

Nama exploring renewables to power Musandam

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Nama Power and Water Procurement (Nama PWP), the state-owned company responsible for power and water procurement, is looking at renewable energy options for power generation in Musandam governorate. To meet the additional capacity required from 2028 onwards in Musandam, Nama PWP, in coordination with other stakeholders such as OETC and OQ, is exploring two alternative supply options. First is through international interconnection and the other through renewable energy options. 'Nama PWP is exploring several sites within Musandam region to develop wind and/or solar projects. Nama PWP will continue exploring and investigating the availability of sites and potential of wind and solar in the governorate,' it stated in its seven-year statement - 2023-2029. The company expects demand for electricity to increase in the governorate following steady growth in population in the coming years as well as driven by projects that aim to boost tourism, economic and commercial activities. Under expected demand forecast, peak demand is expected to grow from 80MW in 2022 to 104MW in 2029, an average increase of 4% per year, Nama



PWP stated. The low case scenario projects a growth rate of 2% for peak demand, increasing only to 95MW by 2029. The high case scenario assumes a larger growth of population as well as increased tourism, fishery activities and other developments. In this scenario, peak demand is projected to grow by an average of 6% per year to reach 119 MW in 2029. Nama PWP's present portfolio of contracted capacity for electricity generation in Musandam comprises Tanweer Diesel Plants and Musandam IPP. Tanweer owns and operates power stations that depend on diesel-fired generators. The Khasab plant has total installed capacity of about 80MW and an

other diesel plant in Dibba has capacity of about 12MW. The contract for Tanweer expires on December 31, 2026. Musandam IPP provides capacity of 123MW using reciprocating engines fuelled primarily by natural gas. 'Musandam IPP provides sufficient capacity to meet electrical energy requirements across all the low and expected case demand scenarios until 2026. It is not anticipated to require Tanweer diesel generators in Khasab and Dibba to meet the expected demand. Tanweer diesel generators will continue to be available to provide additional capacity or as a contingency resource if needed until the end of 2026,' Nama PWP stated.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE WITH PRIDE OF OMAN



A 4m X 6m portrait of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq painted by Abdulmajeed Mohammed Salim al Mamari, 30, from Liwa on a water tank in Sohar in a show of allegiance and pride (Supplied photo)

BEIJING RECORDS LONGEST COLD WAVE IN MODERN HISTORY

Beijing, China - Beijing recorded its longest cold wave since records began in 1951 as the biting temperatures and snowfall experienced in the Chinese capital and elsewhere began to ease. The temperature recorded at Beijing's Nanjiao weather station rose to above 0°C (32°F) for the first time in days, *Beijing Daily* reported. 'Since the temperature first dropped to below zero degrees on December 11, the temperature had remained below that line for more than 300 hours.'



55% of hospitalised elderly patients delirious: Study



Oman's real GDP grows 2.2% in Q3

SAF event showcases readiness to adopt advanced technologies

Our Correspondent
Muscat

H H Sayyid Shihab bin Tariq al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs, presided over the conclusion of a symposium titled 'Strengthening national readiness to deal with advanced technologies' on Monday. The symposium was organised by the Academy of Strategic and Defence Studies at the Al Shafaq Club of Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF). The symposium aimed to raise the sultanate's competitiveness and innovation indicators, assist in initiating employment opportunities in fields of future technologies, enhance environ-



mental sustainability, cut down greenhouse gas emissions, augment the efficiency of related institutions and accelerate digital transition plans. The symposium, which saw

ing flexible government policies and effective systems to realise the sultanate's objectives. H H Sayyid Shihab and attendees also toured an exhibition held on the sidelines of the symposium. It showcased models of Omani projects and companies operating in the field of advanced technologies. He was also briefed on the technologies and innovations presented in the exhibition. The closing ceremony of the symposium was attended by ministers, SAF commanders and other military and security departments, in addition to members of the State Council, top officials of government departments and specialists in the field of modern technology.



OIC welcomes UN roadmap for peace in Yemen

Jeddah, Saudi Arabia - The Secretariat General of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) welcomed a statement issued by Hans Grundberg, Special Envoy of United Nations Secretary-General for Yemen, to reach a roadmap for peace in Yemen. OIC's Secretariat General affirmed on Monday its continued support for Yemen and its people, and its keenness to encourage the Yemeni parties to engage in constructive dialogue to reach a comprehensive and lasting political solution under the auspices of the UN, which enables the Yemeni people to direct their efforts and capabilities towards security and stability, while advancing comprehensive and sustainable development in order to achieve their aspirations. The UN envoy had previously announced that the Yemeni parties had reached an agreement to adhere to a set of measures, including a nationwide ceasefire, explaining that the agreement also required the implementation of measures to improve living conditions and prepare for the resumption of a political process under the auspices of the UN.

ROHM cancels concerts in solidarity with Palestine

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Royal Opera House Muscat (ROHM) has cancelled all scheduled concerts for the 2023-24 season in solidarity with the Palestinian people. In a statement issued on Monday, ROHM said, 'In light of the ongoing events impacting the region, the Royal Opera House Muscat announces cancellation of all scheduled concerts for its 2023-24 artistic season in solidarity with the



Palestinian people. The season will resume with classical programmes only. 'A notable portion of the proceeds generated from these programmes will be dedicated to support the Palestinian people in coordination with Oman Charitable Organisation.' Meanwhile, Oman Charitable Organisation has announced that it collected donations amounting to more than RO582,000 as of Monday, December 24. The organisation noted that those interested can donate

via ONEIC payment machines and bank transfers - Bank Muscat 0423010869610013 and Oman Arab Bank 3101006200500. Donations can also be made through text message. Omantel subscribers can send 'donate' to 90022, Ooredoo subscribers 'Palestine' to 90909, and Renna subscribers can use the code *181*092#. OCO also informed that donations are possible via www.jood.om or its website www.oco.org.om

Royal Army of Oman to celebrate passing out of new batch of officers



Muscat - The Royal Army of Oman (RAO) will on Tuesday celebrate the passing out of a new batch of officer cadets, university officers and limited service officers.

The ceremony will be presided over by H H Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth.

As per custom, the new batch will perform a parade on the military parade grounds of Al Murtafaa Garrison (MAM) to demonstrate the skill they gained at the RAO under the patronage of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, the Supreme Commander. The RAO band will also present a variety of musical performances on the occasion.

