations, such as the month of Ramadan."

"The security situation in Afghanistan is volatile. There is an ongoing and high threat of terrorist attacks throughout Afghanistan, including around airports. There is a significant risk of detention of British nationals," the statement added.

Taliban spokesperson Zabihullah Mujahid, however, said security is ensured in the country and the safety of foreign nationals is also ensured, as per TOLO News.

Mujahid said: "We assure that there is no threat to any foreign national in Afghanistan."

ANI

Namibian president Geingob dies in hospital

Windhoek, Namibia - Namibian President Hage G Geingob passed away early on Sunday while receiving cancer treatment in a hospital in the capital city of Windhoek, the presidential office announced. He was 82.

"It is with utmost sadness and regret that I inform you that our beloved Dr Hage G Geingob, the President of the Republic of Namibia, has passed on today, Sunday 4 February 2024 at around 00h04 at Lady Pohamba Hospital where he was receiving medical treatment from his medical team," acting president Nangolo Mbumba said in a statement on the official social media account of the Namibian Presidency.

Geingob had served as

Geingob had served as Namibia's third president since March 21, 2015, and was re-elected for another 5-year term in 2019

Namibia's third president since March 21, 2015, and was re-elected for another five-year term in 2019. He served as prime minister in 1990-2002 and 2012-2015, in addition to other key ministerial and leadership roles.

"His medical team... has been trying its utmost best to ensure that our President recovers," the statement said. "Regrettably,



A file photo of Namibian President Hage G Geingob

notwithstanding the team's spirited effort to save his life, sadly, fellow Namibians, President Geingob passed on."

"The Namibian nation has lost a distinguished servant of the people, a liberation struggle icon, the chief architect of our consti-

tution and the pillar of the Namibian house," the statement said.

It called on Namibians to 'remain calm and collected while the government attends to all necessary state arrangements, preparations and other protocols'.

On Saturday, vice president Mbumba told the nation Geingob was in a critical but stable condition after undergoing chemotherapy treatment for cancer at Lady Pohamba Hospital in Windhoek, the capital city.

On January 19, the Namibian presidency said Geingob's medical team discovered cancerous cells following a biopsy examination.

Xinhua

Russia requests for UNSC meeting to discuss US strikes on Iraq, Syria

Moscow, Russia - Russia on Saturday condemned the US strikes on Iraq and Syria, and requested a UN Security Council meeting to discuss the issue.

The US has 'once again demonstrated its aggressive essence and disregard for international law', said Maria Zakharova, the Russian Foreign Ministry spokesperson.

According to her, the attack led to the destruction of civilian infrastructure and casualties among ordinary people.

"The obedient participation

of the British Royal Air Force in the US attacks should not create the illusion of some kind of 'international coalition' for anyone. London has yet to answer for its diligence in supporting the purely provocative actions of its superiors in Washington," she said.

Zakharova accused the US of intentionally aggravating the situation in the Middle East, saying: "Washington, believing in its impunity, continues to sow destruction and chaos in the Middle East. The largest US air raid



in the region since 2003, led by Joe Biden's 'act of retaliation' for the unidentified drone attack on the American base in Jordan has no justification."

"We strongly condemn the new blatant act of American-British aggression against

sovereign states. We are seeking urgent consideration of the current situation through the UN Security Council," she said.

The US started airstrikes on Friday against Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps-Quds Force and Iranian-backed militias in Iraq and Syria after a suicide drone attack killed three American troops in Jordan late last month.

In all, more than 85 targets were hit with more than 125 precision munitions, US Central Command (CENTCOM) said in

a statement.

Three days of mourning

Meanwhile, Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammad Al-Sudani ordered three days of mourning on Saturday for military personnel and civilians killed by US airstrikes, according to Iraqi news agency, INA.

"Prime Minister Al-Sudani has declared a general mourning for three days across state departments and institutions as a tribute to the martyrs of our

armed forces and civilians who lost their lives due to the US airstrikes on the Akashat and Qa'im areas in the western Anbar province," said a statement from the media office of the prime minister.

"In protest against the American aggression that targeted Iraqi military and civilian sites, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs will summon the Charge d'Affaires of the United States Embassy in Baghdad, David Burger," INA quoted the agency.

Anadolu Agency

Malaysia calls for more efforts to tackle cancer cases

Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia - Malaysian Health Minister Dzulkefly Ahmad on Sunday called for wider efforts to tackle the rising number of cancer cases in the Southeast Asian country.

Dzulkefly said in a speech marking World Cancer Day that improving the population's access to health services is essential, citing the recorded cases in 2020 - 48,639 new cancer cases and 29,530 cancer-related deaths with the numbers expected to double by 2040. "Outside of advancements in cancer treatment, we must also look at improving the overall population's access to essential health services as most cancer specialists and treatment facilities are usually only available in cities or major hospitals," he said.

He also noted that liver cancer in particular was among the five most common types of cancers in the country, which was caused by the ever-growing rate of obesity. "Obesity increases the risk of fatty liver disease or Metabolic Dysfunction Associated Fatty Liver Disease, which is one of the primary causes of liver cancer," the minister said.

Xinhua

Libyan PM: Israeli strikes against Gaza 'ugliest form of terrorism'

Tripoli, Libya - Israel's attacks on the Gaza Strip are 'the ugliest form of terrorism', Libyan Prime Minister Abdul Hamid Dbeibeh said on Saturday.

Dbeibeh said the attacks will have serious consequences for global stability when he addressed the 42-member meeting of the Islamic Military Counter Terrorism Coalition (IMCTC) in the Saudi Arabian capital, Riyadh.

He demanded an immediate halt to the attacks in Gaza and crimes against the Palestinian people.

After the meeting, Dbeibeh met Saudi Arabian Defence Minister Khalid bin Salman Al Saud and discussed military cooperation between the two countries and the fight against terrorism.

Saudi Arabia announced at the end of 2015 that the IMCTC was established with the participation of 34 countries with its headquarters in Riyadh.

With the increase in new participation in the coalition, the number of members reached 42.

Death toll in Gaza reaches 27,365

At least 127 Palestinians were killed and 178 others were injured in the last 24 hours as Israel continues its onslaught on the besieged Gaza Strip, the territory's Health Ministry said on Sunday.

"The Israeli occupation committed 14 massacres against



The Israeli offensive has left 85 per cent of Gaza's population internally displaced amid acute shortages of food, clean water, and medicine (Anadolu Agency)

At least 127 Palestinians were killed and 178 others were injured in the last 24 hours as Israel continues its onslaught on besieged Gaza Strip, Health Ministry said on Sunday

families in the Gaza Strip, leaving 127 martyrs and 178 injured during the past 24 hours," the ministry said in a statement.

Despite the International Court of Justice's provisional ruling, Israel continues its onslaught on the Gaza Strip where at least 27,365 Palestinians have been killed, mostly women and children, and 66,630 injured since October 7, according to Palestinian health authorities.

Israel has pounded the Gaza

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

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

Demolitions in West Bank

The Israeli army demolished 58

Palestinian structures in the occupied West Bank in January, according to a local organisation on Sunday.

"The demolished structures included 22 inhabited houses and 16 agricultural facilities," the Colonization and Wall Resistance Commission said in a statement.

It said most of the demolitions occurred in the cities of Hebron, Bethlehem, East Jerusalem and Qalqilya.

The commission also reported 1,593 attacks against Palestinians in January, of which 1,407 were carried out by army forces and 186 by settlers.

Tensions have been running high across the West Bank amid an Israeli military offensive on the Gaza Strip following a cross-border attack by Hamas on October 7. The Israeli army has since killed 381 Palestinians in West Bank, injured 4,400 others and detained 6,512 people, according to Palestinian figures.

Anadolu Agency

US, UK launch new strikes against Houthis in Yemen

Washington, US - The US and the UK carried out strikes on Saturday against 36 Houthi targets in 13 locations in Yemen in response to attacks against commercial ships in the Red Sea.

"These precision strikes are intended to disrupt and degrade the capabilities that the Houthis use to threaten global trade, and the lives of innocent mariners, and are in response to a series of illegal, dangerous, and destabilising Houthi actions since previous coalition strikes on January 11 and 22, 2024, including the January 27 attack which struck and set ablaze the Marshall Islands-flagged oil tanker M/V Marlin Luanda," according to a statement by the US, the UK, and others who supported the strikes, including Australia, Bahrain, Canada, Denmark, the Netherlands and New Zealand.

"Today's strike specifically targeted sites associated with the Houthis' deeply buried weapons storage facilities, missile systems and launchers, air defence systems, and radars," it added.



The strike targeted sites associated with the Houthis' weapons storage facilities, missile systems and launchers

The statement said the Houthis carried out more than 30 attacks on commercial vessels and naval vessels since November.

"We remain committed to protecting freedom of navigation and international commerce and holding the Houthis accountable for their illegal and unjustifiable attacks on commercial shipping

and naval vessels," it said.

