

28TH EDITION OF MUSCAT BOOK FAIR OPENS



The 28th edition of Muscat International Book Fair opened on Wednesday under the patronage of H E Dr Mohammed bin Saeed al Mamari, Minister of Endowments and Religious Affairs. The fair, ending on March 2, will put the spotlight on Palestine, addressing different aspects of the Gaza crisis, while this year's theme is artificial intelligence, with numerous events and activities exploring the technology (ONA)

Oman disappointed with failure to issue Gaza ceasefire resolution

Muscat - The Sultanate of Oman has expressed its regret over the UN Security Council's failure to issue a resolution for ceasefire in the Gaza Strip, as a result of the repeated use of veto that hampered the resolution.

The United States used its veto to quash Algeria's draft resolution at the Security Council on Tuesday demanding an immediate ceasefire in Gaza and presented rival text that supported a temporary ceasefire.

The vote in the 15-member council was 13-1, with the United Kingdom abstaining, reflecting the strong support from countries around the globe for ending the devastating conflict that has killed more than 29,000 Palestinians.

In a statement issued by the Foreign Ministry, Oman reiterated its plea for the international community and the Security Council to facilitate all initiatives to implement an immediate ceasefire in Gaza. It urged the Se-



Linda Thomas-Greenfield of US votes against the draft resolution in the UN Security Council on Tuesday (Supplied photo)

curity Council not to stand in the way of peace.

Oman also urged friendly countries to put into practice their positions and statements that support the establishment of peace. It called upon all 'to translate those positions into a just humanitarian reality'.

Wide condemnation

The Arab League denounced the

United States' use of veto power to thwart the resolution submitted by Algeria.

In a statement on Wednesday, Ahmed Aboul Gheit, Secretary-General of the league, expressed his deep regret over the US position. "This is the third time since the outbreak of the crisis in Gaza that the United States has intervened to thwart a draft resolution aimed at a ceasefire,

which clearly indicates its political and moral responsibility for the continuation of the Israeli war on the Gaza Strip."

Aboul Gheit added that the US position reduces the credibility of the international system and reinforces the state of paralysis witnessed by the UN, "which provides political cover for Israel to continue the aggression, in light of the international inability to stop the heinous crimes committed every day against Palestinian civilians".

He said that the draft resolution reflected a balanced position that gave priority to the humanitarian aspect and saving hundreds of thousands of Palestinians who remain vulnerable to the Israeli killing machine, starvation and disease if the war continues.

Countries like Algeria, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Norway, among others, expressed regret at the decision.

Agencies

RO540MN DEVELOPMENT PUSH FOR MUSANDAM

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning (MHUP) has announced a comprehensive development strategy for Musandam governorate, entailing 74 projects with investment exceeding RO540 million.

The strategy aligns with Royal Directives to bolster growth across various sectors, including trade, logistics, industry, tourism, fishing, agriculture, education, health, aviation and food security.

An MHUP official stated, "Musandam's development focuses on multiple sectors, including significant projects like the Al Jaradiyah commercial residential plan in Madha, spread over 170,000sqm, and construction of 60 housing units across the governorate, including 20 in Kumzar."

The strategy reflects His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq's commitment to fostering growth and prosperity in Musandam, particularly in housing and urban planning.

The Roubai project, part of the national Sorouh Project, is a notable venture underway. Spanning over 403,000sqm, it features more than 800 residential units and a financial and business centre, including medical clinics, administrative buildings, a commercial centre and a hotel. "This project emphasises a contemporary lifestyle with green spaces and recreational facilities," the MHUP official informed. Additionally, the ministry's Khuwair Residential Plan in Kumzar, covering 500,000sqm, is nearly complete. This project comprises 300 residential units, a plan for light industries, a de-



The strategy aligns with Royal Directives to bolster growth across various sectors, including trade, logistics, industry, tourism, fishing and health

salination and sewage plant, educational and health facilities, and road infrastructure.

"Musandam has seen establishment of significant projects like two fish farming ventures, spread over 1.6mn sqm, and a 105,000sqm agricultural research and innovation centre."

Plans for the Mahas Industrial Zone and agricultural city, spanning 1.5mn sqm and 462,000sqm respectively, have also been announced.

In the education and health-care sector, establishment of the University of Technology and Applied Sciences and Khasab Hospital, covering 230,000sqm and 116,000sqm respectively, mark significant milestones.

Musandam is also progressing in renewable energy with allocation of 18 sites for wind turbines on an area exceeding 4,050sqm, and three solar energy sites spread over 161,000sqm.

Developments in aviation infrastructure are also evident with over 1.2mn sqm allocated to two runways in Dibba and Madha.

Downtown Khasab, a multi-purpose city centre, is another key project enhancing Musandam's commercial, tourist, residential and recreational appeal.

"From 2021 to 2023, the ministry prepared 13 housing plans in Musandam, including 298 housing units in Khasab and Bukha, 129 housing aids worth RO3.1mn, and 54 usufruct contracts to stimulate economic growth," the official added.



Oman ranks 68th in Social Progress Index

Our Correspondent
Muscat

According to the 2024 Social Progress Index, for the first time the world has declined overall in social progress. Oman's ranking too has declined in the index to 68th from 65th in 2022, 63rd in 2021 and 61st in 2020.

In all, 61 countries saw a significant decline in social progress in 2023 and 77 others stagnated. Only 32 countries saw any real progress.

"Today, four out of five people in the world live in a country where social progress is stagnating or declining," stated the index report published by the Social Progress Imperative, a US-based non-profit.

Oman performed well in the Housing component, ranking 19th globally. Within it, it ranked first in 'Access to electricity' and 'Usage of clean fuels and technology for cooking' indicators.

Oman ranked 51st in Basic Needs, 71st in Safety, 72nd in Foundations of Wellbeing, 55nd in Health, 89th in Opportunities, 58th in Freedom and Choice, 76th in Inclusive Society, 89th in Advanced Education, and 62nd



Oman performs well in Housing, ranking 19th globally. Within it, it is ranked first in 'Access to electricity' and 'Usage of clean fuels and technology for cooking' indicators

in Information and Communications, within which it ranked 1st in Mobile Phone Subscriptions and 13th in Internet Users.

In the GCC, Kuwait ranked highest at 48th, followed by the UAE (51st), Qatar (65th), Bahrain (89th) and Saudi Arabia (90th).

The 2024 Social Progress Index is one of the world's largest curated collections of social and environmental data. Using 13 years of data from 2011 to 2023, it is the only global measurement tool to focus exclusively on the non-economic dimensions of social perfor-

mance in a comprehensive and systematic way.

It is designed as a complement to GDP and other economic indicators to help understand how people across the globe are really living and who is being left behind. The index was designed by a team led by Prof Michael E Porter of Harvard Business School and Prof Scott Stern at the Sloan School of Management, MIT.

The 2024 Social Progress Index used 12 components and 57 indicators to measure the social performance of 170 countries fully and an additional 26 countries partially.

The downturn in 2023 marks the world's first social progress recession in the past decade, primarily attributed to declines in Health, Rights, Voice, and Information and Communications.

Denmark ranked first on the 2024 index, with a score of 90.38, followed by Norway, Finland, Iceland, Sweden, Switzerland, Luxembourg, Australia, Netherlands and Germany, making the top ten. South Sudan was at the bottom, at 170th, with a score of 25.93.

Muttrah to set up drug rehab centre

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Authorities have announced plans to establish a drug rehabilitation centre in Muttrah to support individuals recovering from addiction, marking a significant step towards their reintegration into society.

The decision emerged from a meeting on Wednesday that brought together members of the National Committee for Narcotics and Psychotropic Substances, the Anti-Narcotics and Psychotropic Substances Competition Project Team, and Abdul Hamid bin Abdul Rahman al Kharousi, Deputy Wali of Muttrah.

The meeting focused on the progress of the drug awareness competition project, reviewing the team's achievements, stages implemented and organisational aspects of the initiative. A key topic of discussion was allocation of a site for the rehab centre.

Officials evaluated the activities conducted in 2023, highlighting their role in the wider efforts to combat drug and substance abuse in Muttrah.



The drug awareness competition, in particular, was noted for reflecting Muscat governorate and the concerned authorities' dedication to bolstering national efforts against narcotics and psychotropic substance abuse.

Additionally, the initiative emphasises the efforts to reintegrate individuals recovering from addiction into society.

The rehab centre in Muttrah signifies a comprehensive approach to addressing substance abuse, underscoring a commitment to involve various community segments in creating a supportive ecosystem for those on the path to recovery.



Global conference on sustainability of heritage from Feb 24

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MHT), in collaboration with the UNESCO Chair for World Heritage Management and Sustainable Tourism in the Arab Region, will host an international conference titled 'Opportunities for Heritage: Fostering Innovation, Conservation and Sustainability'. Scheduled from February 24 to 27, the event will take place at German University of Technology in Oman, Halban.

To open under the patronage of H E Salim Mohammed al Mahrouqi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism, the conference will delve into the economic and social potentials of tangible and intangible heritage. The meet represents a commitment at the highest levels to the preservation and innovative utilisation of heritage for sustainable development.

An official from MHT outlined the conference's focus on identifying and leveraging heritage as a driver for economic and social growth. Key themes include addressing heritage conservation in conflict situations, financing mechanisms for heritage and tourism at World Heritage sites,

and exploring cutting-edge approaches for heritage management that consider long-term sustainability and environmental impacts.

Expected to draw a varied group of attendees, including heritage management experts, tourism professionals, academics and policymakers, the conference underscores a collective effort to tackle global challenges in heritage conservation and sustainable tourism.

Participants will have the opportunity to engage in discussions on practical strategies for heritage management, especially in complex scenarios, fostering a rich exchange of ideas and best practices. The event also promises valuable networking opportunities for those committed to heritage preservation, tourism and sustainability.

"The conference aims to contribute significantly to the global dialogue on heritage management and its crucial role in sustainable development," the MHT official stated. The gathering is anticipated to be a cornerstone event for sharing insights and enhancing collaborations that will enhance heritage conservation efforts worldwide.

Educators praise observance of first Omani Teacher's Day

Our Correspondent
Muscat

In a landmark move, 2023 saw the establishment of Omani Teacher's Day on February 24, with February 25 declared a holiday this year for all educational institutions in Oman, including public and private schools.

This initiative via His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik's Royal Directive is acknowledgment and appreciation of the indispensable contributions of teachers to society.

Educational experts have lauded this decision, describing it as a commendable gesture that underscores the nation's commitment to valuing educators and administrative staff engaged in the educational sector. They believe such recognition will have a significant and positive impact on the educational landscape of the sultanate.

Dr Ali Said al Matari, a mathematics teacher at A'Sharqiyah University, said, "This recognition not only motivates educators to enhance their performance but also elevates their sense of belonging within the community."

According to Matari, the official holiday for teachers reflects the critical role they play in nurturing future generations and can inspire young individuals to consider careers in education.

The consequences of this initiative extend beyond motivation and is expected to improve the educational experience for students by fostering a supported and appreciated teaching staff.



The Royal Directive recognises the role of teachers in shaping future generations and their contribution to national progress

ALI HAMAD ALI AL SHEYADI



This gesture is also anticipated to positively influence teacher performance and enhance the educational system

SAMIRA AL BIMANIYAH



It reflects the critical role teachers play in nurturing future generations and can inspire young individuals

DR ALI SAID AL MATARI

tion to national progress, noting that the holiday will allow teachers to rejuvenate, thereby positively influencing their teaching approach and the school environment.

Sharing similar views, Samira Hamoud Hamdan al Bimaniyah, Principal of Fatima bint Al Waleed School in Muscat, said the gesture is in appreciation and acknowledgement of teachers' role as architects of future generations.

"Institution of Omani Teacher's Day as an official holiday is seen as a significant step towards recognising the pivotal role teachers play in the development of the nation. This gesture not only celebrates the teaching profession but is also anticipated to positively influence teacher performance, enhance the educational system, and leave a lasting impact on society at large," Samira added.

Al Faiha launches Smart Home project in Ghala Heights

Muscat - Al Faiha Real Estate Development Company inaugurated a project for residential apartments and offices in Ghala Heights, opposite Madinat Al Irfan, called Smart Home on Monday.

The project, distinguished as a pioneering real estate endeavour, boasts of comprehensive smart specifications in its residential units, including remote control features, alongside integration of artificial intelligence to provide essential services for families. Its

smart amenities will include childcare services, a private cinema for residents, laundry facilities and taxi services.

The project was announced as a press conference held at W Hotel. Sheikh Saud bin Hamad al Ta'i, Chairman of Al Faiha's Board of Directors, said, "We are delighted today and express our joy and pride on this momentous occasion. These smart residential apartments embody our aspirations to deliver a unique living experience. This



Sheikh Saud bin Hamad al Ta'i

combination of comfort and technology aims to create a sustainable and secure environment for all residents."

He described the project as not merely a residential building but "a realisation of a futuristic vision, as we strive to provide comfort and convenience to residents through the utilisation of the latest technologies in the realm of artificial intelligence within real estate development".

The Smart Home project will spread over 13,000sqm, com-

prising nine floors and a penthouse, in addition to parking facilities and a variety of residential units of different sizes.

The project includes a mall covering an area of 5,000sqm, restaurants, a temperature-controlled swimming pool, and a comprehensive health club, ensuring a comfortable and sustainable environment for residents.

Sheikh Saud added, "When completed, the project will be an architectural icon, combining modern designs with authentic

Omani architecture."

Tariq bin Mohammed al Farsi, CEO of Al Faiha Real Estate Development Company, said, "The project will have the finest integrated services, meeting the highest international standards and aligning with future technological advancements. Modern communication networks and diverse parking facilities, totalling over 800 spaces distributed underground and some in front of residential units, will be provided. The mall, offices and residential

units will be interconnected to form an integrated environment and an attractive place for living, working and shopping under one roof."