Municipal Councils Symposium recommends effective approach

Our Correspondent Muscat

The two-day long Municipal Councils Symposium in the sultanate's capital Muscat ended on Monday with a number of recommendations for the better performance of the civic councils so that they can contribute in a more effective way to the country's transition to the next stage of development.

The symposium recommended the implementation of provisions of the Municipal Councils Law and the integration of efforts of the municipal councils, government departments and the private sector establishments.

The recommendations were made keeping in mind the vision of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to empower the civic councils so that they could better carry out their developmental and social roles.

The closing ceremony - held under the auspices of H E Sayyid Hamoud Faisal al Busaidi, Minister of the Interior - highlighted the significance of municipal councils' awareness



about the updates brought about by Oman Vision 2040.

It focused on linking the councils' legally defined functions with the objectives of Oman Vision 2040. In this context, special emphasis was laid on devising annual plans to secure sustained high performance.

The symposium called for espousing clear-cut criteria to

measure the performance of the municipal councils, bearing in mind the demographic and geographical differences between the governorates.

The symposium also suggested a review of the formation of municipal affairs committees in the wilayats to offer better opportunities to study their developmental needs.

A session titled 'Media Aspects of Municipal Councils' was held on the closing day of the symposium.

In addition, a panel discussion was held on the means of integrating the roles of municipal councils' members with the roles of the governors.

The inaugural day saw the launch of an electronic app 'Tannmia' - developed by the Ministry of Interior - that has been designed as a digital interface and a meeting platform for the municipal councils and members of the public.

The symposium was attended by several Royal family members, ministers and other senior government officials and governors.

Tender Announcement

Al Maha Petroleum Products Marketing Company SAOG invites Bidders to submit their proposal for the below detailed tender:

Tender No.	Description	Tender Fee (Nonrefundable) OMR	Tender Purchase deadline	Clarification deadline	Tender Submission Date	
T1	TENDER/2023/12/ENG/019	Tender-Construction Of New Filling Station And Commercial Buildings At Ruwi In Wilayat Muttrah In Muscat Governorate	200/-	01.01.2024	04.01.2024	10.01.2024
T2	TENDER/2023/12/ENG/020	Tender-Construction Of Commercial Buildings At Ruwi In Wilayat Muttrah In Muscat Governorate	100/-			
T3	TENDER/2023/12/ENG/021	Tender- Construction Of New Filling Station, Commercial Building, Carwash, And Atm At Amerat Atkiyah In Muscat Governoratea	200/-			
T4	TENDER/2023/12/ENG/022	Tender-Construction Of Commercial Building, Carwash And Atm At Amerat Atkiyah In Muscat Governorate	100/-			

Bank Name & Account Number

Bank Muscat (0423005687760617)

IMPORTANT NOTE: TO AVOID DUBICATED TENDER PURCHASES, PURHASING T1 DOSE NOT REQUIRE YOU TO PURCHASE T2, AND PURHASING T3 DOSE NOT REQUIRE YOU TO PURCHASE T4.

The Conditions:

- Collection of Tenders:** Interested, specialized companies and establishments registered under grade 3 and above (in C.R) with minimum of 3 years' experience in the same field. Bidders can collect the tender documents from the procurement department by sending a copy of the payment slip to procurement@almaha.com.om
- Bank Guarantee:** The bidder should enclose a bank guarantee issued by any bank in the Sultanate of Oman for an amount equivalent to (1%) of the tender value, with a validity of (90) Days from the last date of submission and addressed to Al Maha Petroleum Products Marketing Company SAOG.
- Offer Submission:** Tender bid should be submitted a sealed envelope and addressed to the **Chairman of Tender Committee**, Al Maha Petroleum Products Marketing SAOG marked with tender number and subject. Other marks or any reference must not be printed outside the envelope. The exterior of the envelope containing the tender document must not reveal the identity of the bidder.
- Submission Location:** The bid should be deposited in the tender box at Al Maha Petroleum Products Marketing SAOG head office located in Ghala before 01:00 PM on the submission date.
- Any bid received after the specified date or if it does not meet the conditions will not be considered.
- Each bid shall be signed and stamped with the signature of the authorized person.
- Al Maha Petroleum Products Marketing Co SAOG reserves the right to accept, reject or cancel the tender without giving any reasons.
- Al Maha Petroleum Products Marketing Co SAOG reserves the right to add or cancel some of the works mentioned in the tender if necessary.
- Al Maha Petroleum Products Marketing Co SAOG is not bound to accept the lowest bid or any other bid without giving any reasons.
- For any enquiry email us at (procurement@almaha.com.om) or by calling **24610289/24610287/24610355**

Forum focuses on investment prospects in North Sharqiyah



Our Correspondent Muscat

Oman Development Bank (ODB), in partnership with the North Sharqiyah governorate, on Monday organised a forum in Ibra to explore business opportunities for that region.

Christened as 'Development and Business Opportunities Forum', the event was sponsored by Mahmoud bin Yahya al Dhahli, Governor of North Sharqiyah.

Dhahli underscored the importance of the forum in presenting business opportunities and investment projects in various sectors. He noted that the working papers presented at the forum indicated a reasonable growth for the entrepreneurs and owners of small and medium en-

terprises in the governorate.

The forum sought to strengthen the partnership between institutions related to the development of small and medium enterprises, and owners of investment projects, in addition to presenting the financial and technical services provided by ODB to institutions.

The event witnessed the signing of many financial and investment agreements between various small and medium enterprises in North Sharqiyah with the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) for a number of projects in the industrial, tourism and agricultural sectors.

The Board of Directors of ODB gave a statement on the bank's financing programmes, which include a special product for job

seekers, in addition to those for the entrepreneurs, who own small and medium enterprises.

The bank took this opportunity to elaborate on its mission as one of the key facilitators in the country's efforts to achieve the developmental goals as set in Oman Vision 2040.

Hamad bin Salem al Harithi, Acting CEO of ODB, explained that the growth rate of loans granted by the bank during the last ten years was 67%, reaching up to RO10mn in 2022.

The size of the lending portfolio to finance various projects to be implemented in the governorate during the fiscal year 2024 has been increased by 15% to reach RO15mn.

The bank's short-term operational plan is to touch RO18mn in total, Harithi added.

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Panel for welfare of disabled holds meeting

Muscat - The National Committee for the Welfare of People with Disabilities on Monday held a meeting under the chairmanship of H E Dr Laila bint Ahmed al Najjar, Minister of Social Development.