US Secretary of Defence Lloyd Austin said separately that the collective action 'sends a clear message to the Houthis that they will continue to bear further consequences if they do not end their illegal attacks on international shipping and naval vessels'. "We will not hesitate to defend lives and the free flow of commerce in

one of the world's most critical waterways," he added.

It came after airstrikes on Friday against Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC)-Quds Force and Iran-backed militias in Iraq and Syria after a drone attack killed three American troops in Jordan late last month.

Anadolu Agency

Russia, South Korea hold tense regional security talks in Seoul

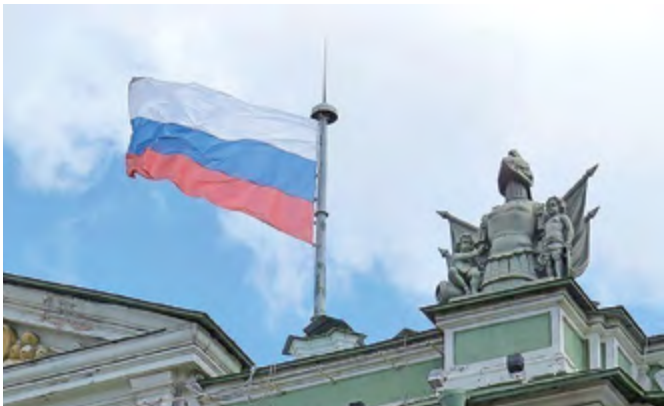
Ankara, Turkey - Russia and South Korea said on Sunday that they discussed regional security and other 'pending issues' amid a chasm of differences between the two countries and escalating tensions on the Korean Peninsula.

In a visit to Seoul, Russia's Deputy Foreign Minister Andrey Rudenko held talks with his South Korean counterpart Chung Byung-won on Friday and 'addressed the Ukrainian war and bilateral ties', Yonhap News reported, citing a statement by South Korea's Foreign Ministry.

Chung expressed Seoul's 'stern stance' on Russia's 'growing military cooperation with North Korea' and called for Moscow's 'responsible behaviour', according to the South Korean news agency.

He also urged Moscow's cooperation to 'prevent any infringement on the legitimate rights' of South Korean firms and citizens in Russia.

During his visit, Rudenko also held talks with South Korea's top nuclear envoy, Kim Gunn, as well as Kim Hong-kyun, the country's



special envoy for peace and security affairs on the Korean Peninsula. Kim called on Moscow to 'strictly comply with its obligations to UN Security Council resolutions, including the immediate cessation of its military ties with Pyongyang that threatens the security of the Korean Peninsula and Europe'.

In a separate statement, the Russian Foreign Ministry said Moscow intends continue developing cooperation with North Korea 'in the interests of both countries and their peoples, as well as strengthening peace and stability in the region'.

It said that in Seoul, Rudenko exchanged views with officials about the situation on the Korean Peninsula and in Northeastern Asia, as well as on bilateral relations, expressing Moscow's 'serious concerns regarding the sharp escalation of tensions in the sub-region'. "It was clearly stated that its main source is the irresponsible provocative policy of Washington, which is trying to encourage regional allies to implement their aggressive plans, fraught with unpredictable consequences, including in the military sphere," it added.

Anadolu Agency

INDIA



Thousands march in Ladakh for statehood

Leh, Ladakh - Thousands of people braved the cold and took out a march demanding statehood for Ladakh and protection under the 6th Schedule of the Constitution for the Union Territory. Thousands of men and women marched in the main city of Leh in the bitter cold, raising chants demanding statehood for Ladakh and the implementation of the sixth schedule of the Constitution. The shutdown in the region was called by the Leh Apex Body (LAB) and Kargil Democratic Alliance (KDA). The central government has constituted a high-level committee led by Union Minister of State for Home, Nityanand Rai, to protect the unique culture and language of Ladakh. The legal Adviser of LAB and KDA, Haji Ghulam Mustafa, told ANI that all powers that were people-centric have weakened and the region has no represen-

tation in the Assembly. "Ever since Ladakh became a UT, the apex body and KDA put forward a four-point agenda. All our powers have weakened. When we were a part of Jammu and Kashmir, we had four members in the Assembly and two in the legislative council. Now we have no representation in the Assembly. It has always been our demand that the people of Ladakh should have representation in the Assembly and that we should get statehood. The reason is that Ladakh is, strategically, a very important place," he said. "This is a tribal majority area and has all the features that states in the Northeast have. Further, along the lines of North-east states, we demand that the provisions of the 6th schedule be implemented in Ladakh to protect its culture." ANI

Govt moving towards making electricity bill zero: PM Modi

Guwahati, Assam - Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday said that the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government at the Centre is moving towards making the electricity bill of the households in the country zero. The prime minister's remarks came while addressing a gathering after inaugurating and laying the foundation stone of projects worth Rs 11,599 crore here in Guwahati. "In the last 10 years, we ran a campaign to provide electricity to every house. Now we are moving towards making the electricity bill zero. In the budget, the government has announced a huge rooftop solar scheme. Under this scheme, initially, the government will help one crore families to install rooftop solar panels," he said. Modi said that the double-engine government of the BJP is committed to reaching every beneficiary. "Our goal is to make the life of every citizen comfortable. This focus is clear in our budget. In the budget, the government has resolved to spend Rs 11 lakh crore on infrastructure," he said. Among the key projects for which the foundation stone was laid by the prime minister in-



Prime Minister Narendra Modi waves to the crowd during a public rally, in Guwahati on Sunday (ANI)

cludes Maa Kamakhya Divya Pariyojana (Maa Kamakhya Access Corridor), which has been sanctioned under the Prime Minister's Development Initiative for North Eastern Region (PM-DevINE) scheme. It will provide world-class amenities to pilgrims visiting the Kamakhya temple. "I am fortunate to dedicate projects for Assam by the bless-

ings of Maa Kamakhya. The inauguration of projects worth Rs 11,000 crore, will strengthen the connectivity of Assam, north-east with other countries of South Asia. These projects will increase employment opportunities in the tourism sector," Modi said. "After the grand event in Ayodhya, I have now come here to the Dwar of Mother Kamakhya. Today I had

the privilege of laying the foundation stone of the Maa Kamakhya Divya Pariyojana Project here. When it is completed, it will fill the devotees of Mother Goddess from all over the country and the world with immense joy." Highlighting that enthusiasm about tourism and pilgrimage is increasing in the country nowadays, he said that since the Ram

Temple in Ayodhya was thrown open to the public, on January 22, over 24 lakh people have taken darshan. "Only a few days have passed since the Pran Pratistha in Ayodhya. In just 12 days more than 24 lakh people have visited," he added. Modi also held a roadshow in Guwahati. ANI

COVERED IN FRESH SNOW



A view of the snow-covered vehicles amid fresh snowfall, in Srinagar on Sunday (ANI)

Andhra CM says farmers are his star campaigners for polls

Amaravathi, Andhra Pradesh - Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Y S Jagan Mohan Reddy on Sunday said farmers are the star campaigners for his party in the ensuing general and assembly elections. Highlighting the pivotal role of farmers as the primary catalysts for progress, Reddy said he disbursed funds totalling Rs 2,55,000 crore under various welfare schemes that are aimed at the betterment of the state. Implementing a transparent and efficient approach, Direct Beneficiary Transfer (DBT) ensured direct monetary assistance to beneficiaries, he said. Expressing gratitude to the beneficiaries, the CM urged them to reflect on the positive changes during his regime and encourage others to vote for his victory. Reddy also warned that voting for Opposition parties could jeopardise welfare initiatives and potentially lead to corruption, reinforcing the



Y S Jagan Mohan Reddy (ANI)

significance of supporting his leadership for sustained progress and prosperity. On Saturday, Reddy gave a clarion call to the Yuvajana Sramika Rythu Congress Party (YSRCP) cadre to get ready to bring another historic victory for the party in the ensuing elections by taking the message of welfare and social justice to the doorsteps of the people.

Addressing a sea of humanity at the party's preparatory public meeting 'Siddham' here on Saturday, the CM told them that YSRCP took birth from the sweat and aspirations of people and its clean sweep will only ensure the continuity of the slew of welfare schemes. "Our target is to get a clear mandate for 175 assembly and 25 Lok Sabha seats in the next elections. Only a vote for the TDP and Jana Sena can prevent the rollback of the welfare schemes," he said. Stating that he had clicked the button 124 times to disburse a whopping Rs 2,55,000 crore through DBT for welfare schemes to eligible beneficiaries over the last 57 months of his government, the CM called on the cadre to advise people to press two buttons for the YSRCP, one for the Assembly and the other for the Lok Sabha, in the ensuing elections. ANI

South Korean Navy chief visits key US naval base

Ankara, Turkey - In a first, the naval forces chief of South Korea visited a key naval submarine base in the US, and 'stressed the need to strengthen ties against growing North Korean threats', the South Korean Navy said on Sunday. Adm. Yang Yong-mo, chief of naval operations, on Friday toured the Naval Submarine Base Kings Bay in Georgia, a southeastern coastal installation home to key nuclear submarines, Seoul-based Yonhap News reported. Yang is the first South Korean Navy chief to visit the base, which operates nuclear ballistic missile submarines (SSBN), a key US strategic asset. Anadolu Agency

14 Myanmar border police flee to Bangladesh as junta fights rebels

Dhaka, Bangladesh - Fourteen members of the Myanmar border guard police fled to Bangladesh in escalating clashes between the Southeast Asian nation's military and the rebel Arakan Army along its western border, officials confirmed on Sunday. Myanmar's junta government has been fighting armed rebel groups for months within its borders, including along the border with hilly Bandarban district in southeastern Bangladesh. "They fled and their weapons and ammunition have been deposited," a Bangladeshi border security official confirmed to Anadolu, asking not to be named due to restrictions on speaking to the media. Separately, Bandarban's Deputy Commissioner Shah



Mujahid Uddin told Anadolu that he was aware of reports about the incident but had no official confirmation.