Smart apartments are an integral part of the project concept, allowing residents to benefit from cutting-edge technologies to enhance their quality of life. These aim to provide a smart and sustainable living environment that promotes quality of life and offers a comfortable and secure lifestyle, a press release stated.

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Duqm port conducts oil spill response drill

Muscat - The Port of Duqm organised an oil spill response training programme for all relevant stakeholders in the presence of Dr Ali al Sunaidi, Chairman of Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones in Duqm on Wednesday.

The exercise reflected the port's commitment to sustainability, environmental responsibility and collaboration with stakeholders.

Objectives of the Oil Pollution Preparedness, Response and Cooperation (OPRC) training included developing multiple scenarios and corresponding strategies, identifying challenges in the implementation of plans and deploying oil spill response equipment (OSRE) during emergencies. The training also addressed various stakeholders' oil spill response plans and the importance of collaborative efforts in effectively responding to minimise environmental impact.

Elaborating on the training and drill, Hashem bin Tahir al Ibrahim,

Chief Business Support Officer at Port of Duqm, said, "The crisis management and oil spill response training aimed to support the port's development efforts and enhance its efficiency, thus maximising the port's potential and enhancing its competitiveness among regional ports. Simulated potential scenarios allowed training for dealing with oil pollution incidents, utilising the latest pollution control techniques."

The drill was conducted by coordinating efforts across various teams within the Port of Duqm and stakeholders like SEZAD, OTTCO, Asyad Drydock, ATD, CTOM, ACT & LAMOR. The exercise also acted as a test for the reliability of oil spill response equipment like containment booms, deflection booms and skimmers. The port's spill response team demonstrated high efficiency in handling spill incidents, highlighting the readiness of employees and equipment for such situations.

SUR FESTIVAL FROM FEB 25

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, in cooperation with South Sharqiyah Governor's Office, will organise Sur Maritime Heritage Festival from February 25 to March 9.

An official at South Sharqiyah Governor's Office informed that the two-week festival will highlight the wilayat of Sur's historical and maritime heritage and its role in promoting tourism.

The festival will include a maritime heritage village and a section for craft industries and feature workshops and lectures, recreational and cultural events, poetry evenings, laser shows, games, children's competitions, jugglers, a honey and dates exhibition and traditional arts performances related to the sea.

According to the official, the festival's wide array of activities will cater to people of all age groups and backgrounds.

"A food carnival will also be held to showcase local seafood, catering to food enthusiasts, alongside water sports and a paragliding carnival," the official said.

Last year, over 72,000 people visited the Sur Maritime Heritage Festival. "This year, we are expecting a lot more," he added.

South Sharqiyah governorate allows visitor to engage in and enjoy a wide variety of activities. Among others, it is the ideal



(Supplied photo)

place for camping in the plains and plateaus and for fishing.

The Fath al Khair Museum is one of the most prominent cultural and historical landmarks of governorate that highlights the ancient maritime heritage of Sur, while castles and forts in the wilayat bear witness to the rich

history of the governorate.

In September 2023, the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism invited bids for the design and consultancy services for the construction of the Maritime History Museum in Sur.

The new museum will be a national cultural and educational

institute that will house, preserve and showcase the sea-faring Omani heritage.

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism has allocated 14,154sqm of land for the project along the coast, beside Al Ayjah Bridge and opposite to the well-known Al Ayjah Watch Tower in

Khor al Batah.

In October 2023, the Maritime History Museum was chosen as the project for the second edition of the Bilarab bin Haitham Architectural Design Award, in which a concept design for the museum had been presented.



(Supplied photo)

Waref student team from N Batinah wins regional Injaz contest

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Waref student team from Abdullah bin Al Abbas Basic Education School in North Batinah has won the best student company at the Injaz al Arab Young Entrepreneurs Award.

The competition, which concluded on Tuesday in Doha, Qatar saw the Omani team ace the high school category. The competition also has a category for university students.

The regional competition is a culmination of six months of experiential education and training in work readiness, financial literacy and entrepreneurship, after which students from 13 countries in the Arab world meet each year to contend for the Injaz Al Arab Young Entrepreneurs Award.

Waref competed against teams from Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Kuwait, Lebanon, Morocco, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates and Sudan.

Their product 'Hosn', or castle, is a mosquito repellent that also works as perfume, which won the sixth edition of Injaz Oman for the academic year 2023, qualifying them for the regional competition.

The students described Waref as specialised in the production of natural insecticides made from waste material. It produces safe natural products that provide sustainable alternative to chemical pesticides.

Injaz al Arab Young Entrepreneurs Award facilitates peer-to-peer learning through tried and tested methods of putting students through various company competitions in order to encourage innovative business ideas among students.

Every year thousands of students participate in Injaz national competitions, creating hundreds of student companies in the process. The national competitions build excitement and momentum, with winning entries moving on to the Injaz region-wide competition.

Dhahirah fest draws over 47,000 visitors

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Dhahirah Tourism Festival continues to captivate audiences, having attracted more than 47,000 visitors since its opening on February 15. Ending on March 6, the festival has received visitors from across Oman as well as neighbouring countries.

The wide participation underscores the festival's appeal and its contribution to the region's tourism sector.

Highlighting the multifaceted impact of the festival, Governor Najib bin Ali al Rawas said, "The



(Supplied photo)

festival serves as a catalyst for economic and social development, offering over 400 direct benefits to small and medium enterprises, productive families, jobseekers, rural women and the

youth."

According to Rawas, the event is not only a tourist attraction but also a platform for nurturing artistic and technological talents, providing invaluable ex-

periences for future endeavours.

Furthermore, Rawas pointed out that the festival plays a crucial role in stimulating commercial activity within the governorate, benefiting both individuals and institutions. "It goes beyond tourism, fostering an environment where young individuals can develop their skills in arts and technology, thus contributing to the local economy and community," he elaborated.

The festival stands as a testament to the region's vibrant culture and commitment to economic diversification.

Indian expats relieved as NEET centre reinstated in Muscat

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Parents and wards were delighted following an announcement by the National Testing Agency of India to expand the list of exam centres for the National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test (NEET) for 2024, including Oman and 13 other international centres.

NEET is an all-India entrance test for students who wish to pursue undergraduate medical courses in government and private institutions in India and abroad.

The announcement came in response to demands from In-

dian diaspora parents, including those based in Oman. The decision now allows students residing in Oman to sit for the NEET exams in 2024 in Muscat without the need to travel to India.

MK Mohammad, a parent, said, "This decision is a great relief for us and our children. It ensures that they have a fair chance to pursue their dreams without the added challenge of travelling to India for the exams."

The Indian expatriate community in Oman, led by the Kairali Oman group, had raised the matter with H E Amit Narang, Indian Ambassador to Oman, earlier this week.

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Tender Announcement

Duqm Quarries SAOC is pleased to announce the following tender:

Tender No	Tender Name	Last date for Collecting Documents	Last Date for Submission of Tender	Tender Document Price
DQ-TD-2023-02	Supply and Delivery of 700 TPH Fixed Limestone Crusher to Al Duqm	26-Feb-24	12-Mar-24	100 OMR

Tender Conditions:

- 1 Interested Bidders shall send an Expression of Interest (EOI) to **tenders@duqmquarries.om**. The last date to receive the Expression of Interest (EOI) is 26th Feb 2024 at 04:00 p.m. The bidders shall mention the Tender Name and Tender Number in the Expression of Interest (EOI).
- 2 Proposals shall be submitted in two separate envelopes (Technical and Commercial) sealed with red wax and addressed to the Honorable Audit Committee Chairman at Duqm Quarries Company. The Number and Name of the Tender shall be written on the outside, provided that the name of the bidder or what he refers to is not written on the envelope.
- 3 A bank guarantee or certified check from one of the banks operating in the Sultanate shall be attached to the bid, at a value of 1% of the value of the bid, and it shall be valid for 90 days. Bids that do not meet the guarantee will not be considered.
- 4 The company is not obligated to accept the lowest or any other bid. The company has the right to accept or reject any bid without stating the reason.



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Philippines	145.25
Sri Lanka	809.25

*Rates as on February 21

Source: xe.com

BRIEFS

Fitch affirms QatarEnergy rating at AA-

Fitch Ratings has affirmed QatarEnergy's (QE) Long-Term Issuer Default Rating (IDR) at 'AA-' with positive outlook.

The positive outlook on QE mirrors the Qatari sovereign's outlook. This is because QE's 'AA-' rating is constrained by that of its sole shareholder - Qatar - given strong links between the company and the sovereign, in line with Fitch's Government-Related Entities (GRE) and Parent and Subsidiary Linkage (PSL) Rating Criteria.

Fitch's assessment reflects QE's full government ownership and the presence of senior government officials on its Board of Directors, underscoring the high level of influence and strategic oversight by the state.

Omantel, Huawei join hands to build Sultanate's National Cloud

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Omantel, the leading provider of integrated telecommunication services in the sultanate, has reiterated its leadership in cloud by forging a strategic partnership with Huawei, a global player in the cloud arena, to build National Cloud.

Huawei was selected on the basis of its track record in launching similar projects globally, Omantel said in a press statement on Wednesday.

The alliance propels Omantel into a prominent position in the cloud arena, setting the stage for unparalleled advancements and achievements. It will empower Omantel to provide latest technology, global experience, data security and local data hosting to the entire nation, which includes government entities, state owned companies, financial sector, energy sector and SMEs, enabling them to accelerate digital transformation and thus support Oman's Digital Economy drive.

National Cloud is poised to elevate the landscape by providing tailored solutions for the entire nation, spanning various sectors such as smart cities, smart banking, smart campus, government



The goal of National Cloud Project is to accelerate Oman's digital transformation and contribute positively to digital economy

data solutions, backup and disaster recovery, medical imaging, smart education, digital human solutions, and more. These examples, as Omantel said, offer just a glimpse of the diverse benefits accessible to everyone in the transformed landscape.

Commenting on the partnership, Eng Aladdin BaitFadhil, Chief Commercial Officer of Omantel, said, "We, at Omantel, continue to strengthen and enhance Omantel's comprehensive ecosystem with the latest cloud technologies. We are confident

that National Cloud will open new doors for our enterprise customers to delve into the future, while benefiting from the quality and security."

Omantel introduces cutting-edge technology into the cloud project, ensuring data residency in Oman, and incorporating the highest industry standards for robust data security. Beside speeding up the National Digital Transformation programme and contribute positively into the Digital Economy, the Oman Cloud Services Project will enable different public and private sector entities to support the goals of Oman Vision 2040.

Qi Xiao, President, Middle East and Central Asia Cloud Business at Huawei, said, "The history of partnership between Huawei and Omantel goes back to two decades and is manifested in some highly successful projects in Oman. We are pleased to have been selected to support

Omantel in the National Cloud, a project of high national importance. Omantel is a trailblazer and leading provider of ICT services in Oman, playing a crucial role in the sultanate's digital transformation. Huawei is thrilled to have been a steadfast long-term partner in driving Omantel's ambitious digital roadmap."

The new partnership comes on the heels of Omantel's success in the integration of its operations, processes, and extensive expertise in the field of communications and digital technology, and achieving the status of a leading telecommunications company in Oman and beyond.

The company's innovative approach has contributed to providing latest solutions to the entire nation. Omantel supports the Oman Vision 2040 objectives by investing in emerging technologies and providing cutting-edge solutions in modern technology, information and communications technology, such as cloud solutions, ICT solutions, AI, smart solutions, cyber-security, and much more, in addition to harnessing its technological capabilities to enhance innovation and leadership in new and advanced technologies.

OQ8 celebrates 100th export vessel

Duqm - Duqm Refinery (OQ8), a \$9bn joint venture between Oman's OQ and Kuwait Petroleum International (KPI), announced the dispatch of its 100th export vessel from its terminal in Duqm.

This milestone highlights OQ8's flawless safety record since its commencement in May 2023 and underscores its vital role in enhancing global supply chain resilience, having successfully exported over 4.1mn tonnes of products to global customers.

Duqm's location and proximity to key markets along the Indian Ocean has been instrumental in facilitating seamless trade across critical markets, from Brazil to the Gulf of Mexico, East Africa to India, enhancing the Refinery's value proposition to global partners.

David Bird, CEO of OQ8, emphasised the company's pivotal role in the global supply chain. "Our 100th shipment reflects our strategic foresight and operational expertise," Bird said.

He added, "Located outside the Strait of Hormuz, our terminal is a vital link in global trade, offering a secure and dependable route for the flow of energy and commodities. This strategic position has been crucial in enabling seamless trade across key markets worldwide, enhancing



our proposition to global partners. Our commitment to being a reliable supplier of high-quality products has never been stronger, and this milestone further cements our reputation in the global market."

OQ8 has set new benchmarks in maritime logistics, demonstrating its capability in safely managing the global supply of refined products. The terminal loaded a record-breaking 850,000 barrels of naphtha onto one of the largest vessels it has serviced, achieving a loading rate of 47,000 barrels an hour.

The refinery's adaptability is further highlighted by its ability to handle ships of all sizes, efficiently loading up to 44,000 tonnes of Petcoke in less than 68 hours. The terminal also

smoothly facilitated large LPG shipments, up to 5,500 metric tonnes, and introduced nighttime operations for unloading crude oil at Ras Markaz Terminal - a significant achievement in less than a year of operation.

As OQ8 gears up for its first sulphur shipment, it continues to showcase its commitment to diversifying export products and enhancing its service offerings.

OQ8 is seamlessly integrated with a number of OQ Group investment projects, including Oman Tank Terminal Company (OTTTCO) and OQ Trading (OQQT), as well as Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC). The Ras Markaz Crude Oil Terminal, expertly managed by OTTTCO, is a shining example of this integration, as OTTTCO provides crude storage tanks from which crude is transported to the refinery via pipelines extending over 80km.