The meeting reviewed the progress as being made during the lab of developing services and programmes for people with disabilities. The meeting highlighted the strategic approach and the executive position of the lab's activities. It also showcased the list of projects and initiatives resulting from the lab's works.

The work of this lab will continue until the end of December this year.

55% hospitalised elderly patients delirious

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Among the several research projects of the 10th National Research Award organised by the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, 'Delirium in Medically Hospitalised Patients: Prevalence, Recognition and Risk Factors - A Prospective Cohort Study' by Dr Rajaa Saleh al Farsi, Internal Medicine Resident from Oman Medical Specialty Board, won in the Health and Social Services field in the Young Researcher's category.

According to Dr Rajaa, delirium is defined as a sudden and fluctuating disturbance in mental function, characterised by an inability to pay attention, disorientation, an inability to think clearly,

and fluctuations in the level of alertness (awareness). It is usually the result of an organic disease, in addition to the presence of risk factors that increase the chance of having delirium.

She described the study as the first in the sultanate on delirium in elderly people hospitalised in internal medicine wards and one of the few studies done in the Middle East discussing this topic.

The research project aimed to assess the prevalence of delirium among elderly people hospitalised at Sultan Qaboos University Hospital as well as assess the risk factors that may increase the likelihood of its occurrence and evaluate its impact on short- and long-term health outcomes.

Dr Rajaa and her team included 327 patients aged 65



years or older, admitted in wards at Sultan Qaboos University. Patients were screened for delirium using Three-Minute Diagnostic Assessment for Delirium using the Confusion Assessment Method (3D-CAM). Risk factors and clinical outcomes

were assessed by interviewing patients, reviewing their medical records and following up by phone calls 90 days and one year after hospital discharge.

Dr Rajaa stated that the study showed prevalence of delirium among elderly patients admitted

to medical wards was more than 55%, with hypoactive delirium being the most common type. There are several actors that increase the risk of delirium, including the presence of prior cognitive impairment, poor functional status, an increase in the number of medications the patient takes, the presence of a urinary catheter, dehydration, and electrolyte imbalance. Moreover, delirium has a significant impact on short- and long-term health outcomes. It associated with increase mortality (all-cause mortality at 90 days - 25.4% vs 8.4% - and one year - 35.9% vs 16%) after hospital discharge, prolonged hospital admission and increased incidence of complications acquired from the patient's presence in the hospital,

including infection, bed sores and upper gastrointestinal bleeding.

Through the study, Dr Rajaa concluded that delirium is common among elderly patients hospitalised in general hospital wards and it is associated with serious clinical consequences. Early recognition, implementing effective preventive strategies for delirium, and developing geriatric wards are crucial. Further research is necessary to explore effective management strategies for delirium in general medical wards and to optimise patient care.

The research project was published in the 'Journal of Clinical Medicine' and the research team included Dr Abdullah Mohammed al Alawi, Juhaina Salim

al Maqbali, Dr Aisha Ramadhan al Huraizi, Dr Taif al Saadi, Dr Noof al Hamadani and Dr Khalfan al Zeedy, besides Dr Rajaa.

Regarding her National Research Award win, Dr Rajaa said, "Winning it is a tremendous achievement for me and my research group members. It is a validation of our hard work, dedication and passion for research. This award not only boosts our confidence as researchers but also opens new opportunities for collaboration and funding. It serves as a motivation for us to continue making significant contributions in our field. Overall, winning the National Research Award is a significant milestone in my career, and I am truly honoured and grateful for this recognition."

Omani documentary wins Best Screenplay Award in Tunisia

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Omani documentary film *Al Darrooj* - by director Dr Humaid bin Saeed al Amri - won the Best Screenplay Award at the fourth edition of the Cinemakna Days of Poetic Films festival held from December 20 to 23 in Tunisia.

Participants from 16 countries - Tunisia, Palestine, Oman, Libya, Mauritania, Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Morocco, Cuba, Rwanda, Pakistan, South Africa, Canada and Iran - took part in the festival.

Al Darrooj has had the honour of being the first Omani short narrative film to be screened at Sultan Qaboos Cultural Centre in the United States of America in 2022, the first Omani short narrative film to be shown at the Arab Film



Festival in Korea, and El Hanager Arts Centre in Cairo Opera House. The film has participated in more than 40 festivals around the world and won several international awards.

Amri praised the efforts of the organisers of the Cinemakna Days of Poetic Films festival and its jury, which had the difficult task of choosing the best from a

host of excellent entries.

"I congratulate my country, the Sultanate of Oman, and the Omani films that have a distinguished presence on the podium. I congratulate my crew who contributed to the success achieved by the film. Thank you, Tunisia and the filmmakers, intellectuals, poets and writers who appreciated the film," Amri added.

MHUP offers 421,000sqm of land for investments in agri projects

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning (MHUP) has earmarked over 421,000sqm of agricultural land in South Batinah for public auction in its efforts to engage the private sector in the country's economic progress.

MHUP, in cooperation with the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources (MAFWR), has announced the allotment of 421,078sqm of land for integrated agricultural projects.

According to an MAFWR official, the projects for which the land has been allocated include ten investment opportunities to grow mangoes, citrus fruits, figs, vegetables in greenhouses, and onion in South Batinah.



The ministry zeroed in on these projects following discussions at the Food Security Laboratory - recently conducted by MAFWR, with the participation of a number of relevant authorities - to diversify sources of food and enhance food security in line with the objectives of Oman Vision 2040.

"The ministry provides suitable land for investment to encourage private sector institutions and companies to take part in the country's growth process. The ministry urges them to implement projects that contribute to promoting food production and achieving good profits," the official pointed out.

These projects were chosen to increase the supply of local produce to markets not only in Oman, but also other parts of the GCC and beyond. This will also create job opportunities for citizens, the ministry official explained.

Talking about the ministry's current projects, he said, "MAFWR has initiated grape cultivation worth RO100,000 in the governorates of North Shariyah, Dakhliyah, Dhahirah, North Batinah, South Batinah and Dhofar to support farmers and achieve self-sufficiency in production of fruits."

The project aims to raise the agricultural sector's contribution to the gross domestic product, and provide business opportunities to small and medium enterprises.