Meanwhile, at least one Bangladeshi national was injured by stray bullets fired from Myanmar.

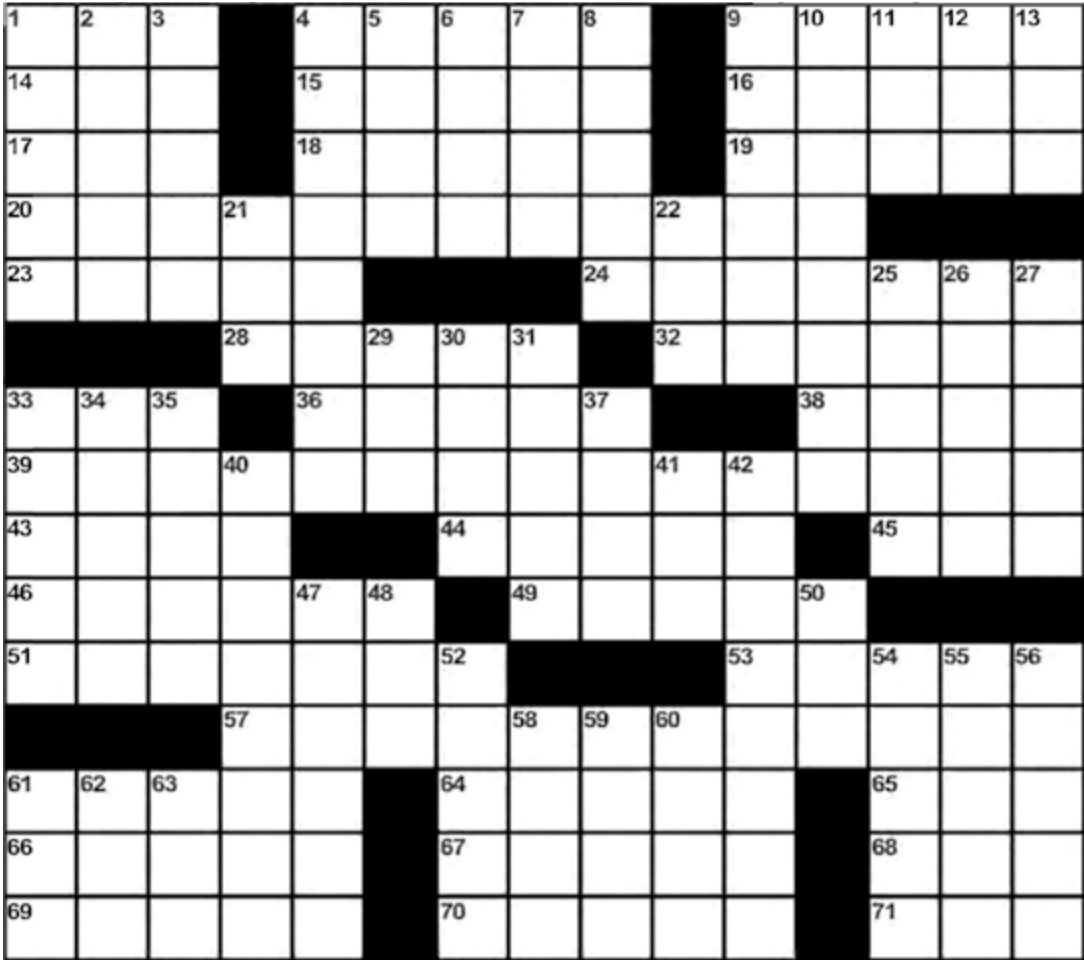
Artillery fire also fell within Bangladesh from Myanmar's western Ghumdhum region late on Saturday, with the sound of

Myanmar's junta government has been fighting armed rebel groups for months within its borders, including along the border with hilly Bandarban district in southeastern Bangladesh

shelling continuing until Sunday. With primary schools along the border already closed, the shelling caused panic among residents of border villages, the district official also confirmed. "But the situation is under

control. Border residents have been asked to stay on alert and in safe shelter. BGB (Border Guard Bangladesh), police and security forces are all on alert to deal with any situation at the border," he continued. Bangladeshi Foreign Minister Hasan Mahmud told reporters recently in Dhaka that border forces are on alert to prevent a fresh influx of refugees from neighbouring Myanmar from crossing the border. About 1.2mn refugees, members of Myanmar's persecuted Rohingya Muslim community, are currently taking shelter in the Cox's Bazar region of southeastern Bangladesh. The majority of Rohingya living in Bangladesh fled a brutal military crackdown in Rakhine, Myanmar in 2017. Anadolu Agency

DAILY CROSSWORD



- ACROSS**
- 1) Keg spigot
 - 4) Window parts
 - 9) Musical exercise
 - 14) Valuable rock
 - 15) Move very gradually
 - 16) Huge ship
 - 17) Major network
 - 18) Crew member
 - 19) Express audibly
 - 20) Totally prepared
 - 23) Crime committed with bad lighting?
 - 24) Pizza fractions, often
 - 28) Court figure, briefly
 - 32) Honeybunch alternative
 - 33) Parenthesis, essentially
 - 36) Mixtures or medleys
 - 38) Akin to
 - 39) Apt end to a peaceful day
 - 43) _-bodied
 - 44) Ogre's lack
 - 45) Medicos, briefly
 - 46) One who has your home covered?
 - 49) Device in the beauty salon
 - 51) Section of a lyric poem
 - 53) Cheese chunk
- DOWN**
- 1) Island nation east of Fiji
 - 2) Ann_, Mich.
 - 3) River to the Rio Grande
 - 4) City in Pennsylvania
 - 5) Clothes presser
 - 6) Bawdy
 - 7) Lecherous gaze
 - 8) Bender
 - 9) Gunk
 - 10) It's tough to fight, it's said
 - 11) Picnic pest
 - 12) Director Spike
 - 13) Human thing to do, it's said
 - 21) Cuban couple
 - 22) Word with "first" or "band"
 - 25) Attempted
 - 26) Boy Scout, at times
 - 27) Oozes
 - 29) Certain Ivy Leaguer
 - 30) Approaching, poetically
 - 31) _ and aahed
 - 33) Some culture mediums
 - 34) Automaton
 - 35) Amber, for one
 - 3 7) Name on a billboard
 - 40) Visibility helper
 - 41)_ Lanka (Ceylon)
 - 42) Shop VIPs
 - 47) Item name derived from a person
 - 48) P on a frat house
 - 50) Gun, as an engine
 - 52) Pronouncement
 - 54) Some coins
 - 55) Barnyard honker
 - 56) Clear a blackboard
 - 58) Down in the dumps
 - 59) Isle of exile for Napoleon
 - 60) Command to a dog
 - 61) Sounds of understanding
 - 62) Auction offering
 - 63) U.N. workers protection gp.

NOTE PAD

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE

ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

Get a new adventure underway today, and you will show the Universe that you are ready for action! It will reward you with interesting days. Move any upcoming travel plans into high gear and get your tickets reserved. The earlier you financially commit to things, the better price you are going to get. Ask that cutie out on a date and find out once and for all whether or not they're interested. Give yourself something to get a little bit excited about.

LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

Your urge to get closer to someone may be getting so strong that it's unbearable, but before you make any moves, you need to stop. Pay closer attention to the clues they are sending. They might not be quite ready to open up to you just yet. To test the waters, keep your conversation light. Resist the urge to ask them to spend the rest of their life with you! Baby steps will get you closer to their heart than giant leaps. Take some time apart and make them miss you.

SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

If you think that you need to start making some changes, then do it. You can't wait for other people to give you permission or even encouragement. This is your life to lead. The kind of growth you experience and the types of changes you make are totally up to you. Following fads might make you feel like part of the crowd, but if it doesn't make you feel better about yourself, what good it is? Ironically, it's when you go off on your own that you feel the biggest crowds supporting you.

TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

Given the independent energy you're filled with right now, it is not a good day for you to work in a team. You understand the value of alliances, but today you just won't have the patience. No one is working at your pace, and the last thing you'll want to do is spend your day waiting for other people to catch up to you. Impatience and frustration are sure to follow. So try to avoid groups. Stick it out by yourself for the foreseeable future. You'll be happier.

VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

Is your career your top focus right now? It should be. You are in a phase of rich clarity. You have the ability to fully understand the opportunities in front of you in a way you never could before. But first you have to slow down and look around. Take a moment to make some loose plans for your future, and make them big! Give yourself a general idea of where you want things to go, and you'll figure out how to get there later.

CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

Your vision is going to be clear as a bell today, so it's a great day to finally come to a decision on that issue you've been wringing your hands over for so long. You need to make a choice, then stick to it! Look at those puzzling things one more time today, and the right way to go could be embarrassingly obvious. Your omnipotent vision might also reveal a few business problems you can get a jump on today before they grow into bigger headaches tomorrow.

GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

You are feeling less serious today, and in the mood for light conversation and silly stuff. It's probably due to a huge surge in your creativity. You're itching for a way to express yourself, and spending your day doing nothing but research or work is not going to make for a happy day. If you can, make time today to just have fun. Find out what's going on with celebrity couples. You are a well-rounded person who needs different kinds of stimulation.

LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

If you are made a group leader today, your group is going to be very lucky. You're smart as a whip and able to cut through the politics that inevitably happen whenever more than two people get together. No one is going to be able to distract you from what needs to get done. Plus, you are exceptionally charming, and people are going to follow whatever decision you make to the letter. Popularity has never been terribly important to you, but that's only because everyone always likes you.

AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

If there's a party going on and you're not on the guest list, so what? This fact shouldn't stop you from being a part of the good times. You have enough creativity and charm to be able to figure out a way to get on the list and in on the fun. The inner circle of the social set needs you to be there. You offer the right energy. Do what you can to get involved, but stop short of putting yourself in a position to be taken advantage of. You are the coolest, and you need to remember that!

CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

You are faced with a tough climb up a tall mountain, but you will love the view once you get to the top! You cannot let this challenge intimidate you and force you to go in another direction. This is something you have been waiting for, so grab your chance in the spotlight and go for it. It is time you sought the attention of others more actively. You deserve to be the star, and you know it. Take this climb one step at a time, and be sure to pace yourself.

SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

This could be the day when all of your hard work will finally pay off. If your boss has been a big problem for you lately, you can say goodbye to any tensions quite soon. There have been discussions going on among the big power players. They've been about you, and they have been favorable. There will be a huge change in the dynamic coming soon, and someone's ego could get a bit bruised. Don't worry, it won't be yours. You will come out of this transition doing quite well for yourself.

PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

The past few days may have been dragging along too slowly for you, and the slower pace is sure to continue today. Try not to get frustrated, though. Time might feel like it's moving slowly, but rest assured that things are still happening, and you are still making headway on your goals! Patience is all you need to regain a more mellow, happy vibe. What you are waiting for will come. You just need to relax and have faith in the people who are making it happen.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

01. In a casino, what is the name of the box that holds multiple decks of playing cards?
- A. Slope
 - B. Cast
 - C. Shoe
 - D. Glove
02. What embroidery technique is to gather fabric so that it can stretch, and was commonly used in cuffs, bodices, and necklines in garments where buttons were undesirable before elastic?
- A. Couching
 - B. Smocking
 - C. Sashiko quilting
 - D. Broderie Anglaise

03. Although much reduced and fragmented, the Atlantic Forest stretches where?
- A. The coasts of southern Greenland
 - B. Along the coasts of the Gulf of Guinea
 - C. The coasts of Nova Scotia
 - D. Along the Brazilian Atlantic coastline, and inland
- Answers: 1.C 2.B 3.D

KIDS COLOURING



BOGGLER

R	I	I	P
O	K	O	Y
I	N	L	L
B	A	S	L

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

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

WORD BUILDER

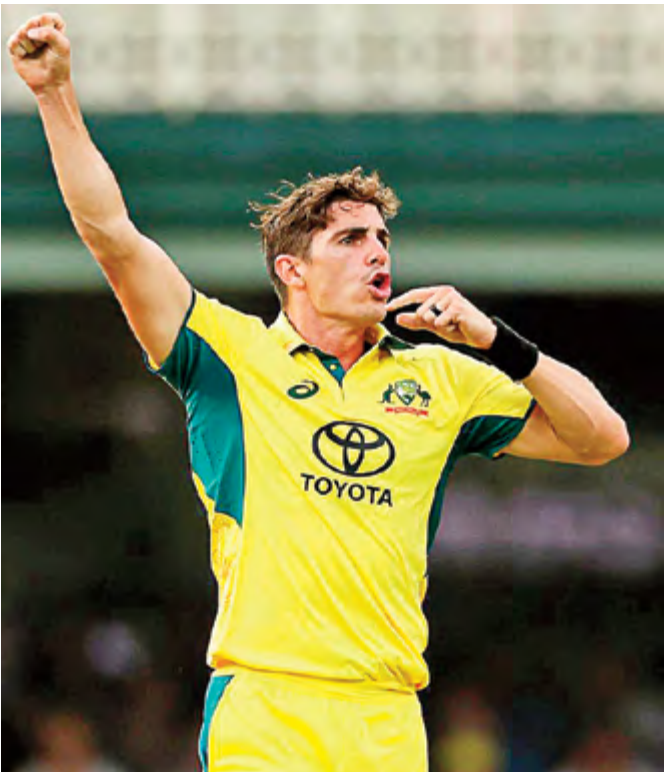


You have three minutes to find all the words contained in this word.

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

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER

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



Sean Abbott made 69 off 63 balls and took three wickets for 40 runs to help Australia beat West Indies

Australia thrash West Indies by 83 runs to seal series

Sydney, Australia - Australia's Sean Abbott shone with bat and ball as the world champions beat West Indies by 83 runs in Sydney on Sunday, winning the three-match One Day International (ODI) series 2-0.

Australia, who beat West Indies by eight wickets in the first match on Friday, scored 258-9 in 50 overs after being put in to bat first by the visitors. West Indies were all out for 175 in 43.3 overs in reply.

West Indies started well with Alzarri Joseph (2-74) dismissing both Australian openers in the first three overs.

At one point the hosts were

struggling at 167-7 but Abbott, who came in at number eight, helped stabilise the innings with a timely knock of 69 from 63 balls, his second half century and highest individual score in ODIs.

Abbott, 31, also took three wickets for 40 runs as he and Josh Hazlewood (3-43) made the West Indies batters struggle to settle in, with only Keacy Karty (40) and captain Shai Hope (29) having some success with their 53-run partnership.

The teams will meet in the third ODI on Tuesday in Canberra followed by a three-match T20 International series starting on Friday.

GILLT-EDGED CHANCE

Shubman ton helps India set England a target of 399 in second Test

Visakhapatnam, India - India's Shubman Gill smashed a crucial hundred as the hosts set England a daunting victory target of 399 on day three of the second Test on Sunday.

Gill overcame a jittery start to smash 104 in India's second innings total of 255 before the home side folded, leaving England to bat out 14 overs in fading light.

The tourists lost the wicket of Ben Duckett (28) to finish on 67-1, still needing 332 to go 2-0 up in the five-match series.

Zak Crawley was batting on 29 at stumps with night-watchman Rehan Ahmed on nine.

"I'm definitely very pleased but I think I left a bit out there, to be honest," Gill said of his knock.

"We were in a good position and I think we could have scored a few more runs ... but, overall, I think it was a pretty good effort.

"It's still a pretty decent wicket to bat on ... The odd ball is turning and keeping low - and if we get the ball in the right areas, we will get the job done tomorrow."

England are fretting over the fitness of Joe Root, who hurt his right little finger trying to take a catch in the slip and continues to be monitored.

Earlier, James Anderson, England's lone seamer in the match, jolted India with a two-wicket burst after the hosts resumed on 28 for no loss.

Anderson struck in the second over of the day with a delivery that curled around Rohit Sharma's (13) back to uproot his off-stump. The seamer dismissed Yashasvi Jaiswal (17) in



India's Shubman Gill celebrates after his century against England on Sunday

It's still a pretty decent wicket to bat on ... The odd ball is turning and keeping low - and if we get the ball in the right areas, we will get the job done tomorrow

SHUBMAN GILL

his next over when the opener played a loose drive and Root took the catch in the slip.

Gill was adjudged lbw to Tom Hartley (4-77) early in his knock but the batter reviewed the deci-

sion, which was overturned after replays revealed a faint edge.

He was still on four when Anderson rapped him on the pad but England's lbw appeal was turned down. The tourists challenged that decision but the umpire's call stood.

Gill and Shreyas Iyer (29) threatened to bat England out of the match before two stunning catches dragged the tourists back into the contest.

Ben Stokes sprinted backwards towards long off and hurled himself full length to grab a catch to dismiss Iyer.

Ben Foakes then pouched a sharp, low catch behind the stumps after Rajat Patidar (nine) had inside-edged Ahmed (3-88).

Gill took a single off spinner Shoib Bashir to bring up his third Test hundred.