David Bird, added, "The collaboration between OQ8 and our partners OTTTCO, OQ Trading, and KPC has been pivotal to our journey and have significantly strengthened our supply chain. Their integral roles underscore our collective commitment to excellence and reliability in the global energy market. We appreciate their dedication and are excited about our continued partnership shaping the energy future."

Following its inauguration on February 7, 2024, OQ8 is operating at capacity delivering 230,000 barrels per day.

ONA

Tethys Oil signs drilling rig deal for Block 58 in Oman

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Swedish energy company Tethys Oil announced that it is continuing its operational activities on Block 58, onshore Oman.

The company on Tuesday said that the preparations for the drilling of the first exploration well, Kunooz-1, in the Fahd area are ongoing and a rig contract has been signed with Gulf Oilfield Services (GOS).

The contract for the rig was signed with Gulf Oilfield Services during a signature ceremony. Signatory on behalf of Tethys Oil was Dr Fredrik Robelius, CTO and General Manager of Block 58. Signatory of GOS was CEO Ali al Busaidi.

Gulf Oilfield Services is fully owned by Kuwait Drilling Company (KDC) and has been drilling in Block 7 Oman, contracted with Hydrocarbon Finder E&P, utilising heavy rigs since May 2022.

GOS has achieved zero Lost Time Incidents (LTI), including one full year achieving goal zero milestones. In less than two



Tethys Oil said the preparations for the drilling of the first exploration well, Kunooz-1, in the Fahd area in Block 58 are ongoing and a rig contract has been signed with Gulf Oilfield Services

years, the company has managed to achieve more than 60% Omanisation.

KDC as the parent company of GOS, is one of the first drilling contractors in the region and has been drilling oil and gas wells since the early 1960's

with a comprehensive experience in all type of wells, from shallow to deep wells.

"We are pleased to have signed a drilling rig contract with GOS for the first exploration well on the Kunooz prospect as they have a strong track-record of safe and efficient drilling operations. We plan to commence drilling on the high-potential prospect, estimated to hold unrisks recoverable prospective resources of more than 100 mmbbl, in mid-April," Magnus Nordin, Managing Director of Tethys Oil, said.

Tethys Oil recently announced that its share of the production, before government take, from Blocks 3 & 4 onshore Oman, in January 2024 amounted to 263,552 barrels of oil, corresponding to 8,502 barrels of oil per day.

Tethys Oil, through its wholly owned subsidiary Tethys Oil Block 3 & 4 Ltd, has a 30% interest in Blocks 3 & 4. Partners are Mitsui E&P Middle East with 20% and the operator CC Energy Development (Oman branch) holding the remaining 50%.

Europe's gas consumption falls to 10-year low in 2023 on weak demand

Paris, France - Europe's gas consumption in 2023 fell to its lowest level in 10 years as countries scaled up efficiency measures and renewables deployment, according to the Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis (IEEFA) on Wednesday.

In the two years since the start of the Russia-Ukraine war, natural gas demand has declined by 20% across Europe.

The latest version of IEEFA's European LNG Tracker reveals that Germany, Italy and the UK are the drivers of the fall in natu-

ral gas demand and that the continent's LNG consumption is forecast to peak in 2025.

With markets rapidly curbing their reliance on Russian gas in the wake of the invasion, IEEFA forecast that LNG imports would rise in 2023 to make up for the shortfall. However, Europe's LNG demand was in fact flat year over year.

Despite this, countries continue to construct new LNG infrastructure. Eight import terminals have come online since February 2022, and a further 13



projects are expected to be operational by 2030. This means that the combined capacity of Europe's LNG terminals could be three times higher than the expected LNG demand by the end of the decade.

"Two years on from Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Europe's energy system is more diversified and resilient. The crisis has been controlled to an extent, efficiency measures have been scaled up, and renewables have accelerated. This has set up the continent to

continue reducing gas demand," said Ana Maria Jaller-Makarewicz, lead energy analyst, Europe, at IEEFA.

"Having experienced the dangers of risking security of energy supply by depending too much on one source, Europe must learn from its past mistakes and avoid becoming over-reliant on the US, which provided nearly half of its LNG imports last year."

Europe's success in slashing Russian piped gas imports contrasts with its rising shipments of LNG from the country. Between

2021 and 2023, Russian LNG supplies to Europe increased by 11%, while shipments to Spain doubled and shipments to Belgium more than tripled. Furthermore, Turkey and Greece started importing Russian LNG in 2022.

The European terminals that imported the most Russian LNG between 2021 and 2023 were Zeebrugge in Belgium, Montoir-de-Bretagne in France, Bilbao in Spain, Gate in the Netherlands, Dunkerque in France, and Murghados in Spain.

Anadolu Agency

Toyota Veloz: spacious and power-packed

Toyota's crossover Veloz SUV is spacious, power-packed and built to take you and your loved ones places.

The Veloz makes an impressive mark with its fuel-efficient performance, easy manoeuvrability and ample interior space. The Veloz features three rows of seats that can comfortably accommodate seven passengers due to flexible configurations, to offer an exceptional ride, a press release said.

The vehicle's outstanding performance is ready to heighten the thrills and excitement in daily drives, while its enhanced safety features deliver added protection and peace of mind.

The Toyota Veloz is equipped with MacPherson strut-type front suspension, which provides linear and direct driving dynamics, while the rear is equipped with a new torsion beam suspension system. Drivers can experience three different driving modes with a choice of ECO, Sport, and Power modes to suit a variety of driving conditions and styles. The vehicle also

Upon entering the vehicle, passengers are welcomed by ambient lighting that complements the overall feel of the spacious cabin

boasts excellent manoeuvrability, with a 5m turning radius.

Powering the Veloz is a four-cylinder 1.5ltr capacity engine with 16-valve DOHC and dual VVT-i, which produces 104.6Hp and 138 Nm of torque with fuel consumption of

19.3 km/l. Paired with Continuously Variable Transmission (CVT) that simulates a seven-speed sequential shift transmission to deliver powerful, smooth acceleration from start-off and at low speeds, as well as quiet, efficient transmission at higher speeds with excellent fuel efficiency.

Upon entering the vehicle, passengers are welcomed by ambient lighting that complements the overall feel of the spacious cabin, which comes with a range of advanced and practical features. These include a 7-inch colour Multi-Information Display (MID), which is complemented by an 8-inch multimedia screen

with Apple CarPlay and Android Auto™ integration for seamlessly connected journeys.

The Toyota Veloz's three rows of seats can accommodate up to seven people, while the second and third rows can be folded together or individually for different layouts that provides passengers with more comfort and can carry more cargo, including longer items. Additional comforts include a 6-speaker sound system, a powerful automatic air conditioning system with rear control panel, rear sonar, and smart entry and start systems.

As with any Toyota

model, the vehicle comes complete with a comprehensive array of safety features including Vehicle Stability Control (VSC), Anti-lock Braking System (ABS), Electric Parking Brake (EPB) with Brake hold function, Emergency Stop Signal (ESS), Traction Control (TRC), etc.



Zawawi Trading receives multiple Mercedes-Benz accolades

Zawawi Trading Company, the General Distributor of Mercedes-Benz Trucks in Oman, was recently recognised at the prestigious Mercedes-Benz Trucks and Buses Elite Class Awards 2023.

In a ceremony recently held in Dubai, UAE, Zawawi Trading Company won four accolades in Facility, Marketing, Training Activation, and Truck Sales, a press release said.

In addition, Zawawi Trading Company also secured overall third place in the prestigious awards. The event saw the participation of a total of 16 Mercedes-Benz Trucks General Distributors from around the GCC, Egypt, Morocco, Lebanon, Tunisia, Iraq, Pakistan, and Yemen, to name a few.

"These accolades are testa-

ment to our team's exemplary performance when it comes to customer-centricity. It is a privilege to be acknowledged for our unwavering commitment to providing customers with an upgraded Mercedes-Benz truck driving experience.

"We want them to enjoy a seamless and highly personalised experience - not just in the truck but in every touchpoint with our company and our brand," said Gary Brown, general manager of Commercial Vehicles at Mercedes-Benz Oman.

With a rigorous prioritisation of providing all customers with a superior customer experience, Mercedes-Benz Oman Commercial Vehicles offer an unrivalled range of tailor-made and reliable transport solutions.

OHRC participates in 53rd Arab meet

The delegation of the Omani Human Rights Commission, headed by Minister Plenipotentiary Aqeel bin Alawi Baomar, concluded its participation in the fifty-third meeting of the Arab Permanent Committee on Human Rights, whose activities were held in the Qatari capital, Doha, with the participation of member states of the League of Arab States and Arab National Institutions concerned with human rights.

At the conclusion of its work, the meeting recommended condemning the ongoing crimes of Israeli aggression against the Palestinian people, expanding its aggression towards other Arab countries, targeting tens of thousands of civilians, and subjecting the Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip to a deadly siege that cuts off the means of life. They also condemned the systematic de-



struction of residential neighbourhoods, hospitals, schools, universities, mosques, churches, and infrastructure with the intention to make the Gaza Strip a scorched, unviable land.

The meeting welcomed the launch of the 'Arab Forum for National Mechanisms for Implementation, Reporting, and Follow-up' to promote coopera-

tion, partnership, and exchange of experiences and best practices related to the work of these mechanisms in all Arab countries.

In addition, at the conclusion of its work, the meeting called for enhancing working on the plan implementing the Arab strategy for human rights in cooperation and consultation with those who

are concerned with human rights issues at both the national and regional levels in the Arab Region.

The OHRC's delegation included Dr Jamal bin Eid al Khaduri, OHRC member, Labiba bint Muhammad al Ma'awliyah, OHRC member, and Salem bin Khalfan al Rushdi, head of the Media Department at the Omani Human Rights Commission.

Fahad Express celebrates 50 years

Fahad Express, one of the first travel agencies in the country, celebrated its 50 years at the Crowne Plaza, Qurm, with a special night replete with travel memories, live entertainment and surprises.

The owners and the top officials of Fahad Express noted that they were celebrating 'half a century of adventures' as they embarked on a new chapter of exploration together, a press release said.

The occasion also saw the unveiling of a new logo in line with the achievement of the 50 years' milestone.

"The market has evolved over the last 50 years and the customer experience of booking their travels has changed. After understanding the changing needs of customers and viewing market trends, and to celebrate 50 years, we created a new identity that reflects a complete and



personalised approach," Jannat Shafaei, marketing director at Fahad Express, said.

"The refreshed logo has put in a modern touch while still retaining the essence of the previous one. It is now more bold, yet simple and conveys trust, peace of

mind and reliability, which are values that we stand by. This reinforces our goal to make every experience more special and memorable. Today, I am proud to present you with the new identity of Fahad Express," he declared.

Let's Read invites entries for The Children's Writing Competition'24

The Dar Al Atta'a Let's Read Programme is delighted to announce the launch of its 18th Children's Writing Competition. Students aged 8 to 18 are invited to submit an essay on 'My Hero' - this could be an historical figure, a present-day personality, or someone known who has shown great courage and heroism.

The entries will be judged on certain criteria, including a detailed description of the setting where the heroism took place, and relatable and vivid character portrayal, describing the hero's physical features and personality traits. The judges will also be

looking for a dramatised and exciting story, giving details of the hero's courage and bravery.

The hero/heroine may have rescued someone from danger or defended a victim from bullying. They may have put themselves in danger to help others or to report the truth. It could be someone who has fought bravely against disease, or injury, or lived bravely with disability. It could also be someone who has achieved greatness.

Entrants should include a photo of their hero. The word count should not exceed 500 words - in English or Arabic.

Jane Jaffer, founder of the Let's Read Programme and the Children's Writing Competition, said, 'The winning entries will win great prizes. The judges are looking forward to reading about interesting/inspiring characters.'

Students can submit their entries in person at the Let's Read Bookshop in Oman Avenues Mall. Email English entries to: letsreadoman@gmail.com. Arabic entries can be emailed to: maythaa.1988@gmail.com. by April 6 with the student's name, age, phone number and email address and student's school telephone number and email.

The National Museum organises 'Rock Engravings'

The National Museum, represented by the Department of Museum Learning and Community Outreach, organised an event titled 'Rock Engravings' on February 20 to introduce rock drawings and engravings and their human significance inspired by Oman's nature across the ages.

The event was attended by members of the Friends of Oman Museums, students, and individuals interested in rock art and the ancient history of Omani civilization, a press release said.

The event included a lecture titled 'Examples of Rock Drawings in the Sultanate of Oman', presented by Dr Habib bin



Marhoon al Hadi, a senior specialist in history curriculum at the Ministry of Education. The lecture introduced rock drawings found in numerous valleys and mountains in Oman, dating back to ancient times. The lecture was followed by a guided tour for participants to explore examples of rock drawings and engravings in the Prehistory and Ancient History Galleries of the National Museum.

It's worth noting that rock drawings and engravings have been discovered in numerous valleys and mountains across Oman, spanning various provinces and dating back to prehistoric and ancient eras.

EU member states agree on new sanctions against Russia

Berlin, Germany - European Union member states agreed on a new package of sanctions against Russia, the Belgian presidency of the bloc announced on Wednesday.

"EU ambassadors just agreed in principle on a 13th package of sanctions in the framework of Russia's aggression against Ukraine," the presidency said in a statement posted on X.

"This package is one of the broadest approved by the EU. It will undergo a written procedure and be formally approved for 24 February," the second anniversary of the conflict, the statement said.

EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said with the new package, the EU will add almost 200 persons and entities to the list of sanctions.

"With this package, we are taking more action against entities involved in circumvention, the defence and military sectors," he said in a statement.

Since the beginning of Russia's war against Ukraine in February 2022, the EU imposed 12 sets of sanctions against Russia, banning oil and coal imports and exports of high-tech technology products, as well as excluding Russian banks from the SWIFT international payment system.