TRA wins GCC Digital Government Award for community participation

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA) won the first place in the Digital Government Award for Gulf Cooperation Council countries in the category of Best Digital Community Participation for its Public Consultations project.

The award ceremony took place in the Saudi capital, Riyadh, in conjunction with the activities of the Digital Government Forum in its second edition in 2023.

The Public Consultations project aims to enhance communication and constructive dialogue between public, officials and decision-makers, through the process of collecting opinions and suggestions of the general public and stakeholders and presenting these to decision-makers for analysis and the final decision issued by the authority.



The award, which is organised every two years, aims to enhance the culture of excellence and innovation among government agencies in GCC countries, establish a culture of positive competition among these in the field of digital governance, and highlight successful experiences.

The award also aims to encourage institutions to integrate segments of society into decision-making and harmonise with the modernisation efforts of governments in the GCC.

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Rates as on December 25

Source: xe.com

BRIEFS

Saudi fund inaugurates Mauritania project

Saudi Fund for Development (SFD) has inaugurated of the Arkiz Agricultural Project in Mauritania.

The Saudi fund has contributed to financing this project through a development loan worth \$34mn.

The Arkiz Agricultural Project aims to enhance water and food security in the country and contribute to the development of key developmental sectors.

Through this project, approximately 6,700 hectares of agricultural land will be reclaimed, which will help raise the agricultural production capacity, and generate employment opportunities, the release said.

Oman's real GDP grows 2.2% in Q3

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman's real GDP – gross domestic product at constant prices – grew at an annual rate of 2.2% in the third quarter of 2023, according to data released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

The sultanate's real GDP reached RO9.388bn for the July-September quarter, compared to RO9.186bn recorded in the same period last year, as shown by the preliminary official data. Real GDP saw a slight contraction of 0.2% in the second quarter of 2023.

Non-hydrocarbon GDP grew at a rate of 3.9% in the third quarter, compared to a 0.9% contraction in hydrocarbon GDP. The growth of non-hydrocarbon GDP was primarily driven by robust activities in Oman's services sectors.

Within the hydrocarbon sector, oil activity recorded a decline of 2.7% to RO2.805bn in Q3 2023, while natural gas activity grew by 10.3% to RO506mn over the same period. Oman's oil production has slightly decreased this year on account of OPEC+ output cuts



Non-oil GDP grew at a rate of 3.9% in the third quarter, compared to 0.9% contraction in hydrocarbon GDP. The growth of non-oil GDP was primarily driven by robust activities in Oman's services sectors

agreement.

In non-hydrocarbon growth, overall industrial sector activities decreased by 2.6%, primarily due to declines in manufacturing (-7.8%) and construction (-10.7%) sectors.

Activities in the services sector, the largest contributor to

Oman's GDP, grew by 6.5% in the third quarter of 2023. Within the services sector, wholesale and retail trade grew 4.3%.

However, the third quarter GDP growth numbers are significantly lower than Oman's GDP growth in 2022 when the sultanate recorded a growth of

4.3% for the full year.

For the full year 2023, the government's estimates in January projected Oman's real GDP to grow by 5.5%, mainly due to an anticipated increase in oil and gas production. However, a slight decline in Oman's oil production this year has affected the growth numbers.

International institutions such as International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank and global credit rating agencies have estimated that Oman's 2023 economic growth will remain significantly lower than the previous year, mainly due to an expected decrease in oil output owing to an OPEC+ decision, of which Oman is a member.

The IMF recently said that Oman's economic outlook remains favourable. 'Supported by favorable oil prices and sustained reform momentum, Oman's economic recovery continues and inflation remains contained.'

'While growth is projected to slow down this year to 1.3% due to OPEC+-related oil production cuts, it is set to rebound starting in 2024, supported by higher hydrocarbon production and stronger non-hydrocarbon growth,' IMF said in a statement.



Seminar discusses GCC economic integration and diversification

Muscat – A two-day seminar hosted by the Ministry of Economy kicked off on Monday to explore economic and development integration in the GCC.

The seminar is titled "The Role of the Private Sector in Economic Diversification in GCC States". The opening ceremony

The event explored mechanisms of establishing a highly competitive private sector which can compete on the international arena

was held under the auspices of Dhafir Awad al Shanfari, Chairman of the Economic and Financial Committee at the State Council.

Moreover, the event explored mechanisms of establishing a highly competitive private sector in the region which can compete on the international arena. It also

highlighted the role of the private sector in realising the initiatives, projects and programmes of GCC economic integration.

All findings of the seminar will be submitted to the ministerial permanent preparatory committee of the GCC Economic and Development Affairs Authority. ONA

CBO issues treasury bills worth RO47mn

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Central Bank of Oman this week raised a total RO47.3mn on behalf of the sultanate's government via treasury bills.

The value of the allotted treasury bills amounted to RO30mn, for a maturity period of 28 days.

The average accepted price reached RO99.590 for every RO100 treasury bill, while the minimum accepted price also arrived at RO99.590. The average discount rate and the average yield reached 5.3446% and 5.3666%, respectively.

The value of the allotted treasury bills amounted to RO17.3mn, for a maturity period of 91 days. The average accepted price reached RO98.660 for every RO100 treasury bill, while the minimum accepted price arrived at RO98.660.

The average discount rate and the average yield reached 5.3747% and 5.4477%, respectively.



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

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

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

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

Buna platform reaches 105 Arab banks

Abu Dhaib, UAE – The Arab Monetary Fund (AMF) held its 209th executive board meeting, chaired by Dr Fahad Mohammed Alturki, AMF director-general and chairman of the board.

The meeting reviewed the fund's activities and its key efforts across various sectors during the fourth quarter of 2023 within its five-year strategy (2020-2025). The fund's efforts aimed to assist its Arab member states in facing economic and financial challenges on both regional and global levels, reinforcing its role as a closer partner to its member countries.

During the meeting, there was an update on the developments concerning the Arab Regional Payments Clearing

and Settlement Organisation (Buna payment platform). The number of banks connected to the platform has reached 105 banks.

Additionally, the meeting included a brief on the fund's lending plan for 2023, including new loans provided to member states and disbursements on existing loans aimed at supporting Arab countries in enhancing their economic, financial, and monetary conditions.

Furthermore, the board reviewed the fund's investment activity, including the acceptance of deposits from central banks and Arab monetary institutions, the performance of investment portfolios, developments in global financial markets, and measures taken

to advance the implementation of the fund's investment strategy.