Oman's Al Rawahi third as Loubet and Pascaud secure narrow victory in Qatar International Rally

Lusail, Qatar - Oman's Abdullah al Rawahi and his Jordanian co-driver Ata al Hmoud proved that winning last year's regional title was no fluke as they climbed from fifth to the bottom step of the podium in an Autotek-run Skoda in the Qatar International Rally on Saturday.

Meanwhile, Pierre-Louis Loubet and Loris Pascaud delivered a masterclass performance on their desert debut and overcame late damper issues and a couple of time penalties for con-

tact with stage surround fencing to secure a memorable victory.

Norway's Mads Ostberg and his Swedish co-driver Patrik Barth delivered a late charge over the afternoon loop of three short stages but missed out on the win by just 4.6 seconds.

Al Rawahi, who picked up valuable MERC points into the bargain, was delighted with his effort.

Al Rawahi said: "This result is good for the championship and good points. Today was fantas-

tic. We did some small mistakes yesterday but we managed to get back from fifth to third. We pushed hard. It is a good result. The team worked really hard to give me a better car today and it worked."

The result meant that no Qatari crew featured on the podium on their home event for the first time since the mid-1990s.

QMMF-backed Qatari Abdulaziz Al Kuwari and Irish co-driver James Fulton slipped back



Oman's Abdullah al Rawahi (2R on the podium) and his Jordanian co-driver Ata Al Hmoud celebrate with the other winners

from third to finish fourth in their Sarrazin-supplied Volkswagen Polo GTi. Former event winner Nasser Khalifa al Atya and Lebanon's Ziad Chehab were a distant fifth in their Motortune Ford Fiesta MkII.

An overnight 30-minute time penalty obliterated Nasser Saleh al Attiyah's chance of winning his home event for an 18th time but the Qatari and his co-driver Giovanni Bernacchini pushed hard to climb through the tail end of the field. Nasser made it as far as ninth overall but the finish in Lusail Boulevard was a bridge too far and the winner of three stages broke a damper and retired on the last stage to cap a miserable weekend.

The Jordanian crew of Shaker Jweihan and Mustafa Juma completely dominated the MERC2 category in their Mitsubishi Lancer Evolution X. They finished sixth overall and 9min 04.5sec ahead of their nearest production class rivals, Shadi Shaban and Samer Issa.

'Driving in Ferrari red a chance to fulfil another childhood dream'

London, England - Lewis Hamilton said he was determined to leave Mercedes on a high this season before fulfilling a childhood dream by racing for Ferrari in 2025.

Britain's seven-times Formula One world champion stunned the sport when his move on a multi-year deal was announced on Thursday.

Hamilton, 39, said in a post on Instagram on Saturday that the decision felt right and reminded him of his move to Mercedes from McLaren at the end of 2012.

"I feel incredibly fortunate, after achieving things with Mercedes that I could only have dreamed of as a kid, that I now have the chance to fulfil another childhood dream. Driving in Ferrari red," he wrote. "Mercedes has been a huge part of my life since I was 13 years old, so this decision has been the hardest I've ever had to make," he added.

Hamilton said the time was right to take on a new challenge.

"I still remember the feeling of taking a leap of faith into the unknown when I first joined Mer-



Lewis Hamilton

My focus is on the upcoming season and getting back out on track with Mercedes

LEWIS HAMILTON

cedes in 2013," he recalled.

"I know some people didn't understand it at the time but I

was right to make the move then and it's the feeling I have again now. I'm excited to see what I can bring to this new opportunity and what we can do together."

Ferrari have not won a drivers' title since 2007, the year Hamilton made a stunning debut with McLaren and missed becoming champion by a single point.

He won his first title with McLaren in 2008 and the rest with Mercedes. The Briton is

now the sport's most successful driver of all time with a record 103 wins, although his last victory was in December 2021.

Hamilton said that right now he was not thinking of 2025.

"My focus is on the upcoming season and getting back out on track with Mercedes," he said. "I am more driven than ever, I am fitter and more focussed than ever and I want to help Mercedes win once again.

Bublik beats Auger-Aliassime, meets Coric in Montpellier

Montpellier, France - Second-seeded Alexander Bublik of Kazakhstan rallied from a set down to defeat No. 3 Felix Auger-Aliassime of Canada on Saturday and will meet Borna Coric of Croatia in the finals of the Open Sud de France in Montpellier.

Bublik needed more than 2 1/2 hours to dispatch Auger-Aliassime 4-6, 6-4, 6-4.

Meanwhile, Coric defeated top seed Holger Rune of Denmark 6-3, 4-1. Rune retired in the second set.



Alexander Bublik

Davis Cup qualifiers

Canada defeated South Korea 3-1 to easily advance to the 2024 Davis Cup Finals.

Gabriel Diallo defeated Seongchan Hong 7-5, 4-6, 6-1 to punch Canada's ticket.

Slovakia also advanced with a 4-0 defeat of Serbia. Germany advanced 3-2 over Hungary. The Netherlands topped Switzerland 3-2 to advance. Finland swept Portugal 3-0 and Brazil beat Sweden 3-1. Chile and Peru are tied 1-1 heading into Sunday's action. Argentina and Kazakhstan are also deadlocked at 1-1. France

has a 2-0 lead on Chinese Taipei, and the Czech Republic leads Israel 2-0. Croatia and Belgium are also tied 1-1.

Lin Zhu wins

Second seed Lin Zhu of China took another step toward defending her title at the Thailand Open by defeating Australian Arina Rodionova 6-3, 6-3 in a quarterfinal match Friday in Hua Hin. Zhu had a 5-1 edge in aces

and won 22 of her 29 first-service points (76 percent) to ease into the semifinals. Her victory at last year's tournament marked the first four-level title of her career.

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

No. 3 seed Xinyu Wang made it a trio of Chinese players reaching the penultimate round.



South Africa's Ronwen Williams saves a penalty in the shootout against Cape Verde on Saturday

Goalkeeper Williams the hero as South Africa reach last four

Yamoussoukro, Ivory Coast - South Africa goalkeeper Ronwen Williams saved four penalties in the shootout against the Cape Verde Islands to carry his country into the last four of the Africa Cup of Nations after a 0-0 draw in their quarterfinal on Saturday.

Mothobi Mvala scored the decisive kick to make it 2-1 on penalties and win South Africa a semi-final place for the first time since 2000 but they were fortunate to get past the smallest nation in the tournament at Charles Konan Banny Stadium.

South Africa now take on Nigeria in Bouake in their semi-final on Wednesday.

It was a game full of missed opportunities but Cape Verde, who have a population of 600,000 but draw most of their players from a large diaspora in Europe, had most of the chances and were only denied a last-four

place by Williams.

South Africa survived several scares with Williams making a brilliant save to take the game into extra time before continuing his heroics in the shootout by saving four of the five kicks taken by the Cape Verdians.

South Africa dominated the early exchanges but went off the boil after the cooling break, midway through the half, and it was Cape Verde who finished the first half strongly.

They could have been ahead had captain Ryan Mendes taken his chance as the ball fell favourably for him in the box but after several touches to get into a shooting position, his effort was blocked.

There was an even better opportunity for Garry Rodrigues when he was free on goal after breaking down the left but he hit a soft shot straight at Williams.

REALITY CHECK

Kylian Mbappe has decided to join Real Madrid at the end of the season, say reports

Paris, France - Kylian Mbappé has decided to join Real Madrid once his contract with Paris Saint-Germain expires this summer, sources confirmed to ESPN.

The news was first reported by Le Parisien.