On Saturday, the conflict will enter its third year.

Despite waning support for Ukraine in some countries, the death last week of imprisoned Russian opposition figure Alexei Navalny - which many European leaders blamed Moscow for - has given fresh impetus to impose more sanctions on Russia.



With the new package, the EU will add almost 200 persons and entities to the list of sanctions

This package is one of the broadest approved by the EU. It will undergo a written procedure and be formally approved for February 24 (2nd anniversary of the conflict)

EU PRESIDENCY

Russia, Venezuela have 'own plans'

Russia and Venezuela plan to take steps in response to the freezing of their assets in the West, Russia's foreign minister said on Tuesday.

"We have our own plans. Venezuela also has intentions to take some steps. So the exchange of experience in this area is very, very useful. We will seek justice. This is the main direction in which we work," Sergey

Lavrov said during a press conference in Venezuela's capital Caracas with his counterpart Yvan Gil.

Noting that he and Gil exchanged views on this matter during their talks, Lavrov said Venezuela suffers from the policies of the US and its allies, which he described as 'barbaric and predatory'.

He said that the seizing of a Boeing 747-300 plane belonging to Venezuelan company Emtra-

sur by the US on February 12 'fits into the mainstream of the corresponding policy'.

"In addition to the situation with the plane...Venezuelan money and state reserves, like Russian state reserves, are frozen in a number of Western countries. This is, of course, a gross and flagrant violation of both international law and the practice of conducting civilised relations in trade, investment and any other sphere," he added.

Lavrov said relations between Russia and Venezuela have reached a stable level of strategic partnership and the two countries have agreed to increase the pace and volume of their cooperation in the field of nuclear energy and oil production.

He also said a meeting be-

tween the presidents of Venezuela and Guyana on the oil-rich Essequibo region is being prepared and that there is a basis for constructive dialogue.

Guyana and Venezuela have been engaged in a years-long dispute over a 160,000sqkm (61,776 square mile) region where massive amounts of oil and gas have been found. It intensified after ExxonMobil's first oil discovery in the territory eight years ago.

Gil defined the meeting with his Russian counterpart as productive, saying they will continue to work to strengthen relations between their two countries.

Lavrov also held talks with Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro.

Anadolu Agency



WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange

It is time Assange was brought home: Albanese

Canberra, Australia - Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese on Wednesday said it was time that WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange was brought home amid his extradition attempts to the US.

Reacting to his possible extradition, Albanese said he had raised this issue at the 'highest levels' with the US and UK.

"I have put the view very clearly, privately, as I have publicly, that enough is enough. It's time Julian Assange was brought home. I've engaged with his legal team on a regular basis as well, on a strategy to try to get through this and come out the other side in Mr Assange's interest," he told ABC Radio during an interview.

Albanese's statement came amid an ongoing two-day hearing of Assange, which could be his last chance to contest his extradition from Britain to the US.

The Australian prime minister said his government engaged with both countries diplomatically and is working

to achieve an outcome rather than create a headline.

"It's a legal process in another country. So, that is why, both with the US and the UK, we have to engage diplomatically. We certainly have done so," he said.

Last week, the Australian parliament also passed a resolution calling for Assange, who is an Australian citizen, to be allowed to return to his home country.

Assange, who has been detained in a UK prison since 2019, faces extradition over allegations of leaking classified military documents in 2010-2011.

The UK High Court, in a pivotal 2021 ruling, decreed that Assange should be extradited, dismissing assertions over his fragile mental state and the risks he might face in a US correctional facility. Following suit, the Supreme Court in 2022 upheld the decision, while then-Home Secretary Priti Patel affirmed the extradition order, intensifying the legal battle.

Anadolu Agency

SNOW SNAP



Visitors pose for photos with snow-covered Palace Museum in the background at Jingshan Park in Beijing, China on Wednesday (Xinhua)

'Russia used ballistic missile produced by North Korea'

Moscow, Russia - A ballistic missile recovered in Ukraine's city of Kharkiv was produced by North Korea using over 290 non-domestic electronic components, the UK-based Conflict Armament Research (CAR) claimed on Wednesday.

The UK-based organisation that specialises in working with governments to find out how weapons end up in war zones said in its report that the scrutiny of missile remnants unveiled components primarily from the US, manufactured within the last three years.

The missile recovered in Kharkiv on January 2 shows cases recently produced components, with 75% manufactured between 2021 and 2023, while 16% of them were made by companies in Europe, and 9% in Asia, it said.

According to the report, CAR



identified 26 companies from eight jurisdictions linked to these components' production, noting that due to the ongoing collaboration with industry partners, it cannot publicly name these entities.

The report emphasised that Iran, North Korea, and Russia are dependent on the global semiconductor industry for critical military production compo-

nents, and also stressed the challenge of regulating the export of commercial electronic components. CAR claims that the data obtained makes it possible to accuse North Korea of circumventing international sanctions in obtaining international materials, posing a challenge to the global non-proliferation regime.

Anadolu Agency

SA to hold elections on May 29: Presidency

Johannesburg, SA - South Africa will hold national and provincial elections on May 29, coinciding with celebrations for the country's 30 years of freedom and democracy, the presidency announced late on Tuesday.

President Cyril Ramaphosa's office said he had met with the country's nine premiers and the Independent Electoral Commission to discuss the state of readiness for the general elections.

"Beyond the fulfilment of our constitutional obligation, these upcoming elections are also a celebration of our democratic

journey and a determination of the future that we all desire," Ramaphosa said.

South Africa attained its freedom and held its first democratic elections in 1994, choosing Nelson Mandela as the first democratically elected Black president.

Ramaphosa, 71, the flag bearer of the governing African National Congress (ANC) party in power since 1994, faces tough competition from the opposition which could reduce his party's majority in parliament.

Anadolu Agency

Three pandas to leave Belgian animal park for China

Brussels, Belgium - A Belgian animal park on Tuesday announced that three of its five pandas will leave for China this year.

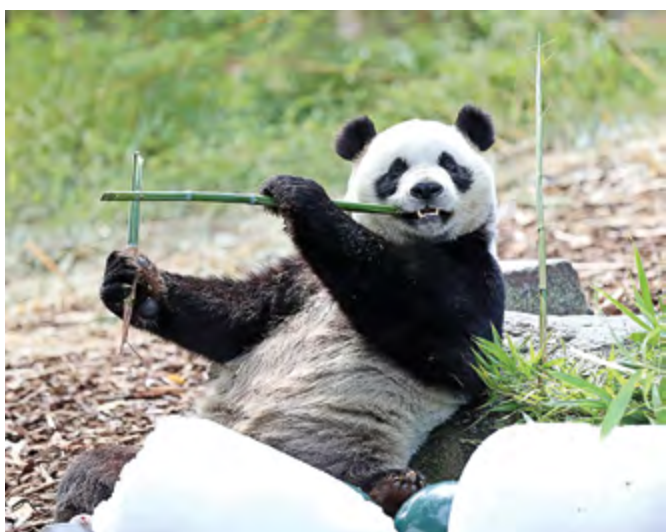
Tian Bao, born in 2016, and twins Bao Di and Bao Mei, born in 2019, will leave Pairi Daiza Park in Hainault in the autumn of 2024.

"Our three 'baby' pandas, cherished by all since their arrival, will have to leave Pairi Daiza in 2024," the park said in a statement. "However, we have been incredibly fortunate to have them with us for over 4 years (for Bao Di and Bao Mei) and almost 8 years (for Tian Bao)."

The sending of the pandas to

China is part of an initial agreement between Pairi Daiza and the China Wildlife Conservation Association (CWCA). When the parents of the three pandas, Hao Hao and Xing Hui, arrived in Belgium in 2014, a 15-year loan had been agreed. This agreement also stipulated that all descendants of the panda couple born in Belgium would go to China at the age of four, to participate in breeding and conservation programmes for the species.

However, the process of Tian Bao's return to China has been delayed by the restrictive measures against the coronavirus



Giant panda Bao Di at the Pairi Daiza zoo in Brugelette, Belgium (Xinhua)

pandemic. The departure of the three pandas marks a significant milestone in the collaboration between Pairi Daiza and China to protect the giant panda. "The departure of the three 'little' pandas is a further step in our commitment to the conservation of this emblematic species," the park said.

Pairi Daiza is encouraging visitors to come and enjoy the last few months of Tian Bao, Bao Di, and Bao Mei's presence. The park will organise special events to celebrate the three pandas' birthdays and say goodbye.

Xinhua

US backs Israeli offensive in Palestine

The US delegation called on the International Court of Justice (ICJ) to ‘carefully calibrate’ its advice

The Hague, Netherlands - The US delegation on Wednesday backed Israel's military offensive in the occupied Palestinian territories and called on the International Court of Justice to ‘carefully calibrate’ its advice.

The American representative, Richard Visek, mostly justified, during the public hearings at The Hague, Israel's military activities in the region, and said: ‘Any movement towards Israel withdrawal from the West Bank and Gaza requires consideration of Israel's very real security needs. We were all reminded of those security needs on October 7, and they persist.’

He regretted that ‘those needs have been ignored by many of their participants in asserting how the court should consider the questions before it’, and that the US position was questioned.

“With respect to duration, international law does not impose specific time limits on an occupation. That said, belligerent occupation is a temporary measure for administering territory under the control of belligerent armed forces,” he justified. “In this regard, it would not, as some participants suggest, be conducive to achievement of the established framework to issue an opinion that calls for a unilateral, immediate, and unconditional withdrawal by Israel. That does not account for Israel's legitimate security needs.”

Visek noted that the US was more resolved to ‘urgently achieve a final peace, that includes the full realisation of Palestinian self-determination’, following the ongoing hostilities and ‘the suffering of Palestinians



The American representative, Richard Visek, mostly justified Israel's military activities in the occupied Palestinian territories, during the public hearings at the ICJ, The Hague, on Wednesday

The Palestinian people have suffered for far too long under an occupation that is seemingly immune from international law

LANA NUSSEIBEH

in Gaza, and the violence in the West Bank’.

Despite supporting Israel's ‘security needs’, Visek also put emphasis on the need for a two-state solution.

“The current crisis illustrates the vital need to achieve this peace, this final peace with a Palestinian state living safely and securely alongside a secure

Israel, fully integrated into the region,” he further said.

Visek also noted that violence and unilateral actions cannot resolve this conflict, and ‘negotiations are the path to lasting peace’.

The US representative, however, called on the ICJ to ‘carefully calibrate’ its advice.

“The challenge for the court is

how to provide its advice in a way that promotes the framework rather than disrupting its balance, potentially making the possibility of negotiations even more difficult. For these reasons, we respectfully encourage the court to carefully calibrate its advice in this proceeding, to support and promote final realisation of peace and stability within the established UN framework set out in Security Council resolutions 242 and 338,” he concluded.

The public hearings started on Monday in the Hague following the UN General Assembly's request for an advisory opinion

on the legal consequences arising from policies and practices of Israel in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem.

Colombia, Cuba, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, and the US presented their arguments in Wednesday's first session.

South Africa brought a genocide case against Israel to the ICJ in late December and asked it for emergency measures to end the bloodshed in Gaza, where more than 29,000 Palestinians have been killed since October 7.

The court in January ordered Israel to take ‘all measures

within its power’ to prevent acts of genocide in Gaza but fell short of ordering a cease-fire.

It also ordered Israel to take ‘immediate and effective’ measures to enable the provision of urgently needed basic services and humanitarian assistance in the Gaza Strip.

‘Illegal occupation’

Meanwhile, the United Arab Emirates on Wednesday deemed the decades-long Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories as ‘illegal’.

“The Palestinian people have suffered for far too long under an occupation that is seemingly

immune from international law,” Lana Nusseibeh, the UAE's permanent ambassador to the UN, said at the hearing at the ICJ.

Israel has ‘imposed collective punishment against Palestinian people... repeatedly issued so-called evacuation orders that in effect seek to transfer Palestinians forcibly’ from their homes and areas, she added.

The Emirati representative said the breaches resulting from the Israeli occupation in all parts of the occupied Palestinian territories ‘are worsening at an alarming pace’.

“We convene today while Israel's grave violations against Palestinians persist with impunity, four months into its military operation in Gaza and following four failures by the Security Council to call for a cease-fire,” Nusseibeh said.

She added that the West Bank is too under an Israeli ‘regime of systemic subjugation’ that compounds Palestinian suffering.

China blasts US veto

The US veto at the UN Security Council against a cease-fire has pushed the besieged enclave of Gaza to a ‘more dangerous situation’, China warned on Wednesday.

“China voted in favour of a UN Security Council draft resolution that would have demanded an immediate humanitarian cease-fire in Gaza,” said Mao Ning, spokeswoman of China's Foreign Ministry.

The US vetoed ‘it alone, pushing the situation in Gaza to a more dangerous situation’, she said.

Anadolu Agency



Houthis reports 6 US, UK overnight raids

Sanaa, Yemen - Yemeni Houthis on Wednesday said the US and UK carried out six overnight airstrikes on several areas in the Al Hudaydah province in western Yemen.

“The American-British aggression targeted the Al-Araj area in Al Hudaydah with four raids,” said the Houthi-run Saba news agency in a brief statement on Wednesday.

The Houthi Al-Masirah Channel earlier reported two raids on the Jabanah area in the northern Al Hudaydah province.

The Jabanah area contains an air defence military site for the Houthi group, and has been targeted several times by US and UK forces, Anadolu re-

ported from the ground.

No details on casualties or material damage were provided. The US and UK have yet to confirm the strikes.

In solidarity with Gaza, which has been under an Israeli onslaught since October 7, the Houthis have been targeting cargo ships in the Red Sea owned or operated by Israeli companies or transporting goods to and from Israel.

With tensions escalating due to the US and UK launching joint airstrikes against Houthi targets in Yemen, the group declared it considered all American and British ships to be legitimate military targets.