The board was also informed about the Arab Monetary Fund's initiatives to develop the Arab financial and banking sectors, and capital markets, which are among its business priorities.

Notable activities in this context included organising the 2023 Forum on Central Bank Cross-Border Foreign Currency Operations, the 18th High-level meeting on financial stability and regulatory and supervisory priorities, and a workshop on 'Improving the Performance of Government-Owned Companies in Arab Countries'. WAM

Oil prices decrease in thin trading

Muscat – Crude oil prices declined on Monday during thin Christmas trade amid questions about unity among OPEC+ producers and concerns on Red Sea trading routes due to attacks from the Yemeni Houthi rebel group.

The international benchmark crude Brent traded at \$78.80 per barrel at 0659 GMT, a 0.45% decrease from the closing price of \$79.16 a barrel in the previous trading session on Friday.

The US benchmark, West Texas Intermediate (WTI), traded at the same time at \$73.49 per barrel, down 0.54% from Friday's close of \$73.89 per barrel.

The majority of global markets are closed on Monday due to the Christmas holiday break.

Last week, both benchmarks gained more than \$3 on average, with rising tensions in the Middle



East and transport bottlenecks in the Red Sea raising supply concerns.

In response to Israel's attacks on the blockaded Gaza Strip, the Houthi organisation declared that

any Israeli-flagged ship would be targeted.

The Red Sea is one of the most important trading routes in the world, as approximately 12% of global trade passes through the

Suez Canal.

Several international companies, including the Italian and Swiss-owned Mediterranean Shipping Company (MSC), Denmark-based shipper Maersk, German shipper Hapag-Lloyd, and France-based shipper CMA CGM, suspended all sailings in the Red Sea after security was compromised.

Following the British energy company BP's announcement that it would stop all tanker traffic in the Red Sea, concerns were raised that seaborne deliveries, which have so far mostly affected the transportation of goods, could expand to energy shipments.

Experts say the prolonged inability of the Suez to operate may pose economic threats for regional countries such as Egypt, whose economy is already fragile. Agencies

Saudi Arabia to establish aviation MRO giant

Jeddah, Saudi Arabia – The Public Investment Fund (PIF), Saudi Arabia's sovereign wealth fund, announced the signing of an agreement to invest in Saudia Technic, a subsidiary of Saudia Group.

Formerly known as Saudia Aerospace Engineering Industries, Saudia Technic has a long-established presence and rich legacy in Saudi Arabia, tracing its roots back to the 1960s. It provides services across key aviation maintenance, repair and overhaul segments (MRO), including line, base, components and engines.

PIF and Saudia Group will transform Saudia Technic into a national MRO champion by investing in infrastructure, boosting efficiency and capturing market growth in Saudi Arabia over the next decade. Saudia Technic's ambition is to become the MRO of choice for domestic airlines and global partners seeking access to the Saudi market.

The investment will support the development of an approximately 1mn sqm MRO village in Jeddah, including a state-of-the-art jet propulsion center that will expand Saudia Technic into the leading MRO in the Middle East.

The new MRO village will significantly increase hangar capacity and the number of component shops, successfully positioning Saudia Technic to capture Saudi Arabia's future market demand by unlocking scale and efficiency across line, base, engine, and component



MRO of choice for airlines and partners worldwide."

Saudi Arabia is firmly cementing its position as a global aviation hub. Stimulating new industry ecosystems and partnerships, PIF has already made significant investments in the sector. These include plans for King Salman International Airport in Riyadh, which aims to have capacity for 120mn travelers by 2030. Other initiatives include the launch of The

Saudia Technic will develop 1mn sqm MRO village in Jeddah, including a jet propulsion center that will expand Saudia Technic into the leading MRO in the Middle East

Helicopter Company which was created to enhance local connectivity and meet fast growing demand in Saudi; and AviLease, an aircraft leasing company designed to support the growth of the country's expanding aviation ecosystem.



Global shipping giant Maersk to resume operations in Red Sea

Istanbul, Turkey - Danish shipping giant Maersk announced that it will resume operations in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden after a multinational security initiative deployed its forces against Houthi attacks.

"The recent security situation around the Red Sea/Gulf of Aden has seen Maersk and other carriers pause, adjust and divert services away from the area in the interest of safety. Our utmost priority has been and always will be the safety of our seafarers as

well as your cargo on our vessels, and all contingency measures have been introduced with these in mind," it said in a statement.

"As of Sunday, we have received confirmation that the previously announced multi-national security initiative Operation Prosperity Guardian (OPG) has now been set up and deployed to allow maritime commerce to pass through the Red Sea/Gulf of Aden and once again return to using the Suez Canal as a gateway between Asia and Eu-

rope. This is most welcome news for the entire industry and indeed the functionality of global trade," the company added.

Yemen's Iran-backed Houthi rebel group has significantly stepped up its involvement in the conflict in the Gaza Strip.

The group has warned that it will attack all Israel-bound ships in the Red Sea, one of the world's most frequently used sea routes for oil and fuel shipments, in a bid to support Palestinians as they face Israel's aggression and siege

in Gaza.

The world's largest container companies suspended their operations in the region last week.

Following the Houthi attacks, the US announced the creation of a multinational mission last week to counter them.

In a statement, US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said the escalating attacks threatened the free flow of commerce, endangered innocent mariners, and violated international law.

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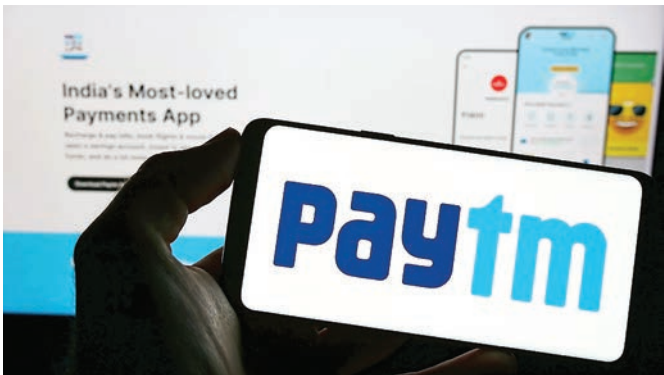
India's Paytm bets big on AI

New Delhi, India - Indian mobile payments pioneer Paytm has its eyes set on Artificial Intelligence (AI) to not just innovate faster but also streamline its workforce.