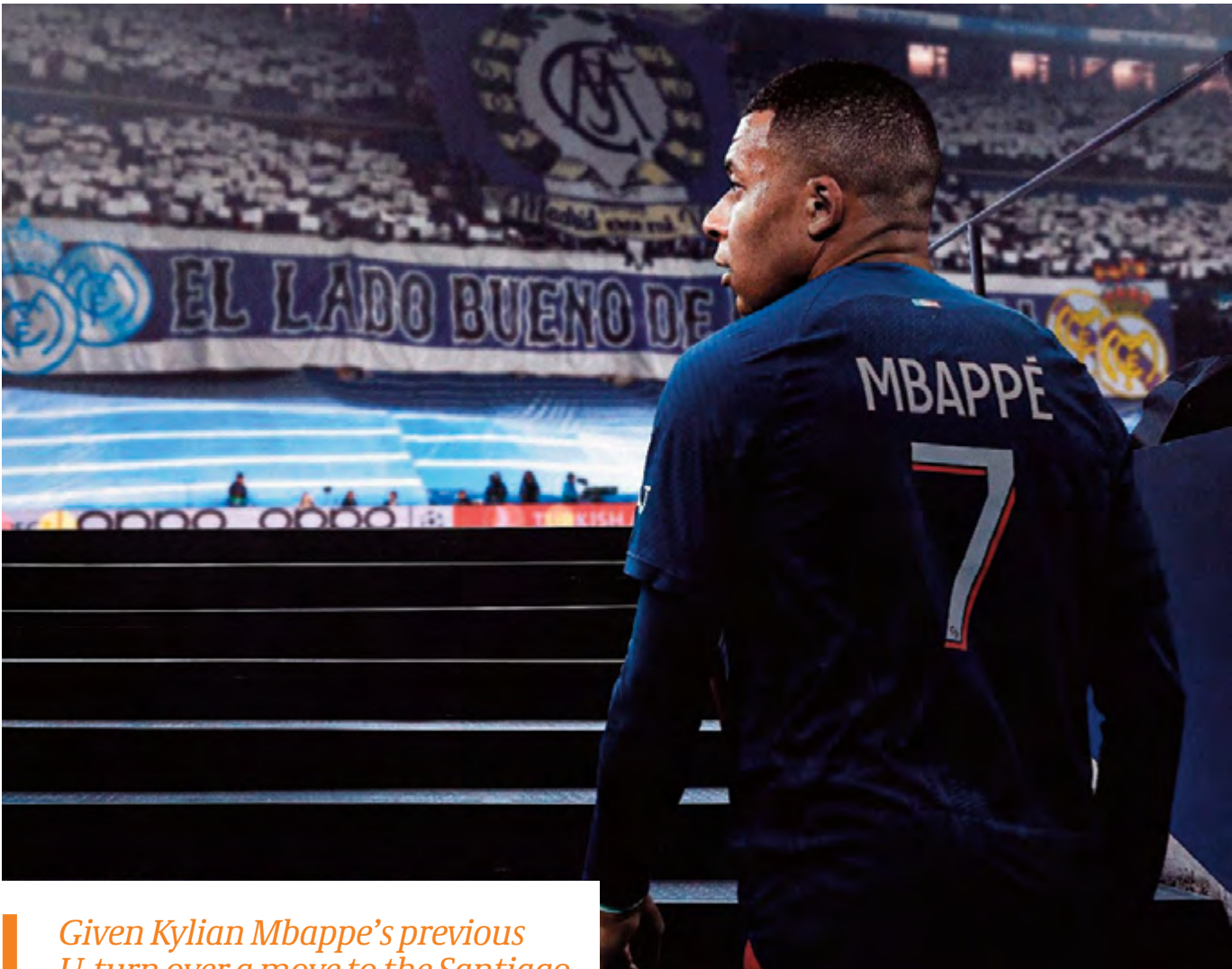
Last month, ESPN reported that Mbappé had been offered a contract by Madrid and, according to a source, he is expected to announce his decision to join the 14-time European champions next week.

Mbappé, 25, has not yet informed PSG or Real Madrid, sources said, but his decision has been taken.

His desire to be allowed to play with France in the Olympic Games on home soil in the summer will be an important part of the negotiations with Madrid.

And, given Mbappé's previous U-turn over a move to the Bernabéu in 2022, there is always the possibility that he could change his mind until the deal is actually signed by both parties.

However, his move to Madrid now finally looks set to come to



Kylian Mbappe

Given Kylian Mbappe's previous U-turn over a move to the Santiago Bernabéu in 2022, there is always the possibility that he could change his mind until the deal is actually signed by both parties

fruition this summer.

Kylian Mbappé is set to leave PSG after six seasons at the club. Gao Jing/Xinhua via Getty Images

One source told ESPN that

leave the club as a free agent, Mbappé will be opting out of bonuses that amount to around 100m.

His wages at Madrid, according to a source, are expected to be half of what he currently earns at PSG.

The France captain, who grew up idolising Bernabéu legends Zinedine Zidane and Cristiano Ronaldo, has always dreamt of

playing for Madrid and, according to a source, he feels it is the right time in his career to move to the Spanish capital.

Sources told ESPN that PSG had two scenarios prepared for their future plans - one that involved Mbappé staying at the club and one that didn't. However, according to sources, there had been a feeling in the club for a few weeks that he would leave.

Last-gasp goal takes Ivory Coast into semis

Bouake, Ivory Coast - Hosts Ivory Coast kept up their incredible escape act at the Africa Cup of Nations as they came from behind to beat Mali 2-1 in Saturday's quarter-final, scoring a last-gasp goal in extra time to book a semi-final with the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Oumar Diakite got a touch to Seko Fofana's strike to win the game for the Ivorians, who played with 10 men for most of the match after Odilon Kossounou was sent off shortly before halftime.

Mali had taken a 71st-minute lead through Nene Dorgeles but the home team, roared on by the crowd at the Stade de la Paix, fought back and equalised through Simon Adingra in the 90th minute to force extra time.

Diakite then scored the winner before being sent off for a second booking by taking his shirt off in celebration. Mali's Hamari Traore was also shown a red card at the final whistle.

The Ivorians had limped into the knockout stage as one of the



Ivory Coast's Simon Adingra celebrates after scoring against Mali on Saturday

four best third placed finishers, despite a 4-0 loss to tiny Equatorial Guinea, but then resurrected their hopes by edging holders Senegal on post-match penalties in the last 16.

But they will now fancy their chances of reaching next week-

end's final after another display of mental strength and determination, mixed in with some good fortune. There were early scares for the capacity home crowd as Mali made a furious start while the Ivorians looked nervous and struggling with the burden of ex-

pectation.

In the sixth minute, Sikou Niakate's close-range effort in a goalmouth scramble struck Kossounou on the hand but a lengthy VAR check showed Niakate had come from an offside position before striking the ball and Mali

were not awarded a penalty.

But five minutes later Kossounou slipped as he chased Lassine Sinayoko to a ball over the top and knocked the Mali striker off his feet with the referee having no hesitation in awarding a spot kick.

Adama Traore hit the ball to the right corner but Yahia Fofana put a strong hand out to make a superb save. Kossounou's luck ran out two minutes before halftime when Jean Michael Seri lost possession to allow Sinayoko to run at the Ivorian goal and the centre back fouled him, earning a second caution to leave the hosts down to 10 men.

Ivory Coast battled gamely with the one-man disadvantage after the break and there were few chances for Mali, but they still forced a breakthrough when substitute Dorgeles fired home a spectacular long-range shot.

Dorgeles, who cut inside before and hitting a bullet shot from outside the Ivorian penalty area that goalkeeper Fofana stood and watched fly into the net.



AC Milan's Olivier Giroud celebrates after scoring against Frosinone

Jovic scores winner as Milan beat Frosinone

Frosinone, Italy - A late goal by striker Luka Jovic rescued a 3-2 win for AC Milan at Frosinone on Saturday, helping Stefano Pioli's side to keep in touching distance of Serie A's top two sides Inter Milan and Juventus.

Milan, third in the standings on 49 points, trail leaders Inter by five and second-placed Juventus by four before the top two meet at the San Siro on Sunday, a clash that will still leave Inter with a game in hand.

"In the new year we are doing many good things despite knowing that we can do better," Pioli told a press conference. "It is now useless to think about the past, we are rediscovering continuity and we want to carry it forward."

Milan remained unbeaten in 2024, having won four games

and drawn one.

Olivier Giroud, Matteo Gabbia and Jovic were all on target for the visitors, while Matias Soule and Luca Mazzitelli scored for Frosinone either side of halftime.

Giroud nodded home a cross from Rafael Leao to give Milan the lead in the 17th minute, but it took only seven minutes for the hosts to level from the penalty spot through midfielder Soule after a penalty was awarded for handball by Leao.

The 20-year-old Soule became the first player to score 10 goals for Frosinone in a single Serie A season.

Frosinone captain Mazzitelli surprised the local crowd as he put the hosts in front with a low shot inside the far post in the 65th minute.

Barcelona ease to victory at Alaves

Vitoria-Gasteiz, Spain - Barcelona won 3-1 at Alaves in LaLiga on Saturday thanks to goals by Robert Lewandowski, Ilkay Gundogan and substitute Victor Roque, who was sent off after picking up a second yellow card.

Barcelona opened the scoring thanks to an incisive pass from Gundogan to Lewandowski and the Pole lofted the ball over goalkeeper Antonio Sivera to score his ninth goal of the season.

Gundogan popped up early in the second half with a fine left-foot strike from Pedri's pass to increase Barcelona's lead.

Alaves launched a quick



Barcelona's Victor Roque celebrates after scoring against Alaves

counter-attack two minutes later following a breakaway by Alex Sola who crossed for Samu

Omorodion to head home.

"We knew how to compete and we were very solid at the

back. The pity is that goal we conceded, because we had the game under control at 2-0 and within minutes they scored. We defended the box badly and that makes me angry, because we worked hard," said Barca coach Xavi Hernandez. "But overall we played a very good and very mature game," added the coach in his second game after last week's surprise announcement of his departure at the end of season.

"We have two victories after that decision, I said it was necessary and here is the reaction of the team. We have been very effective, something we had lacked all season."

Man United beat West Ham, Wolves stun Chelsea

Manchester, England - Rasmus Hojlund made it four Premier League goals in as many games and Alejandro Garnacho scored twice as Manchester United beat West Ham 3-0 to move back into the top six.

Meanwhile, Matheus Cunha scored a hat-trick as Wolves came from behind to stun Chelsea 4-2 and replace the Blues in the top half of the table.

The victory moved Gary O'Neil's side up to 10th, one point and one place above Chelsea after 23 games.