Anadolu Agency

US: Nikki Haley vows to stay in Republican primary race

Washington, US - Former UN envoy Nikki Haley vowed on Tuesday to remain in the US race for the Republican presidential nomination in spite of former President Donald Trump's commanding lead.

Speculation had mounted that Haley would announce her exit from the White House during a news conference on Tuesday, and she alluded to that fact when she addressed supporters and the media in her native state of South Carolina.

“Some of you, perhaps a few of you in the media, came here today to see if I am dropping out of the race. Well I'm not,” she said. “Many of the same politicians who publicly embrace Trump privately dread him. They know what a disaster he's been, and will continue to be for our party. They're just too afraid to say it out loud. Well, I'm not afraid to say the hard truths out loud. I feel no need to kiss the ring,” she added.

The comments come four



Former UN envoy Nikki Haley

days before Haley will compete against Trump in South Carolina, which she led as governor from 2011 to 2017. Win or lose on Saturday, Haley vowed to remain in the race, comparing herself to David against Goliath.

“South Carolina will vote on Saturday. But on Sunday, I'll still be running for president. I'm not going anywhere. I'm campaign-

ing every day until the last person votes,” she said.

Haley is Trump's sole remaining Republican challenger after a once-thick crowd of candidates has narrowed considerably as the campaign season drags on. She has long been the target of Trump's ire, and the former president has accused Haley of serving as a Demo-

cratic stalking horse attempting to foil his White House run.

An average poll compiled by the RealClearPolitics website shows Trump with a commanding lead against Haley with nearly 62 per cent of the vote in his favour, compared to just 37 per cent of voters who favour his former UN ambassador.

Anadolu Agency

Israel behind attack on gas pipelines: Iran minister

Tel Aviv, Israel - An Iran minister has accused Israel of being behind last week's attack on gas pipelines in the country, The Times of Israel, citing the semi-official Tasnim news agency reported on Wednesday.

“The enemy intended to disrupt households' gas supplies ... but within two hours our colleagues worked to counter the Israeli plot which only damaged several pipes,” Iran's Oil Minister Javad Owji said.

According to a February 14 report in Al Jazeera, Minister Owji told state TV about twin explosions on gas pipelines overnight. The daily said that while there are few details about the blasts, one occurred on the mainline gas route running from Iran's central Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari province north to major gas fields in the Caspian Sea. The other explosion was reported in the southern province of Fars, it said.

Meanwhile, earlier this month, Israel's Minister of Defence, Yoav Gallant, had alleged that several recovered documents and other materials had revealed that envelopes filled with cash funds were being transferred from Iran directly to Hamas leader Yahya Sinwar.

ANI

‘Prolonged walkout’: Military doctors step-in as medics protest in South Korea

Seoul, South Korea - Amid protests and mass resignations by trainee doctors, South Korea on Wednesday asked military hospitals to fill the gaps in the health sector and provide treatment to civilian patients.

At least 10 civilian patients have already been treated by military medics as military hospitals have opened to the public, the Seoul-based Yonhap News reported.

“The military exists to protect people's lives and safety. (Military hospitals) should kindly treat citizens so that they don't feel uncomfortable,” Defence Minister Shin Won-sik told chiefs of 12 military hospitals in a video call.

The minister was visiting a military hospital in Yangju, north of the capital Seoul, where he directed the military to ‘assign additional medical personnel and manage staff fatigue to brace for



a prolonged walkout in the civilian sector’.

South Korea's civilian hospitals are suffering disruptions in providing services to the people as thousands of trainee doctors are protesting the government's move to increase medical seats.

However, people are also facing security issues while visiting the military hospitals.

Protesting trainee doctors, over 70 per cent or 8,816 junior

doctors, claim that the government ‘lacks transparency’ and that the move to increase the number of medical students will ‘compromise’ the quality of medical education and services.

Some 7,813 doctors have so far left their work sites.

The government, however, said the increase of 2,000 seats is ‘necessary’ to address a shortage of doctors.

Anadolu Agency

INDIA

End of an era: Legal luminary Fali Nariman passes away at 95

New Delhi - Fali Sam Nariman, one of India's most distinguished legal luminaries, breathed his last on Wednesday leaving behind a legacy that will forever resonate in the annals of Indian jurisprudence. He was 95 years old.

The passing of Fali S Nariman led to an outpouring of heartfelt tributes from countless people from the legal community and political leaders.

President Droupadi Murmu expressed her condolence on social media platform X. "Among the wisest experts on our Constitution, he was also a globally respected jurist. He served the nation in various

roles, including as a member of the Rajya Sabha, with equal dedication," President Murmu said.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on X: "Shri Fali Nariman Ji was among the most outstanding legal minds and intellectuals. He devoted his life to making justice accessible to common citizens. I am pained by his passing away. My thoughts are with his family and admirers. May his soul rest in peace."

On Wednesday, before the beginning of the court proceedings, Chief Justice of India D Y Chandradhud said: "We mourn the sad demise and passing

away of Fali Nariman. He was a great giant of an intellectual. It's very sad."

Attorney General R Venkataramani, who was present in the courtroom, agreed with the CJI saying: "It is indeed difficult news to swallow."

Justice N V Ramana, former Chief Justice of India also issued a statement expressing condolence. "Shri Nariman witnessed our nation's many a trials and tribulations, both before and after independence and fought for upholding Constitutional values till his last breath."

Nariman was born on January 10, 1929, in Rangoon, Burma (now Myanmar), to Parsi



Fali Sam Nariman

parents Sam Bariyjamji Nariman and Banoo Nariman. He enrolled as an advocate of the Bombay High Court in November 1950.

Nariman's illustrious career spanned over six decades, dur-

ing which he made significant contributions to the evolution of Indian constitutional law.

In the landmark Kesavananda Bharati case, Nariman assisted Nani Palkhivala who represented the petitioner. The 1973 historic judgment by the Supreme Court propounded the Basic Structure doctrine.

Nariman was appointed Additional Solicitor General of India in May 1972 but resigned from the post a day after the imposition of the Emergency in 1975 in protest against the Indira Gandhi government decision.

More recently, Nariman was part of the legal team that fought against the National Ju-

dicial Appointments Commission (NJAC) Act, which sought to replace the Collegium System. The Supreme Court struck down the NJAC Act, upholding the Collegium System for the appointment of judges in India's higher judiciary.

Beyond his courtroom prowess, Nariman was a prolific writer, with several authoritative works on constitutional law to his name. He authored *India's Legal System: Can it be Saved?* which was published in 2006.

In 2010, he published his autobiography *Before Memory Fades... An Autobiography*. In the book he wrote: "I have lived and flourished in a secular India. In

the fullness of time if God wills, I would also like to die in a secular India."

He later published *The State of the Nation and God Save the Hon'ble Supreme Court*.

From defending civil liberties to championing the cause of judicial independence, Nariman fearlessly fought for justice and constitutional values throughout his career.

Recently in December last year, Nariman reacted sharply to the Supreme Court's verdict upholding the abrogation of Article 370 which had conferred special status to the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir.

ANI

Farmers' agitation: Centre ready for 5th round of talks

New Delhi - Union Agriculture Minister Arjun Munda said on Wednesday that the central government is ready to discuss all the issues raised by the Punjab farmers.

He further invited the farmers for a fifth round of talks while urging them to find a solution through 'dialogue'.

"After the fourth round, the government is ready to discuss all the issues like MSP (minimum support price), crop diversification, stubble issue, FIR in the fifth round. I again invite the farmer leaders for discussion," Arjun Munda said while speaking to ANI on Wednesday.

"I appeal to them to maintain peace and we should find a solution through dialogue," he added.

He said that the farmers have not responded to the invite yet while appealing to move forward with the talks.

"No information has come yet (from farmers' side). We appeal that we should move forward for talks and present our stand. The government also wants to move forward and find a solution," the union minister said.

Earlier in the day, the general secretary of Punjab Kisan Mazdoor Sangharsh Committee, Sarwan Singh Pandher reiterated the demand for a legal guarantee of minimum support price (MSP) and assured a peaceful approach going ahead.

The farmer leader said that



Security personnel stand guard at Tikri Border in New Delhi on Wednesday, as farmers have announced to continue to march towards national capital (ANI)

The government is ready to discuss all issues like MSP, stubble issue, crop diversification... I again invite the farmer leaders for discussion

ARJUN MUNDA

as the 'Dilli Chalo' resumed on Wednesday, only the leaders will be marching towards the

national capital.

"We have decided that no farmer, youth will march forward. Leaders will march ahead. We will not attack our Jawans. We will go peacefully. All this can be ended if they (central government) make a law on MSP," Sarwan Singh Pandher told ANI.

Also, addressing the protesting farmers, he appealed to move forward peacefully.

The farmers' leaders were seen wearing protective gears including masks, safety glasses and headphones to defend the

resistive measures undertaken by the security forces.

In resistance to the protests, the forces used tear gas shells, water cannons apart from the multi-layer barricading deployed at various borders of Delhi.

Several farmers and police personnel were injured in the clashes during the march that started on February 13.

The protesting farmers have been camping at the Shambhu border near Ambala since the start of the march.

Meanwhile, Congress na-

tional president Mallikarjun Kharge on Wednesday, expressed strong support for the ongoing farmers' protest, declaring that the party stands firmly with them.

"We are supporting them (farmers). We are saying openly that their reasonable demands should be fulfilled. We are going to say this in our election manifesto also that a legal guarantee will be given. All crops cannot be covered but the essential crops should be done (providing MSP)," Mallikarjun Kharge said.

ANI



Gaganyaan: Human rating of cryogenic engine completed

New Delhi - The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) has successfully completed the human rating of its CE20 cryogenic engine, a critical component of the Gaganyaan missions, an official said on Wednesday.

The Gaganyaan project envisages a demonstration of human spaceflight capability by launching a crew of three members into an orbit of 400km for a three-day mission and bringing them back safely to earth by landing in Indian sea waters.

"ISRO has accomplished a major milestone in the human rating of its CE20 cryogenic engine that powers the cryogenic stage of the human-rated LVM3 launch vehicle for Gaganyaan missions, with the completion of the final round of ground qualification tests on February 13, 2024. The final test was the seventh of a series of vacuum ignition tests carried out at the High Altitude Test Facility at ISRO Propulsion Complex, Mahendragiri, to simulate the flight conditions," the ISRO said in a press statement.

As per, the ground qualification tests for the human rating of the CE20 engine involved life demonstration tests, endurance tests, and performance assess-

ment under nominal operating conditions as well as off-nominal conditions w.r.t thrust, mixture ratio, and propellant tank pressure. All the ground qualification tests of the CE20 engine for the Gaganyaan programme have been successfully completed.

"In order to qualify the CE20 engine for human rating standards, four engines have undergone 39 hot firing tests under different operating conditions for a cumulative duration of 8810 seconds, against the minimum human rating qualification standard requirement of 6350 seconds," they said.

ISRO has also successfully completed the acceptance tests of the flight engine identified for the first unmanned Gaganyaan (G1) mission, tentatively scheduled for Q2 of 2024. This engine will power the upper stage of the human-rated LVM3 vehicle and has a thrust capability of 19 to 22 tonnes with a specific impulse of 442.5 seconds.

In a stellar display of prowess, India soared to new heights in 2023 with the successful soft landing of Chandrayaan-3 on the South Pole of the Moon and the launch of Aditya-L1, India's first solar mission.

ANI

SP to contest on 63 seats, Congress on 17 in polls in UP

Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh - After Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav, party leader Ravidas Mehrotra also confirmed an alliance with the Congress, for the Lok Sabha Election 2024 together.

Sharing details of the alliance, Mehrotra said that the Samajwadi Party will contest elections on 63 seats and Congress on 17 seats in Uttar Pradesh.

"This will strengthen the INDIA bloc which will form its government in 2024. The opposition parties will contest the election together. We have tried to stop the scattering of non-BJP votes," he said.

ANI

India, Greece to take trade to two times by year 2030: PM Modi

New Delhi - Prime Minister Narendra Modi said that the visit of Greece Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis to India reflected the strengthening of the strategic partnership between the two countries.

He stated that the growing cooperation in the defence and security sectors reflects deep mutual trust between the two nations.

In a joint press statement after holding bilateral and delegation level talks here with his Greek counterpart, Modi said that both countries have agreed to take their bilateral trade to two times by the year 2030.

Modi said: "I am happy to welcome PM Kyriakos Mitsotakis and his delegation to India. After my visit to Greece last year, his visit to India is a symbol of the strengthening strategic partnership between the two countries. The visit of the Greek



PM Narendra Modi holds a bilateral meeting with Greek PM Kyriakos Mitsotakis, in New Delhi on Wednesday (ANI)

PM to India after 16 years is a historic occasion."

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar, Union Minister of State for External Affairs Meenakashi Lekhi, National Security Advisor Ajit Doval and Foreign Secretary Vinay Kwatra were among others who were

present in the delegation level talks. Terming his discussions with Mitsotakis 'meaningful and useful', Modi expressed happiness that India and Greece are taking steps to implement the agreements reached in bilateral trade in 2023.

Modi said new opportunities

were explored during his meeting ranging from agriculture, pharma, medical devices, technologies, innovation, skill development, and space.

The prime minister said: "We identified several new opportunities to give new energy and direction to our cooperation.

There are many possibilities for closer cooperation between the two countries in the field of agriculture." He added: "And I am pleased that both sides are taking steps to implement the agreements reached in this area last year. We emphasised on increasing cooperation in many areas like pharma, medical devices, technology, innovation, skill development, and space."

He said shipping and connectivity are the highest priority areas and discussed increasing cooperation in these areas with the Greek PM. Modi noted that India and Greece have common concerns and priorities in the fight against terrorism. "We also discussed connecting the start-ups of both countries. Shipping and connectivity are topics of high priority for both the countries. We also discussed increasing cooperation in these areas."