The company which introduced India to mobile payments, is building an India-scale AI system that will help various financial institutes in capturing possible risks and frauds, while also protecting them from new kinds of risks due to advancement in AI.

In doing so, the company is also optimising its workforce as it eliminates repetitive tasks, and encourages its employees to adapt to AI.

A Paytm Spokesperson said, "We are transforming our operations with AI-powered automation to drive efficiency, eliminating repetitive tasks and roles to drive efficiency across growth and costs, resulting in a slight reduction in our workforce in operations and marketing. We



will be able to save 10-15% in employee costs as AI has delivered more than we expected it to. Additionally, we constantly evaluate cases of non-performance throughout the year."

The company spokesperson further added, "Our core business of payment may see manpower increase by 15,000 more in the coming year. With a dominant position in the payments platform and a proven profitable business model, we will continue to innovate for India."

"In this, insurance and wealth

will be a logical expansion of our platform, in continuation of our focus on the existing businesses. Having shown the strength of our distribution-based business model in loan distribution, we are expanding the same to focus on new businesses to drive scale."

Paytm had reported operating profitability in early 2023, and is now gunning for EBITDA-level profitability. In July - September quarter of this year, Paytm's revenue from operations has seen a growth of 32% year-on-year.

ANI

Putin approves Rosbank's purchase of Societe Generale's Russian assets

Moscow, Russia – Russian President Vladimir Putin approved Rosbank's stake purchases in leading Russian companies owned by French bank Societe Generale that ceased operations in the country due to sanctions arising from the Russia-Ukraine war.

"Now, Rosbank will be able to buy back shares in a number of energy companies from its former owner, including Rosseti, RusHydro, Inter RAO, Gazprom and Gazprom Neft, Lukoil, Surgutneftegaz, Rosneft and Tatneft, Transneft, and Unipro," reported Russian news agency TASS on Sunday.

Also among the Russian companies are VTB Bank, Rostele-



Vladimir Putin

com, and Aeroflot; diamond mining company Alrosa; and steel and mining company Severstal, the agency reported.

The authorization granted to Rosbank encompasses the purchase of shares in Nor Nickel, gold producer Polyus, as well as several other companies.

Agencies



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- 7- Residential plot for the Wilayat of Bidiya/Al Wasel, total area 96,847 square meters
- 8- Residential/commercial building, with an area of 1,572 square meters, it includes hotel apartments and shops in wilayat bidyah
- 9- Residential/commercial shops, with an area of 1944 square meters, it includes a market consisting of 19 shops in wilayat bidyah
- 10- Residential/commercial Land with an area of 1044 square meters and an existing hotel in the Wilayat of Mahut/Haji
- 11- 4 industrial plots in Duqm, total area 30,000 square meters
- 12- One residential/commercial plot with an area of 900 square meters and a residential plot with an area of 594 square meters in Al-Qabil
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Ford Everest: A next-gen stunner

Make your journey remarkable with the capable and impressive 7-seater 4x4 SUV. Designed to make fine impressions, the Ford Everest is packed with impressive features, many of which are the best in its segment.

With capability at its core, the Ford Everest is engineered to take on tough tasks with ease. Inside, premium levels of craftsmanship have created a quiet and refined seats for up to seven, while class-leading technology and safety features offer driver and passengers comfort and peace of mind on every journey, a press release said. Everest's wider track and longer wheel-base enabled designers to create a more progressive, muscular appearance. Designers also put a lot of thought into the function and feel of the interior, taking inspiration from modern homes and bringing in plush materials, premium finishes and ambient lighting in areas customers will appreciate best.

The interior of the Everest is spacious. A full-width coast-to-coast instrument panel and centre console with dual cup-holder recesses, plus dash-mounted 'pop-out' cup-holders for front-seat occupants make the interior impressive. It is equipped with



integrated wireless charging and a svelte new leather trimmed e-Shiftter and an electric parking brake. Access to the third row is much easier thanks to second-row seats that slide further forward than before. Additionally, all occupants now have places to store their things and depending on the model, charge their devices with power outlets in all

three rows.

In addition to a more refined and comfortable interior, Ford focused on incorporating the latest connectivity and technology features into the Next-Gen Ford Everest. It comes with an 8-inch digital instrument panel that replaces the traditional analogue cluster, in addition to large, high-resolution portrait 10.1-inch or

best-in-class 12-inch touchscreens. Next-Gen Ford Everest is loaded with Ford's latest SYNC4 A system, which comes customer-ready with its voice-activated communications, entertainment, and information systems.

The portrait-orientated 12-inch screen is linked to a 360-degree camera with split-view

display to make parking a breeze in tight urban spaces or to assist when negotiating particularly tricky terrain while out exploring.

Powering the Ford Everest is a 2.3L EcoBoost Turbo petrol engine, mated to an efficient 10-speed SelectShift automatic which delivers Best-in-Class 296HP power and 420Nm of torque.

Ring in the New Year at Huqqa Dubai Mall

Huqqa Dubai Mall invites people to kickstart 2024 with a stunning New Year's Eve celebration and have an unforgettable experience.

The popular Turkish restaurant in the city has planned a spectacular end-of-year party for its guests. One can enjoy gorgeous views of the Dubai Fountain from the restaurant's terrace, it'll be the perfect way to start the New Year. A private promenade reserved exclusively for restaurant guests will offer a spectacular view of the Burj Khalifa fireworks show at midnight, a press release said.

Nestled in Dubai Mall's Fashion avenue, this casual dining haven will host an evening of jubilation featuring live DJ, violin and dance performances, delectable a la carte dining, signature mocktails, and panoramic views of the renowned Dubai Fountains and Dubai Mall fireworks, bidding a fond farewell to the old year.

As the Dubai Fountain provides a picturesque backdrop, guests can indulge in a sumptuous meal infused with Turkish



and international flavours, including dishes like Miso Chicken, Salkum Kofte, Lamb chops and an array of chef specialties.

For an enchanting evening, Huqqa Dubai Mall presents and exclusive limited access to a prime location near the fountain, ensuring an unobstructed view of the captivating fountain show and the iconic Burj Khalifa fireworks display.

42 Omanis get professional training at Infitech institute

The Infitech Training Institute, a subsidiary of Abraj Energy Services company, on Monday marked the passing out of 42 Omani technicians who completed training at the institute.