BARSHAM TO THE RESCUE

Qatar edge Uzbekistan in shoot-out to keep Asian Cup dream alive

Al Khor, Qatar - Defending champions Qatar will face Iran in Wednesday's semifinal of the Asian Cup after Marquez Lopes' side handed Uzbekistan a 3-2 penalty shoot-out defeat at Al Bayt Stadium on Saturday following a 1-1 draw.

Goalkeeper Meshaal Barsham saved spot-kicks from Rustamjon Ashurmatov, Zafarmurod Abdirakhmatov and Jaloliddin Masharipov to set Pedro Correia up to score the winning penalty and take the hosts into the last four.

The shoot-out win came after the Qataris had taken the lead in the 27th minute when captain Hassan al Haydos shot from a tight angle and Utkir Yusupov slapped the ball over his own goal line but Odiljon Hamrobekov levelled in the 58th minute with a low strike.

Neither side was able to claim a second in what remained of regulation time or in 30 minutes of extra-time to take the game to penalties.

Ashurmatov and Almoez Ali had seen their efforts in the second round of spot-kicks saved before Almahdi Ali skied his attempt high over the bar but Barsham's saves from Abdirakhmatov and Masharipov made the difference for Qatar.

It was a tense end to a game in which Akram Afif once again carried much of the defending champions' threat, stinging Yusupov's hands in the 11th minute, but it was the Qatar team captain who breached the Uzbekistan defence as the hosts went in front.

Al Haydos was released into space by an astute Almoez Ali



Qatar goalkeeper Meshaal Barsham celebrates after their victory against Uzbekistan

Goalkeeper Meshaal Barsham saved spot-kicks from Rustamjon Ashurmatov, Zafarmurod Abdirakhmatov and Jaloliddin Masharipov to set Pedro Correia up to score the winning penalty

backheel and the midfielder drove along the bye-line before hitting a shot that took just enough of a deflection off Ashurmatov to force Yusupov to push the ball into his own net.

The Uzbeks responded with Otabek Shukurov's first-time

strike from inside the area that was deflected over Barsham's crossbar while Mohammed Waad made a goal-saving block when Azizbek Turgunboev looked destined to score.

Yusupov made amends for his earlier error by keeping out

Almahdi Ali's header and Turgunboev threatened again as the half drew to a close, Barsham blocking his attempt to score with a strike on the run at the goalkeeper's near post.

Uzbekistan continued to probe after the interval, Masharipov seeing his free-kick palmed clear by Barsham while Qatari defender Fathy narrowly avoided putting the ball in his own goal. Masharipov was just off target with a 55th minute shot from distance.

Three minutes later the equaliser came as Hamrobekov played the ball towards Oston

Urunov, receiving possession again on the edge of the area with the space to score in the far corner with a left-foot shot across Barsham.

Abbosbek Fayzullaev twisted in front of the Qatar defence deep into injury time to create the space to shoot across the face of goal while Afif almost won the game for Qatar when he bent a stunning strike inches wide of Yusupov's left post.

The Qataris went closer still five minutes into extra-time when substitute Abdel Aziz Hatim hit a shot from 25 yards that clipped the crossbar.

Lopez: Qatar's focus is only on semifinal

Al Khor, Qatar - Qatar coach Marquez Lopez is refusing to look beyond his side's Asian Cup semifinal meeting with Iran as the host nation moved a step closer to successfully defending the title with a 3-2 penalty shoot-out win over Uzbekistan.

"Our goal is to always win, one match after the other and we've given everything we've got in this short period," said Lopez.

"We believe reaching the semifinal is an achievement, but the mission is not accomplished yet.

"We still have two matches and we want to give everything we can in these two matches, but we'll take it one match at a time."

Hassan Al Haydos' 27th minute goal had put the Qataris in front, but that effort - which went in off the palms of goalkeeper Utkir Yusupov - was cancelled out by Odiljon Hamrobekov 13 minutes into second half as Uzbekistan deservedly pulled level.



Marquez Lopez

"We studied the Uzbekistan team well and we knew they were a tough opponent," said Lopez. "We knew their strengths and weaknesses, for example we know they have two players who are very powerful and dangerous in attack so we tried to mitigate the threat represented by these players in an attempt to neutralise them."

"We gave our best and scored the first goal, then we got nervous and our level dropped."

Coach Moriyasu accepts responsibility for Japan's exit

Al Rayyan, Qatar - Hajime Moriyasu took responsibility for Japan's 2-1 defeat to Iran in their Asian Cup quarterfinal at Education City Stadium on Saturday.

The loss meant the Samurai Blue's bid for a record-extending fifth title continues, having last emerged champions in 2011.

"Firstly, I would like to congratulate the Iranian players and staff for the victory," said Moriyasu. "Unfortunately we have to leave the tournament now at the quarter-final stage. I feel sorry for our supporters and everyone involved in Japanese football.



Hajime Moriyasu

"I feel responsible for the result as my staff and players gave their maximum towards this game and this tournament."

It had all been going well for Japan, having taken the lead in the first half through a wonderful solo effort from Hidemasa Morita in the 28th minute but they could not sustain their dominance in the second period.

The Iranians went on the attack in the second half, peppering the Japanese goal with 17 shots, and their persistence paid off as Mohammad Mohebbi leveled the tie and Alireza Jahanbakhsh sent them into the semis.

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Reinforcing a relic

The move by Egyptian heritage conservation authorities to resurface and reinforce the Pyramid of Menkaure has been met with much criticism, terming it as interference in heritage



When the Egyptian authorities released a video last week describing plans to resurface the Pyramid of Menkaure with the granite blocks that once clad part of its exterior, the initial reaction was swift, and harsh.

The Pyramid of Menkaure is the smallest of the three main pyramids at Giza. It stood at around 65.5m tall. Erosion and time have reduced its height to approximately 61m.

Some archaeologists criticised the reinforcement idea. An online comment that was widely picked up by news organizations likened it to trying to “straighten the Tower of Pisa.” Others worried that covering the familiar limestone walls of the pyramid with new cladding would have the effect of turning the historic Giza plateau into an ersatz Disneyland.

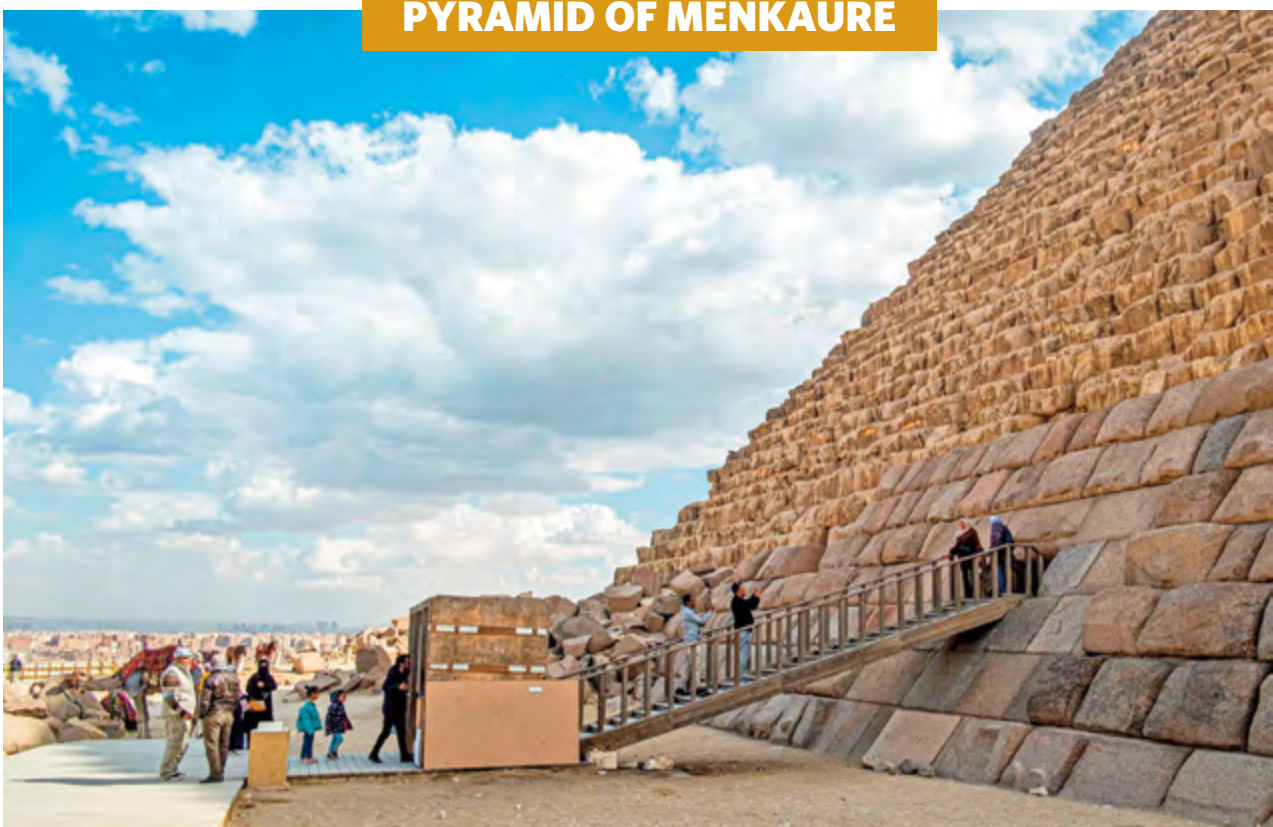
The initiative was announced by Mostafa Waziri, the secretary general of Egypt’s Supreme Council of Antiquities, who called it ‘the project of the century’ in a video posted January 25 on social media. He has said the endeavour, led by a coalition of Egyptian and Japanese experts, would begin with at least a year of study, and that an international team would then decide whether to proceed with trying to restore the granite blocks that once covered roughly the bottom third of the pyramid.