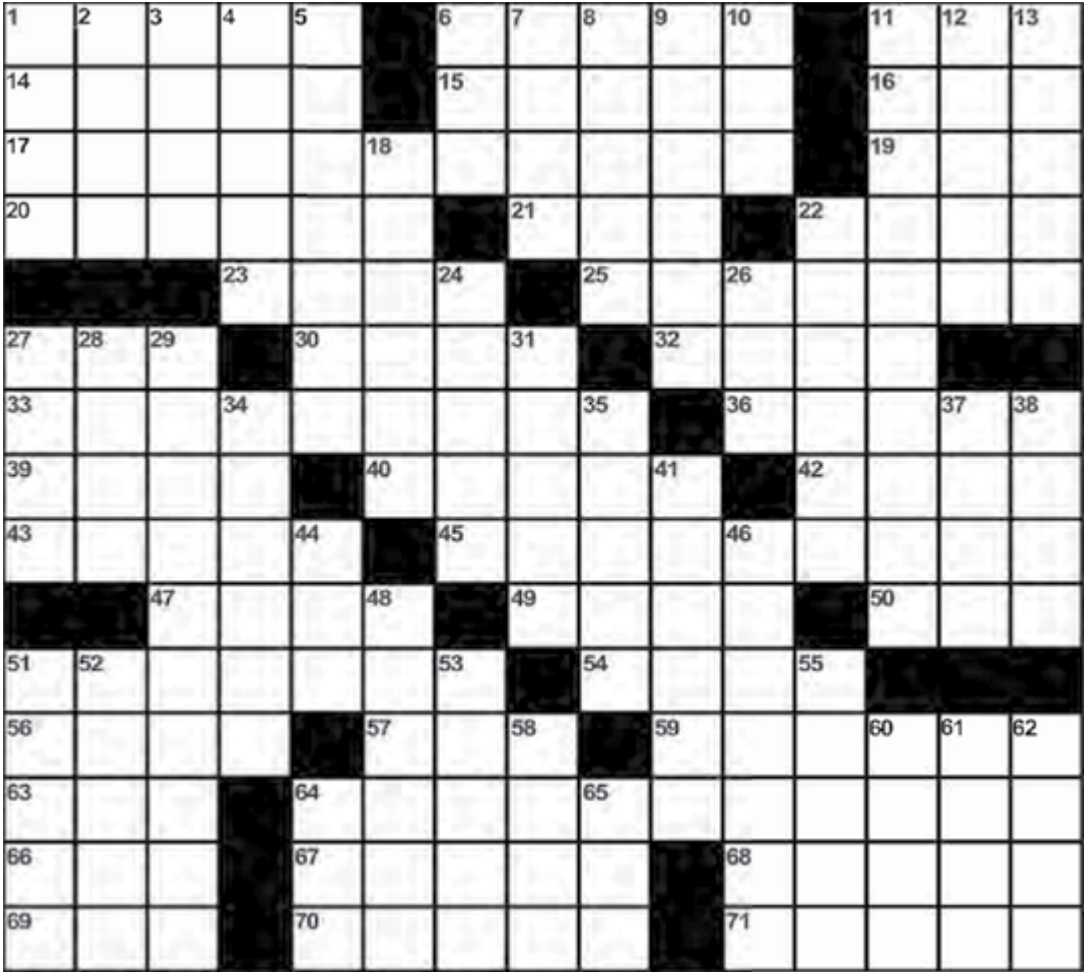
Announcing the formation of

a Working Group between India and Greece for defence and security, he said: "The growing cooperation in defence and security reflects our deep mutual trust. With the formation of a Working Group in this area, we will be able to increase mutual coordination on common challenges like defence, cyber security, counter-terrorism, and maritime security."

He said: "New opportunities for co-production and co-development are being created in defence manufacturing in India, which can be beneficial for both the countries. We have agreed to connect the defence industries of both the countries. India and Greece have common concerns and priorities in the fight against terrorism. We discussed in detail how to further strengthen our cooperation in this area."

ANI

DAILY CROSSWORD



ACROSS

- 1) Range rope
- 6) Haul with tackle
- 11) What a gentleman tips
- 14) Regarding
- 15) Sub in WWII
- 16) "The Mikado" dress part
- 17) Parting words
- 19) It's right under your nose
- 20) Tried one's hand (at)
- 21) Lodge brother
- 22) Puts two and two together
- 23) Restrooms, in Britain
- 25) Boxing legend Jack
- 27) "Say..." (doctor's order)
- 30) Click it to drop it
- 32) Carey or Barrymore
- 33) Like a certain childhood friend?
- 36) Excessive blarney
- 39) Etna spew
- 40) Ann_, Mich.
- 42) Ornamental notions case
- 43) Bookcase unit
- 45) Prompt willingness
- 47) Economic and social misfortunes
- 49) Baseball quota

- 50) Like Gen. Powell
- 51) More than bothered
- 54) Polio vaccine pioneer
- 56) Improvise musically
- 57) Air show formation
- 59) "Praying" insect
- 63) Hour on a grandfather clock
- 64) "See what I mean?"
- 66) Word with "Angelo" or "Antonio"
- 67) Center of the action
- 68) Bjorn Borg, for one
- 69) Simon's couple
- 70) Broadcast again
- 71) Provide funds for

DOWN

- 1) Cardinal number (fifth power of 10)
- 2) Over the bounding main
- 3) Went tickety-split
- 4) Calyx component
- 5) Paper-folding art
- 6) Objector's word
- 7) High-pitched instrument
- 8) "... I lie to you?"
- 9) Pink-slipped
- 10) Suffix for ordinal numbers
- 11) Stands up to scrutiny

- 12) Follow the law
- 13) Slightly drunk
- 18) Nine-day Catholic prayer
- 22) Tarzan and others
- 24) Part of a drum kit
- 26) Post-wedding title
- 27) Is under the weather
- 28) Asian maidservant
- 29) Think about
- 31) Word before renewal or sprawl
- 34) Racehorse gait
- 35) A famous bear and a famous catcher
- 37) Deceptive maneuver
- 38) Light fog
- 41) Change the title of
- 44) Pesky insect
- 46) Medical disappointment
- 48) Harshly extreme
- 51) Dispatch boat
- 52) River nymph
- 53) Ward off
- 55) Well-recognized
- 58) Active European volcano
- 60) Even, scorewise
- 61) Opening to China?
- 62) Rataouille, e.g.
- 64) Long-nosed fish
- 65) Solo of "Star Wars"

NOTE PAD



YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE



ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

It is time for you to experience a few new things in your life. Your day-to-day routine is losing some of its excitement, and you run the risk of getting too complacent and lazy! If you are living on a tight budget right now, don't worry. It doesn't require a lot of money to go exploring. As a matter of fact, doing it on the cheap is often much more interesting than going first class all the way. Put on some comfortable shoes and take a new path at least once today.



LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

Getting too obsessed about learning something new about your latest crush is not wise right now. There are other people in your life, and frankly they deserve your time and energy more than this person does. Pay attention to your time-tested relationships. New loves or even new friendships are exciting, but do they add anything more than a little bit of excitement to your life? Call up one of your oldest friends. Remind yourself why you cherish them.



SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

Just like children need structure in their lives to excel, adults need structure too. And the big question is if you have enough. Today, if you don't have a schedule or at least a loose plan, you could veer off course and get little if anything done. There is too much disarray in your life now, and it's going to be very easy to get distracted if you don't have your priorities set. Take time today to sort through the details. Put things in the right order.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

1. Which brothers founded the studio which developed the dance rhythm game, Just Dance 2021?

- A. Smith
- B. Guillemot
- C. Kwok
- D. Gou

2. Who was Prime Minister of the UK on 28 March 1979, when the House of Commons passed a Motion of No Confidence, forcing a general election that was won by Margaret Thatcher?

- A. Edward Heath
- B. Harold Wilson
- C. Alec Douglas-Home
- D. James Callaghan

3. Who used to observe the Sarum Rite?

- A. Followers of the religion now known as Wicca
- B. Druids
- C. Prehistoric peoples living in Salisbury
- D. Mediaeval Christians in parts of Europe

Answers: 1.B 2.D 3.D



TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

Someone is going to be in a hurry today, and they might think that gives them the right to rush you too. But speed could create some problems for you today. You've been going at the right pace for you, and it's not wise to change that now just to make things convenient for someone else. You can't let other people push you around no matter how insistent or powerful they might be. If these folks are in such a hurry, just let them speed off on their own without you.



VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

The details of your day could be more confusing than imaginable, so it's best for you to get a head start on things. Fortunately, you have a great deal of clarity, and you can get organized early enough to avoid most of the headaches. People are reaching out for some guidance from you, but if you don't have the time to deal with them, you can't help them. Ask for a rain check and let them know that you will get back to them later if you can. You have to make your own needs top priority.



CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

Today, it's advisable for you to reserve your energy for your own issues and concerns and not worry about other people too much. So what if folks complain that you are being selfish by not putting them first? They're wrong. You simply have to put yourself first every once in a while. If you exert all your energy making others happy, you will have nothing left over to make yourself happy, and that's not good. Maintain your flawless manners, but don't forget to treat yourself right.



GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

The negative feelings you had for someone have improved so much that you are starting to feel like you'd join their fan club if they had one! The exciting part is that they are singing your praises just as loudly. The two of you are on good terms, and it was a victory you both fought for. You have grown from tense acquaintances to friends, and it's something to celebrate. Consider moving your relationship into a more social arena and building on the foundation you have created together.



LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

Let your selfless side come out today. It's eager to help make the world a better place. You have the time and you have the energy, so all you need is the cause. Spread the word to folks that you're up for lending them a hand wherever they need help. Chances are you'll get involved with something exciting and rewarding before the end of the day. Whether it's helping someone pick out a new gadget or helping someone get into a better mood, you'll love being an asset.



AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

Whatever you're feeling, you have to let it out today! Happy or sad, jealous or proud, envious or territorial, it doesn't make any difference. Just let folks know what's going on in your heart. Holding on to your feelings for too long could cause your blood pressure to skyrocket and your imagination to run wild. But once you get your emotions out of your system, you will be amazed at how much healthier and happier you immediately start to feel.



CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

You might have some friction with an authority figure today, but an important compromise can be reached if you can both focus on what you agree on. They need you more than you need them, so you are in a very enviable position. Play this negotiation wisely, though. You don't want to push too hard and make them appear to have caved in to your demands. Help them protect their reputation and they'll be in your corner forever, helping you out in future situations.



SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

You've been working awfully hard to avoid getting into a conflict with someone you care about, but today it could start to feel like the effort required to keep doing that might be more than you can bear. You have to prepare yourself for the possibility that you two could argue. There is no need to be afraid. You just need to be prepared. First of all, focus on facts. Do your research and arm yourself with the evidence you need to prove your point.



PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

Exercise your creativity as much as you possibly can today by doing dances, singing songs, solving riddles, doing whatever. Your unique way of celebrating your life can turn heads and provide some entertainment to the people you really want to impress. People will love your antics and send some seriously good energy back your way. This is a great day to make big changes in your social life. What used to be predictable will now be thrilling and unpredictable.

KIDS COLOURING



BOGGLER

Y	S	O	C
O	P	H	P
O	O	K	I
R	L	P	I

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

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

WORD BUILDER



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

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

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER

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

ISWK, MCCC YELLOW CHAMPS

Cleon and Vivaan star as Indian School Wadi Kabir win Inter-School U-13 title

Muscat - Indian School Wadi Kabir U13 defeated Indian School Muscat U13 by 23 runs in the final of the Oman Cricket Inter-School Junior Domestic League 2023-24 supported by Mazoon Dairy SAOC at Municipality Grounds recently.

Cleon Mello and Vivaan Malhotra both made 66 as ISWK U13 posted 177 in 20 overs. Pranav NS picked two wickets for ISM U13.

In response, Pranav's 64 kept ISM U13 alive in the chase but two wickets each for Ayush Shetty and Mohammed Akeel turned the tide in the favour of ISWK and they eventually won by 23 runs.

In the final of Oman Cricket Inter-Academy Junior Domestic League, Muscat Cricket Coaching Centre Yellow U13 defeated Boshier Sports Centre U13 C by 10 wickets.

MCCC Yellow U13 bundled out BSC C U13 for 88 in 16 overs with Pranav NS taking three wickets and Shravan SM picking up two.

Aditya Chaudhari scored 32 for BSC C U13. In response, Shravan SM made 44 and Ayush Shetty scored 37 to seal MCCC Yellow's big win.

In the prize distribution ceremony, Alkesh Joshi, Treasurer - Oman Cricket, Kiran Asher - Board Member, Oman Cricket, Paul Martin, Mazoon Dairy and



Indian School Wadi Kabir players celebrate with the trophy; (below) MCCC Yellow players celebrate with the trophy



Duleep Mendis - Chief Development Officer - Oman Cricket graced the stage.

For Inter-School tournament, Ayush Shetty of ISWK U13 bagged the Best Batsman as well as the Best All Rounder awards while Jose Cherian of ISWK U13 Lions was awarded the Best Bowler.

For Inter-Academy tournament, Ayush Shetty of MCCC Yellow U13 was the Best Batsman and Best All Rounder while Pranav NS of MCCC Yellow U13

was the Best Bowler.

BRIEF SCORES:
ISWK U13 177/5 in 20 overs (Vivaan Malhotra 66(49), Cleon Mello 66(52); Pranav NS 2/27) beat ISM U13 A 154/7 in 20 overs (Pranav NS 64(38); Mohammed Akeel 2/23) by 23 runs.

BSC U13 C 88/10 in 16 overs (Aditya Chaudari 32(24); Pranav NS 3/8) lost to MCCC Yellow U13 89/0 in 10.3 overs (Shravan SM 44(29), Ayush Shetty 37(34)) by 10 wickets.