The year-long vocational training, funded by the Ministry of Labour, constituted part of the skill-development programme in the fields of electricity and mechanics within the sectors of oil and gas.

The passing-out ceremony was held under the auspices of H E Sayyid Salim bin Musallam al Busaidi, Undersecretary for Human Resources Development in the Ministry of Labour, at the Avani Muscat Hotel on Sunday.

This vocational training - the first of its kind in the Sultanate of Oman - ran for over 1,512 hours.

In a ground-breaking initiative, the Infitech Training Institute, a subsidiary of Abraj Energy Services, Oman's leading provider of oil and gas services, marked a momentous occasion with the graduation of a cohort of aspiring professionals from its one-year vocational programme in electricity and mechanics within the



oil and gas sector.

Speaking at the event, H E Busaidi expressed his pleasure and congratulations, acknowledging the graduates' readiness to contribute effectively to the workforce and commending the Infitech Training Institute for their dedicated efforts in preparing job seekers for the labour market.

He further emphasised that such professional training programmes are pivotal in empowering the nation's workforce, creating quality employment opportunities, and recognising the exceptional competence of Omani professionals across var-

ious sectors, particularly within the oil and gas sector.

Engineer Saif al Hamhami, CEO of Abraj Energy Services, said, "Today, we celebrate the graduation of this exceptional group from Oman's pioneering vocational training programme.

"Our commitment, embodied by the Infitech Training Institute, is to contribute to the development of highly qualified national professionals, aligned with the Ministry of Labour's Tenth Five-year Plan for 2021-2025 and in full alignment with Oman Vision 2040's objectives for the qualification and training of Omani talents," he added.

Al Seef Creek Festival lights up Dubai

Al Seef, the breathtaking lifestyle destination where Dubai's past meets its present, is making spir-its bright this winter season with the vivacious Al Seef Creek Festival, which brings great hustle and bustle to the waterfront.

The destination is putting on an ultra-special show featuring family entertainment, live performances, an old-world souk and artisanal market, and a jaw-dropping 39m high festive tree. Against the backdrop of the city's old town, cheerful performances, activities, and entertainment abound, a press release said.

Visitors are invited to witness the grandeur of the tallest festive tree in the Middle East, standing at an impressive 39m. This magnificent tree, adorned with over



30,000 ornaments and illuminated by more than 6,800 LED lights, lights up with dazzling decorations, brilliant baubles, and twinkling tinsels.

The world-renowned Anooki characters have arrived amid their world tour to captivate audiences. The larger-than-life inflatable installations have

charmed the world with their inspirational messages of friendship and protecting the environment. Drawing inspiration from their surroundings, the Anooki have turned Al Seef into their own magical playground, hanging off its buildings and playing with its iconic architecture to bring joy to all who visit.

Al Seef Creek Festival roars through the waterfront destination with cultural and educational activities, family entertainment, and exclusive dining and shopping offers. Enjoy live performances by talented artists and browse handicrafts, jewellery, fashion and homeware by grassroots businesses and home-grown artisans at an authentic Emirati souk and street market.

Rihal, OutSystems organise Technology Day

In a remarkable showcase of technological innovation, Rihal, a fast-growing Omani technology company, recently collaborated with OutSystems, a global leader in low-code application platforms, to host an inspiring Technology Day.

This event highlighted Out-

Systems' latest platform developments and the successful partnership between Rihal and OutSystems. The platform represents a major shift in application development, offering customisable, ready-made code solutions for rapid development - a stark contrast to traditional

coding methods.

Rihal has adopted this innovative approach to enhance its service delivery and offer its clients the latest technologies. "Our collaboration with OutSystems over the years has been a cornerstone of our strategy, enabling us to deliver exceptional value to our

clients through advanced technology," said Azzan al Kindi, CEO and co-founder of Rihal.

The event demonstrated how OutSystems' low-code platform streamlines the building of robust applications, a crucial advantage in today's fast-paced technological landscape.

Deloitte, Fintech Saudi launch Makken Programme to transform Saudi Arabia

Deloitte, the leading global professional services firm, is partnering with Fintech Saudi to foster the growth of emerging companies in Saudi Arabia's financial technology sector through the Makken Programme.

Saudi Fintech is an initiative by the Saudi Central Bank in collaboration with the Capital Market Authority, aiming to transform Saudi Arabia into an innovative fintech hub with a thriving and responsible fintech ecosystem, a press release said.

Makken, meaning empower, is a programme designed to support entrepreneurs and startups in Saudi Arabia's fintech industry through financial support and a comprehensive suite of services, including technology, cloud computing, cybersecurity, and more.



The programme was officially launched this week in Riyadh, in the presence of the Governor of the Central Bank of

Saudi Arabia (SAMA), Ayman Mohammed Alsayari, and Mohammed bin Abdullah el Kuwaiz, chairman of the Board

of Directors of the Capital Market Authority,

Mutasem Dajani, Deloitte Middle East CEO, said, "I am de-

lighted to have attended the launch of Makken, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's game changing fintech programme. We are

proud of Deloitte's partnership with the Saudi Central Bank and Capital Market Authority on this program, fuelling the growth of

this key sector in the Saudi economy and its ongoing transformation."

Participating FinTechs in the Makken Program will be hosted on Deloitte's industry leading, Cloud Managed Services driven by OpenCloud, providing relentless automation, cloud optimization and cybersecurity services for multi-cloud workloads.

Ali Hamid, Deloitte Middle East Partner, and Cloud Leader for the region said, "The Deloitte OpenCloud Platform will provide Saudi FinTechs with cloud infrastructure that enables rapid delivery to support secure, compliant, scalable and agile operations, allowing these startups to focus on building their innovate products and services, whilst Deloitte provides the managed services and cyber security controls."

Israeli forces detain 35 in West Bank

The arrests took place in cities of Nablus, Tulkarem, Ramallah, Bethlehem, Hebron and East Jerusalem

Ramallah, Palestinian Territories - Israeli forces detained 35 more Palestinians in the occupied West Bank on Monday, taking the tally of detainees in the occupied territory to 4,730 since October 7, according to prisoners' affairs groups.

The arrests took place in the cities of Nablus, Tulkarem, Ramallah, Bethlehem, Hebron and East Jerusalem, the Commission for Detainees and Ex-Prisoners' Affairs and the Palestinian Prisoner Society said in a joint statement. The figure of detainees does not include those arrested by Israeli forces in the Gaza Strip.