Dr Waziri, in an interview with the satellite TV station *Ten* last week, dismissed criticism that has erupted online as ‘social media talk that has no basis in truth.’

Some online critics seemed to be under the impression that the smooth granite blocks visible in videos and photos of the pyramid - which contrast sharply with the more familiar textured limestone above - were new. But several Egyptologists said that they appeared to be the pyramid’s surviving granite blocks, which have been there for centuries, and which can be seen in photographs dating back to 1907.

The debate over the pyramid reflects a constant tension in the field of conservation - whether to try to return ancient structures to their earlier splendour or minimise intervention as much as possible.

“Both schools of thought elevate something,” said Leslie Anne Warden, an associate professor of art history and archaeology at Roanoke College, who emphasised that Egypt is far from the only country to confront these questions. “One is geared a bit more toward tourism. If you are going to Giza as a foreigner, you may be expecting to be transported to the ancient world. The other school says that you are glossing



The Pyramid of Menkaure was once clad partly in granite blocks, visible in the lower portion



The ancient Egyptians would have polished the blocks when installing them in the pyramid itself,” any attempt to fix and polish them would be a blatant interference in the work of the ancient Egyptians, who did not complete this pyramid

IBRAHIM MOHAMED BADR
Associate professor, Misr University of Science and Technology

CAUTIOUS CONSTRUCTION

The construction of the pyramids had begun with preparing the site of the Giza complex which is known to be the highest point in all of Cairo, then clearing the area and levelling the ground to create a solid foundation for the pyramid.

Limestone blocks were quarried from an area nearby. These blocks could weigh about two tons each and were transported to the construction site. A rectangular or square base was laid out, and then the base stones were carefully placed to ensure stability.

The ancient Egyptians are believed to have used a ramp system to move the massive stones into position. This could have been a straight or zigzagging ramp made of mud bricks, rubble, or limestone. The pyramid was built in steps, each layer consisting of horizontally laid limestone blocks. As the pyramid grew taller, the layers decreased in size, as seen today. Some of the tools used included levers, sleds, and possibly counterweights

to position the stones accurately.

The pyramid was originally covered in smooth, polished white limestone casing stones. These outer stones were meticulously placed to create a smooth surface, which has since been removed or eroded. Some believe a solid gold top was placed at the summit of all the pyramids of Giza. The interior of the pyramid was carefully designed to hold chambers and corridors. The main burial chamber was constructed with granite and might have contained the pharaoh’s sarcophagus like the rest of the pyramid of Giza.



The Pharaoh

The Pyramid of Menkaure acted as a funerary tomb, which remains a cultural and religious wonder that sheds great facts about the afterlife. It is the smallest and shortest member of the pyramids of Giza. The pyramid complex includes three smaller queen’s pyramids and a mortuary temple.

over huge portions of what happened and prioritising one narrative.”

The Pyramid of Menkaure was built to house the tomb of King Menkaure, who ruled Egypt more than 4,000 years ago. It is the only one of the three main pyramids at Giza that was encased in multiple levels of Aswan granite, a red stone that comes from quarries more than 550 miles south of Giza. Scholars believe the pyramid was never completed after the king’s death.

Over the centuries, many of the granite stones fell off or were removed from the site for a variety of reasons, according to Morgan Moroney, the assistant curator of Egyptian, Classical, and Ancient Near Eastern art at the Brooklyn Museum. Even in ancient times, she said, people reused them to build nearby monuments or houses. Earthquakes, erosion and vandalism wore away at them over the centuries.

Salima Ikram, the head of the Egyptology unit at the American University in Cairo, is, however, cautiously optimistic about the new project.

“Scanning and documenting the pyramid and the blocks on the ground is very useful,” she said. If the team were to put the fallen blocks back in place in a way that is reversible, she said, it would be ‘eminently sensible’. But, she cautioned against restoring any blocks if their origins are unclear and suggested that further study would be necessary to confirm that the pyramid could still support the weight of more granite cladding.

Ibrahim Mohamed Badr, an associate professor in the department of antiquities restoration and conservation at Misr University of Science and Technology in Giza, was skeptical about which stones on the site - many of them unpolished - could be confirmed as original to the pyramid.

“The ancient Egyptians would have polished the blocks when installing them in the pyramid itself,” he said. “Any attempt to fix and polish them would be a blatant interference in the work of the ancient Egyptians, who did not complete this pyramid.”

The Ministry of Antiquities did not respond to a request for comment or confirm the project’s budget. Waziri told al-Mehwar TV that the initial phase of the project - which is beginning at a time of soaring debt and inflation in Egypt - was being funded entirely by his Japanese partners. “We will not pay a dime,” he said.

The Menkaure project is part of a broader investment in Giza’s infrastructure, which includes new restaurants and visitor facilities. The Grand Egyptian Museum, which reportedly cost US\$1bn and has been in the works for two decades, is poised to open later this year. (Courtesy: New York Times)

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Many Swiss (SBB) long-distance double-decker trains, such as Zurich to Chur, have a play area in the family coach, with energy-burning games and slides. Change at Chur for the Bernina Express - what you lose in onboard entertainment is more than compensated for by the views as the train climbs into the Alps. The snaking track follows the contours of glacial lakes, ragged gorges and towering mountains, with 196 bridges and 55 tunnels cutting corners en route to Tirano just over the border in Italy.

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Bernina Express, Switzerland and Italy; (below) Stockholm Central Station, Sweden

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When booking trains independently, without an Interrail pass, getting tickets early gives you the best rates and choice of dates. Many routes open bookings three months before travel

Ben Nevis, take a seal-spotting boat trip on Loch Linnhe or catch the Jacobite steam train, which curves over the 21-arch Glenfinnan Viaduct, made famous by its appearances in the Harry Potter films as part of the route the Hogwarts Express takes.

Tickets can be booked through Caledonian Sleeper, from £240 for a family of four. Families should book connecting two-bed compartments. Leave London in the evening and wake up to stirring Scottish landscapes in the morning when travelling aboard the Caledonian Sleeper.

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For a multi-destination trip, an Interrail pass makes travel much easier. There’s a range of ticket options depending on the number of countries you want to visit, how long the

trip will be and how frequently you wish to travel. Once the pass has been bought, download Interrail’s Rail Planner app to reserve tickets across the network - you can travel as much as you like within the parameters of the pass. Interrail’s handy map shows connections between the most popular destinations, such as Paris to Milan and Munich to Prague.

When booking trains independently, without an Interrail pass, getting tickets early gives you the best rates and choice of dates. Many routes open bookings three months before travel, but it can vary. Sign up to the Rail Europe alert service to be notified when bookings for your intended journey have opened.

The online rail guide, The Man in Seat 61, is also invaluable for plotting your way around the continent. It covers detailed itineraries, connection timings, links to booking sites, tips for getting the best deals, descriptions of trains and routes, and even hotel and dining options close to many stations.

Most operators offer free travel for children under a certain age, but the threshold can vary wildly, from under threes to under 15s. And free travel for children often means the child doesn’t get a seat or berth of their own.

Rail Europe summarises which ages

Tariffs

Interrail passes start at 258 (£224) for an adult for four days’ travel within a one-month period, rising to 1,202 (£1,045) for unlimited first-class trains across three months. Children aged 11 and under travel for free. ‘Youth’ tickets (ages 12-27) are 75% of the full adult fare.

Otherwise, prices depend on where you want to go, when you want to go, journey time and how far in advance you book. Expect to pay more than £150 if booking an individual night train for a family of four. Families as large as six can all fit in the same couchette compartment on most night trains. Consider that the night train can replace the cost of a hotel plus flights on the same route, and it’s not a bad deal.

High-speed inter-city day trains are often similarly priced to sleeper trains, but taking slower day services will be cheaper: Prague to Budapest can be around £50 for a family of four on a slower day train, compared with £135 for the sleeper on the same route.



qualify for discounts in more popular countries, including Italy, France and Switzerland. If you want your young ones to have their own space - particularly in sleeper compartments where you may not want to be wedged in a bunk with your child overnight or want to ensure you’re not sharing your compartment with someone you don’t know - you’ll need to pay for the child’s ticket to secure them a bed.

(Courtesy: nationalgeographic.com)