His Highness Azzan bin Qais Al Said hits a ceremonial chip during an official practice day ahead of International Series Oman at Al Mouj Golf

Ceremonial shot gets International Series Oman underway

Muscat - The US\$2 million International Series Oman tournament was officially opened at Al Mouj Golf, with His Highness Azzan bin Qais Al Said playing the ceremonial first shot during an official practice day ahead of the four-day event.

His Highness was given the honour of playing a chip shot onto the 18th green of the iconic coastline course in Muscat, in front of VIPs and guests assembled on the hospitality platform, ahead of the four-day event from Thursday to Sunday.

This year's event features a host of world-class names, Major winners and LIV Golf players including recent LIV Golf Mayakoba winner Joaquin Nie-

mann, 2010 Open champion Louis Oosthuizen, 2011 Masters champion Charl Schwartzel and the cream of the Asian Tour.

His Highness Azzan bin Qais Al Said said: "It was a great feeling, I had lots of adrenaline. Usually, the first tee shot is the ceremonial start but this time it was a chip. It was a lot of fun, and I managed to keep it on the green so I am very happy about that."

International Series Oman is the first of 10 tournaments on The International Series, the Asian Tour-sanctioned pathway onto the LIV Golf League. It is the second edition of the event, with Japan's Takumi Kanaya defending the title he won by four shots last year.

Questions hang over Red Bull as F1 testing starts in Bahrain

Manama, Bahrain - Red Bull will have plenty of questions hanging over them as Formula One testing started in Bahrain on Wednesday, with rivals eager to see how their cars stack up against Max Verstappen's and team boss Christian Horner fighting for his future.

The dominant 2023 champions, with 21 wins in 22 races, launched their new RB20 car last week with some design features reminiscent of those tried and discarded by rivals Mercedes last season.

Some observers sensed all might not be as it seemed but Wednesday should provide an immediate answer to those



Red Bull's Max Verstappen completed 66 laps with a best time of 1:32.548 in the first session of Testing in Manama, Bahrain

cause I'm not sure it's going to be that (launch) car," former McLaren performance engineer and Aston Martin strategist Bernie Collins said in a Sky Sports F1 podcast. "This could be 'Oh, we were just having a joke'. So I'm highly suspicious.

"If they do rock up with that car it's a brave, brave move because they could have easily continued to develop the car they had and that would have been the safer bet," she said.

"If they go with it they've clearly seen something that means they think they can beat their previous developed car."

Questions about Horner, who will be in Bahrain, will re-

main unanswered until the energy drink company completes an investigation into allegations made against him by a female employee. Horner has denied any wrongdoing.

Mercedes, Ferrari, McLaren and Aston Martin are all hoping to be closer to Verstappen, chasing his fourth title in a row this season, but the real pecking order may not be apparent for some time. Seven times world champion Lewis Hamilton will meet the media for the first time since his switch to Ferrari in 2025 was announced and will also have a clearer idea of how competitive his Mercedes will be.

Bumrah rested for fourth Test against England

Ranchi, India - Jasprit Bumrah has been rested from the fourth Test against England beginning on February 23 in Ranchi. KL Rahul, who missed the second and third Tests, is set to miss the fourth Test as well, while his participation in the final Test in Dharamsala is subject to fitness.

The decision to give Bumrah a break has been made keeping his workload in mind - he's bowled 80.5 overs in the first three Tests - with an IPL season coming up followed closely by the 2024 T20 World Cup beginning on June 1. There was speculation that Bumrah was going to be

rested for the third Test in Rajkot but, with the series level at 1-1, he eventually played the fixture.

Mukesh Kumar, who was released from the squad for the third Test in Rajkot, has joined the squad in Ranchi.

India now lead the five-match series 2-1 after a record 434-run victory in Rajkot, and they will have to find a way to make up for Bumrah's absence: he's the leading wicket-taker in the series with 17 wickets at 13.64 apiece. He was the Player of the Match in India's win in the second Test in Visakhapatnam, where he took 9 for 91 across both innings.

CLASSIFIEDS

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PSV's Luuk de Jong celebrates after scoring against Borussia Dortmund

De Jong penalty helps PSV draw with Dortmund

Eindhoven, Netherlands - Donyell Malen scored a superb goal against his former side but a second-half penalty from Luuk de Jong earned a 1-1 draw for PSV Eindhoven in the first leg of their Champions League last-16 tie against Borussia Dortmund at the Philips Stadion on Tuesday.

Dutch international Malen rifled in a thunderous shot from a tight angle after 24 minutes but the home side created the better chances and finally took one when De Jong scored from a spot-kick, awarded for a foul by Dortmund defender Mats Hummels.

That goal stretches PSV's unbeaten home run to 31 games in all competitions and leaves the tie evenly poised with the re-

We should have brought much more calmness to the game

MATS HUMMELS

turn leg in Dortmund to come on March 13.

"We should have brought much more calmness to the game. Hummels told Amazon Prime. "We let the heated atmosphere get to us too much. I saw a very beatable Eindhoven today.

"We were not good enough with the ball. In our home game, we simply need to play better with the ball. Then, I am very confident we will progress."

The match was PSV's first Champions League knockout tie in eight seasons as they bid to reach the quarter-finals for the first time since the 2006-07 campaign.

Malik Tillman had an excellent chance for the opener when he was teed up on the edge of the box and, as the Dortmund defence parted in front of him, dragged his shot wide.

Dortmund took the lead with a wonderful strike from Malen, who had four successful years at PSV before moving to the Bundesliga in 2021.

MARKO WINNER

Late Arnautovic goal gives Inter 1-0 win over Atletico in Champions League last 16

Milan, Italy - A late goal from substitute Marko Arnautovic gave Inter Milan a 1-0 home victory after a tough battle with Atletico Madrid in the first leg of their Champions League last-16 tie on Tuesday.

The Austria striker, who had replaced the injured Marcus Thuram at halftime, redeemed himself following several missed chances by squeezing the ball home after Lautaro Martinez's shot was saved by goalkeeper Jan Oblak in the 79th minute.

It was only the second time the teams had played each other, with Atletico winning 2-0 in the UEFA Super Cup back in 2010.

"It's very satisfying. The lads were wonderful against a physical, technical side that did not make it at all easy," Inter manager Simone Inzaghi told Sky Sport Italia.

The return fixture is on March 13 in the Spanish capital.

"We know this is only the first leg, the second match will be tough, and certainly there are regrets for the result considering with all that we created, we deserved a wider scoreline



Inter Milan's Marko Arnautovic scores against Atletico Madrid in their Champions League match on Tuesday

We know this is only the first leg, the second match will be tough, and certainly there are regrets for the result considering with all that we created, we deserved a wider scoreline

SIMONE INZAGHI

from getting any attempts on target. Samuel Lino had Atletico's first opportunity but his right-footed curler went just wide of the far post.

Ahead of the interval Martinez and Thuram had openings to break the deadlock for Inter but also came up against a resilient defence, with attempts

blocked or saved by Oblak.

Inter started the second half on the attack as Federico Dimarco supplied a cross to Arnautovic, who slid in slightly late and ballooned the ball over from close range. Just after the hour the home fans again expressed their frustration as Arnautovic,

having found himself free in front of goal, sent another effort over the crossbar before the villain became the hero of the night with his late winning goal.

"The third chance came after I missed a couple and I'm happy to have scored for the people who came here to cheer as well

as for my team mates and for my family, who were here tonight," Arnautovic told Mediaset.

Despite the late win it was also a night of concern for Inzaghi as Frenchman Thuram, a pivotal player this season, was substituted at halftime, seemingly struggling with a leg injury.

Haaland goal helps Manchester City move within a point of Liverpool

Manchester, England - Erling Haaland erased any questions about his scoring touch on Tuesday, netting Manchester City's only goal in a 1-0 victory over Brentford that lifted them into second place in the Premier League table, just one point behind leaders Liverpool.

Pep Guardiola's team, unbeaten in their last 10 league matches and finally even in games played with title rivals Liverpool and Arsenal, have 56 points, one ahead of Arsenal in a title race that looks destined to go down to the wire. Brentford are five points above the relegation zone in 14th.

Haaland, who three days earlier pushed a camera in frustration after failing to score with nine shots in a 1-1 draw with Chelsea, was back in form, increasing his league tally to 17 goals. The Norwegian broke the deadlock in the 71st minute when he sprinted onto a beautiful through ball from Julian Alvarez then stroked it past a slipping Kristoffer Ajer before beating



Manchester City's Erling Haaland scores against Brentford on Tuesday

keeper Mark Flekken. Haaland has now scored against every Premier League club he has faced. He has yet to play Luton Town.

Guardiola issued a warning to Haaland's critics and said the

Norwegian had come through a difficult period in his personal life.

"Top strikers score a lot of goals, don't criticise, he will shut your mouth. Sooner or later he is there," Guardiola told reporters.

"He was out for two months

(with a foot injury), he lost his grandmother, it is not easy for a human being. We spoke about the moment and I realised this later, but he didn't say anything about the passing away of his grandmother. In this type of games like Brentford, you need Erling," added Guardiola, who said he left playmaker Kevin De Bruyne on the bench because of "niggles in his hamstring".

Haaland, who had scored just two goals in his previous seven games, had another effort ruled out late in the game because Kyle Walker was offside in the buildup.

Chelsea thoroughly frustrated City on Saturday, and it was more of the same on Tuesday - besides Haaland's goal - with City taking 25 shots, 11 on target to Brentford's two.

Oscar Bobb, who made his first Premier League start, had one of City's best chances, deftly cutting around Christian Norgaard before unleashing a shot that defender Ben Mee sprinted back to just clear off the line.



Ivo Karlovic

Ace machine Karlovic hangs up his racket at the age of 44

Muscat - Towering Croat Ivo Karlovic announced his retirement from tennis at the age of 44 on Wednesday, bringing the curtain down on a career that saw him fire more than 13,000 aces past bewildered opponents.

Standing 2.11m tall, Karlovic's huge serves and unorthodox style caused problems for some of the sport's biggest names and he won two of his three meetings with world number one Novak Djokovic. Having last played on tour at Indian Wells in 2021, and with his 45th birthday approaching this month, Karlovic confirmed his retirement to fans on social media.

"Some of you have noticed that it's been a while since I played a tournament and still ask

me on a daily basis if and when I'll be returning to the tour," he wrote. "I'm sorry to disappoint, but with this letter, I want to make it official and finally announce my retirement."

Karlovic turned professional in 2000 and made a splash in his first Grand Slam match three years later by beating defending champion Lleyton Hewitt at Wimbledon.

His best result at a Grand Slam also came at Wimbledon in 2009 when he reached the quarter-finals.

Karlovic will also be remembered by fans for his longevity in a physically demanding sport, while his 13,728 aces stands second only to American John Isner's tally of 14,470.

Mensik, O'Connell claim upset wins in Doha

Doha, Qatar - Jakub Mensik of the Czech Republic and Christopher O'Connell of Australia each recorded an upset victory on Tuesday in the first round of the Qatar ExxonMobil Open in Doha.

The 18-year-old Mensik won 70 percent of his first serves to notch a 7-6 (3), 6-4 victory over fifth-seeded Alejandro Davidovich Fokina of Spain in 93 minutes.

O'Connell, in turn, posted a 6-4, 6-4 triumph over sixth-seeded

Jan-Lennard Struff of Germany to set up a second-round match versus Finland's Emil Ruusuvuori, who beat Italian Giulio Zeppieri, 7-6 (2), 7-5.

Alcaraz out in Rio

Two of the top three seeds, Spain's Carlos Alcaraz and Nicolas Jarry of Spain, were eliminated in their first-round matches in Rio de Janeiro.

Alcaraz, the top seed, retired due to a right ankle injury with

the score 1-1 against Brazilian wild-card entrant Thiago Monteiro. Jarry, the third seed, fell 6-1, 1-6, 7-5 against Germany's Yannick Hanfmann in 1 hour, 54 minutes.

Other first-round winners included Argentines, No. 5 Sebastian Baez, Facundo Diaz Acosta and qualifier Mariano Navone, as well as Chile's Cristian Garin, Serbia's Dusan Lajovic and Brazilian qualifier Felipe Meligeni Alves.



Jakub Mensik

CULTURAL COUSINS



The Lecture Series – ‘From Mandvi to Muscat’, hosted by the Embassy of India, brings **Prof James Onley**, Ahmed Seddiqi Chair in Gulf and Middle Eastern Studies and Professor of History (Dept of International Studies), American University of Sharjah, to speak on ‘India and Arabia: Connections across Millennia’ at 6pm today (February 22). “India and Arabia are natural trading partners. It is no coincidence that the largest Indian diaspora in the world is in Arabia,” he asserts, in an exclusive interview with **Hubert Vaz**. Excerpts:

The connections between the Arab world and India span over 5000 years - what could be the key reason for India becoming the fulcrum of all activities and ties with Arab nations?

Historically, India has always been the economic powerhouse of the Indian Ocean. Eastern and southern Arabia lacked basic resources such as wood, cloth, metal, foodstuffs, and capital to support large scale economic activity like the pearling industry and import/export sector. It is only natural that the Gulf Arabs would look to India for the things they lacked and for that to be reflected in their martial culture eventually.

The Kashmiri shawls that Gulf Arab men wear today, as part of their national dress, symbolise the ancient and ongoing connections between Arabia and India. India and Arabia are natural trading partners. It is no coincidence that the largest Indian diaspora in the world is in Arabia.

Was proximity with India across the Arabian Sea, as well as maritime relations, also a decisive factor in ties with the Arab world?

Yes. The Gulf is the world’s oldest cultural crossroads. Since the invention of ocean-going vessels nearly five millennia ago, ships have sailed between India and Arabia. The earliest account of Indian ships in the Gulf is a cuneiform tablet recording the words of the Akkadian king Sargon, who ruled from 2334 to 2279 BC, in which he mentions ‘ships of Meluhha’ (the Akkadian name for the Indus Valley Civilisation) anchored at the city of Akkad in central Mesopotamia.

Archaeological evidence suggests that trade contacts were established as early as 2600 BC. Historically, India was the Gulf’s most important trading partner. Today, the tables have turned and the GCC states are India’s largest regional-bloc trading partner, surpassing the ASEAN and the EU.

While plunderers visited the Arab world from far flung nations over the past four millennia, how come the Arabs always had cordial ties with India, though India had a geographic edge over others?

The Arabs first came to India through trade, long before Islam. India’s first mosque, the Cheraman Juma Masjid in the town of Methala in Kerala, was established in 629 during the lifetime of the Prophet Muhammad. It was built because the ancient Arab merchant community there had become Muslim, along

with most Arabs during the early years of Islam.

Intermarriage between the Arab seafarers and local women along the Malabar Coast produced a community of Arab-Indians known as the Mappilas, who, today, account for a significant number of all people in Kerala and the majority of all Muslims in that state.

It was through trade, and then Islam, that Arabs and Indians first came to know each other, therefore. Their ancient trade connections created a shared culture over the millennia. Today they are cultural cousins.

What type of exchanges were most significant and sustainable between India and the Arab civilisation - trade/economic activity, education, culture, literary arts, maritime activity, etc?

The strong commercial connections between India and Arabia over millennia naturally led to a strong Indian influence,

clearly evident in Gulf material culture, from architecture and accoutrements to clothing and cuisine. Gulf dhows were built with teak imported from India.

The houses of Gulf elites were decorated with Indian doors and furniture. Kashmiri shawls adorned the heads of many Gulf Arabs. Colourful Indian turbans were worn by the ruling families of Sharjah, Ras al Khaimah and Oman, and some Gulf Arab merchants.

Gulf Arabs ate their lamb and fish with curry and rice from India every day. In these and countless other ways, the Gulf’s ports and people were deeply connected to the world of



Gulf Arabs ate their lamb and fish with curry and rice from India every day. In these and countless other ways, the Gulf’s ports and people were deeply connected to the world of India

PROF JAMES ONLEY

India, while an Indian world (in the form of communities) existed among them.

What salient points would you be focusing on in your lecture?

India and Arabia have been interconnected for time immemorial despite being geographically separate. Before the oil era, the Gulf Arabs always looked toward the sea for their supplies and sources of prosperity. Their maritime orientation, toward India above all, has profoundly influenced their history and culture.

The Gulf has long been enmeshed in the movement of goods, people and cultures between East and West: from the ancient maritime trade routes between the Indus Valley, Dilmun (Bahrain) and Mesopotamia (Iraq) in the 26th century BC to the global air and sea networks linking the Gulf to the wider world in the 21st century.

Throughout this time, India always loomed large over the horizon, attracting most of the Gulf’s exports and supplying much of what made life possible in the days before oil. Today, the Indian connection is more apparent than ever before with the presence of over eight million Indian expats living and working in the GCC states, giving the neighbourhoods they predominate the feel of Indian towns.

Will you be touching upon anything specific between India and Oman?

My talk will be general, providing an overview of over 4000 years of trade and cultural contact. I will be providing a table of all the ports that traded with the Gulf over the centuries, from Goa in the 22nd century BC to Bombay (Mumbai) today.

What is the clear-cut message for your audience?

The ancient commercial connections and cultural contact between the Indian subcontinent and the Gulf have resulted in far more than cultural influence - the coastlines around the Gulf and Arabian Sea, from Eastern Arabia to the western Indian subcontinent, are a zone of cultural confluence.

To comprehend how deep this confluence goes, one need only look at the prevalence of Islam throughout the Indian subcontinent, the tens of thousands of Arabic and Persian loanwords in Indian languages, the prevalence of Indian numbers and cuisine in the Gulf and the wider Middle East, or the countless cultural traditions shared between the Indian subcontinent and the Gulf. Each has adopted from the other and made it their own, part of their cultural DNA. India and the Gulf are cultural cousins.



Industrial sector adds R05.2bn to Oman’s GDP during Jan-Sept 2023

OMAN'S INDUSTRIAL SECTOR ACCOUNTED FOR NEARLY 17% OF THE COUNTRY'S NOMINAL GDP DURING THE FIRST NINE MONTHS OF 2023

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The contribution of Oman's industrial sector to the country's nominal gross domestic product (GDP) amounted to R05.360bn during the first nine months of 2023, according to the latest data released by the National Center for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

Within the industrial sector, manufacturing industries contributed R02.559bn to the sultanate's GDP in the first nine months of last year, while the construction sector contributed R01.750bn.

Oman's total nominal GDP stood at R031.416bn during the January - September 2023 period. The industrial sector accounted for around 17% of the total

R01.406bn by the end of Q3 2023, compared to R01.873bn recorded at the end of 2022.

Over past decades, Oman's government has shown a strong commitment to supporting the industrial sector exports through initiatives such as establishing industrial zones, enhancing port infrastructure, and promoting Omani products in international markets.

Competitiveness

As a result of the Omani government's concerted efforts to promote industrial growth, the sultanate's rank in industrial competitiveness has significantly improved in recent years.

In its latest report released in August 2023, the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) ranked Oman 56th globally

The significant 16-place rise in global rankings over just seven years underscores Oman's burgeoning industrial competitiveness



GDP during the first nine months of last year, according to the NCSI data.

Nonetheless, Oman's total non-oil exports in 2023 experienced a slight decline of 1.1% to R07.442bn. Notably, the industrial sector dominated Oman's non-oil exports, indicating robust growth in this segment.

Furthermore, foreign direct investment (FDI) in the manufacturing sector reached

and 5th among Arab nations for industrial competitiveness in 2023. This marks a substantial improvement from 72nd place in 2016.

The Competitive Industrial Performance (CIP) Index, which evaluates industrial competitiveness across more than 153 countries worldwide, attributed Oman's remarkable progress to its diversified industrial activities and increased volume of indus-

trial exports. This significant 16-place rise in global rankings over just seven years underscores Oman's burgeoning industrial competitiveness, according to the Ministry of Commerce, Industry, and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP).

This positive momentum is expected to continue, supported by the industrial strategy implemented by MoCIIP, which aims to stimulate the sector and enhance its contribution to GDP, thereby solidifying Oman's position as a global manufacturing hub.

According to MoCIIP, Oman's improved ranking in the index reflects the sultanate's steadfast commitment to enhancing the competitiveness of its industrial sector, driven by the execution of the Industrial Strategy 2040, the cornerstone of industrial development in Oman.

The ministry is actively formulating initiatives to improve industrial efficiency, promote the adoption of Fourth Industrial Revolution technologies in production processes, and empower local industries to compete in international markets.

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Omani Industry Day celebrations focus on AI, factory automation

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) recently celebrated Omani Industry Day in Sohar, under the theme 'Factory Automation and Artificial Intelligence'.

This year's Omani Industry Day celebrations emphasised the importance of the industrial

Industrial sector is of great importance for achieving comprehensive development in Oman, as the rest of the economic sectors revolve around it and integrate with it

H E DR SALEH BIN SAEED MASAN



sector as a main pillar of economic diversification and achieving the goals of Oman Vision 2040, in the context of the global shift towards the technologies of the Fourth Industrial Revolution. The celebrations mainly focused on the use artificial intelligence (AI) and automation in the industrial sector, particularly in factories.

The ceremony was attended by H E Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry, and Investment Promotion, and a number of excellencies and high-ranking officials.

H E Dr Saleh bin Saeed Masan, Undersecretary of MoCIIP for Commerce and Industry, delivered a speech in which he emphasised that the industrial sector is of great importance for achieving comprehensive development in Oman, as the rest of the economic sectors revolve around it and integrate with it.

H E Masan noted that the latest data issued by the National Center for Statistics and Information indicate that the output of the manufacturing sector amounted to RO2.454bn during the first nine months of 2023 at constant prices, and non-oil exports amounted to RO6.767bn until November 2023.

According to the Global Industrial Competitiveness Report, issued by the UN Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), Oman achieved a jump in its global ranking by about 16 places in just 7 years, and was ranked 56th globally out of 153 countries, reflecting the acceleration of industrial competitiveness over the past years.

The Omani Industry Day cel-

ebration ceremony included the inauguration of the National Product Identity Platform (Made in Oman), an electronic service platform to expedite the obtaining of a national product identity

license and certificate, and the use of the logo on Omani products.

By establishing the National Product Identity Platform, MoCIIP aims to utilise the

database of Omani products registered in it to guide various businesses and activities supporting local products and highlighting their quality and diversity.

During the ceremony, MoCIIP also signed four agreements with local companies to enhance the performance of the industrial sector.

On the sidelines of the ceremony, an accompanying exhibition was held in partnership between MoCIIP and the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) in the North Al Batinah Governorate, and included about 40 government and private entities to introduce services and products and present business and investment opportunities in Oman.



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Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman has made remarkable progress in developing its logistics and transport infrastructure over the years. The development and expansion of key sea-ports, coupled with the establishment of economic and free zones, have significantly expanded Oman's prospects as a leading logistics hub and play a vital role in diversifying its economy.

The sultanate's geographical location has proven to be a valuable asset for the country. Situated along major trade routes that connect Asia, Europe, and Africa, Oman has capitalised on this strategic advantage. Substantial investments in infrastructure, including ports, airports, roads, economic and free zones, and industrial estates, have cemented Oman's position as a leading logistics hub in the region.

Oman's strategic positioning and excellent logistics and transportation infrastructure have transformed the country into a gateway to some of the world's most significant and affluent markets and improved Oman's global logistics ranking.

Oman's logistical prowess is underscored by its ranking of 43rd out of 139 nations in the World Bank's 2023 Logistics Performance Index.

Moreover, Oman achieved a notable 12th place globally in the Agility Emerging Markets Logistics Index 2023. These rankings reflect its competitiveness based on logistics strength and business fundamentals.

Logistics strategy

Oman's Logistics Strategy 2040, which was launched in 2015, serves as a blueprint for the country's ambitions in the logistics sector. The strategy sets ambitious targets, including breaking into the top 10 of the World Bank's Logistics Performance Index, creating 300,000 jobs within the logistics sector, and contributing RO14bn (\$36.4bn) to the country's GDP by 2040.

This strategy aims to elevate the lo-

Logistics competitiveness set to drive Oman's economic growth

With Oman's economy projected to continue growing, transport and logistics are expected to remain one of the leading non-hydrocarbon sources of economic growth



gistics sector to become Oman's second-largest contributor to GDP after hydrocarbons. With Oman's economy projected to continue growing, transport and logistics are expected to remain one of the leading non-hydrocarbon sources of economic growth.

The Logistics Strategy 2040 also plans to create up to 300,000 jobs within the logistics industry. This initiative not only bolsters employment opportunities but also strengthens the sector's position as a major contributor to the nation's economy.

RO2.5bn investment by 2025

The Ministry of Transport, Communications, and Information Technology (MTCIT) last year launched an executive programme for Oman Logistics Centre for the period 2023 to 2025.

The programme's core objectives include economic diversification in trans-

portation and logistics, targeting a robust increase in investments to RO2.5bn by 2025.

Ambitious goals include boosting government revenue growth from the sector, achieving RO18mn in returns from land transport by 2025, and increasing employment opportunities in related sectors from 19% in 2023 to 21% in 2025.

H E Said bin Hamood al Mawali, Minister of Transport, Communications, and Information Technology, earlier highlighted the sector's rapid growth, noting its contribution to Oman's GDP in 2022 was approximately RO2bn. He envisions the logistics sector becoming the second-largest contributor to Oman's economy by 2040.

Asyad: The driving force

As a government company, Asyad Group plays a pivotal role in Oman's logistics landscape. Established in 2016, Asyad Group has been at the forefront of the nation's logistics transformation. Leveraging its status as the sultanate's flagship global integrated logistics provider, Asyad Group is actively working to connect Oman's ports and zones with the world.

In 2022, Asyad Group's efforts paid off as the major ports of Salalah, Sohar, and Duqm collectively achieved an impressive growth rate of 8%. They handled over 62.3mn tonnes of general cargo, representing a 10% increase compared to the previous year.

This success demonstrates the Asyad Group's commitment to developing a world-class integrated logistics network that adheres to the highest international standards of operational efficiency.

Oman's journey towards becoming a global logistics hub is marked by remarkable achievements and ambitious plans. Its strategic location, coupled with significant investments in infrastructure and a forward-looking Logistics Strategy 2040, has set the stage for unprecedented economic diversification and growth.

SILVER LYNX CO. LLC AWARDED AS OMAN'S BEST CUSTOM CLEARANCE FIRM FOR 2023



In a significant achievement for **Silver Lynx**, their custom brokerage company, registered with Oman Customs Authority under the name of Gulf Falcon Custom Clearance, has been honored as the Sultanate of Oman's best custom brokerage firm for the year 2023. This prestigious award stands as a testament to their dedication and excellence in the field of logistics and trade.

Expressing pride and gratitude, **Silver Lynx** announced this milestone achievement, extending sincere appreciation to their esteemed customers for their unwavering support and cooperation throughout the years.

Silver Lynx's vision is to become a global leader in the logistics industry, facilitating safe, damage-free, and time-bound delivery of shipments. They are committed to upholding core values that prioritize efficiency, reliability, and customer satisfaction across their range of services.

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Silver Lynx's land transport services are characterized by reliability and punctuality, with a fleet of vehicles available 24/7 to meet customer demands promptly.

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The recognition of Silver Lynx as Oman's best custom clearance firm for 2023 underscores their commitment to excellence and customer satisfaction in the logistics and trade industry. With a vision to lead on the global stage, Silver Lynx continues to uphold its core values while offering a comprehensive range of services aimed at facilitating seamless and efficient trade operations.

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