Meanwhile, harrowing testimonies have emerged on cases of torture by the Israeli military on Palestinian detainees from the Gaza Strip and West Bank, according to a joint statement by prisoners' affairs groups.

"The testimonies from recently released detainees in Gaza revealed gruesome details of torture and abuse by the occupying army upon them, with their bodies bearing signs of abuse," the statement said on Sunday.

The prisoners' society published a video showing an elderly man with bruises and wounds on his feet and wrists.

"Prisoner Nael al-Barghouti, 66, had been tortured during his transfer from Ofer Prison in western Ramallah, to Gilboa Prison in northern Israel," the press release said.

Al-Barghouti 'was brutally



Testimonies have emerged on cases of torture by the Israeli military on Palestinian detainees from the Gaza Strip and West Bank, said prisoners' affairs groups

beaten with batons and rifles and the assault on him and his fellow prisoners continued for three

consecutive hours'. The assault on the prisoners was focused on the chest and rib, resulting in

fractures and contusions, according to the statement.

Al-Barghouti was released in a 2011 exchange deal between Hamas and Israel, only to be re-arrested in 2014.

He was then re-sentenced to life imprisonment, serving a total of 44 years in Israeli prisons, making it the longest sentence among the prisoners.

As the world's attention is focused on Gaza, where Israeli attacks since the October 7 attack by Hamas have killed at least 20,424 Palestinians and led to a humanitarian catastrophe, violence in the occupied West Bank has grown. More than 300 Palestinians have been killed there by Israeli army fire and in attacks by illegal Jewish settlers since Octo-

ber 7, according to Palestinian figures.

'A new agreement'

Israeli officials said on Sunday that Egypt has proposed to both Tel Aviv and Hamas to move forward with a new agreement, involving the release of Israeli hostages held in Gaza.

"The Egyptian proposal is ex-

pected to be discussed on Monday during the meeting of the war cabinet," Israeli news website Walla quoted an unnamed senior Israeli official as saying.

"The proposal is initial and fresh but important and positive," the official said, claiming that 'Cairo has significant leverage over Hamas, which may help in the success of a proposal to release the Israeli hostages in Gaza'.

Egypt, along with Qatar, helped mediate a weeklong cease-fire in November in which Hamas freed over 100 hostages in exchange for Israel's release of 240 Palestinian prisoners. Hamas and other groups are still holding about 129 captives.

Hamas has repeatedly rejected any talks on exchange deal with Israel before a complete cease-fire in the Gaza Strip and the withdrawal of Israeli forces from the besieged enclave.

Airstrike on refugee camp

An Israeli airstrike on Al-Maghazi refugee camp in central Gaza has killed at least 70 people, a spokesman for the health ministry in the enclave said on Sunday.

Ashraf al-Qudra said what was happening at the Maghazi camp was a 'massacre' that was committed on a crowded residential block.

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Pope Francis

Pope voices concern over humanitarian situation in Gaza

London, UK - Pope Francis on Monday voiced concern over the humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip and prayed for an end to the war which is 'devastating the lives of people in Israel and Palestine'.

During his address at St. Peter's Basilica in the Vatican, the pontiff offered his consolation to the people of Gaza, the entire region and the Christian communities. The pope pleaded for 'an end to the military operations with their appalling harvest of innocent civilian victims' and called for 'a solution to the desperate humanitarian situation by an opening to the provision of humanitarian aid in Gaza'.

"How many innocents are being slaughtered in our world! In their mothers' wombs, in odysseys undertaken in desperation and in search of hope, in the lives of all those little ones whose childhood has been devastated by war. They are the little Jesuses of today," he said.

Saying that his 'heart grieves for the victims of the abominable attack' of October 7, Francis reiterated his 'urgent appeal for the liberation of those still being held hostage'. The pope also expressed his hope that sincere and persevering dialogue with strong political will and international support can lead to resolving the 'Palestinian question'.

Meanwhile, Christians in the

Gaza Strip attended midnight mass, a special religious service held at midnight on Christmas eve, at the Church of the Holy Family in the Latin Convent complex in the enclave's centre to commemorate the birth of Christ.

Christmas is observed annually on December 25 by Western churches and January 7 by Eastern churches.

However, this year's Christmas is marred by intense Israeli bombing, making midnight mass one of the most violent nights of Israel's war on the Gaza Strip.

Antoine Ayad, one of the participants in the special religious service, told Anadolu that the Christmas celebration this year is 'limited to religious rituals only'.

"Christmas is a joyous occasion for us, but this year is different. We are facing the worst humanitarian disaster, and we have martyrs, wounded, and church destruction as a result of Israeli (occupied) forces," he added.

"We lost martyrs in the church sanctuary after the Israeli army bombed the Church of St. Porphyry in the Zaytoun neighbourhood about two months ago," he explained.

"Sorrow fills our hearts, and we urge the world to help us overcome the horrors of this war," he appealed.

Anadolu Agency

Japanese ships change course in Red Sea

Istanbul, Turkey - Amid concerns of delayed cargo transfers, Japanese ships are changing course to avoid the Red Sea due to fear of possible attacks by Houthis.

Japanese shipping firms Nippon Yusen and Mitsui O.S.K. Lines have changed the course of their ships away from the Red Sea due to recent attacks on ships. Another firm Kawasaki Kisen Kaisha is also making similar changes.

The temporary measures for passage to and from Europe have been taken in view of the 'possibility that those with links to Israel may be targeted by the Houthis', Japanese broadcaster NHK reported on Monday.



Instead, Japanese ships are passing through the Cape of Good Hope in South Africa and shifting through North America.

The change in sea routes may cause delays in cargo shipments

as the Red Sea is the shortest passage between Asia and Europe through the Suez Canal - one of the world's most frequently used sea routes for oil and fuel shipments.

Iran-backed Houthis in Yemen have significantly stepped up their involvement in the current conflict in the Gaza Strip by targeting vessels in the southern Red Sea and the group

warned about attacking all Israel-bound ships. It said the attacks aim to support Palestinians as they face Israel's 'aggression and siege' in Gaza.

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'2023, one of the most difficult years for children'

Geneva, Switzerland - As dozens of conflicts have ruthlessly robbed tens of thousands of children of their future, 2023 will be remembered as 'one of the most difficult' years to be a child in, according to the United Nations Children's Fund (Unicef).

Another factor that made the year 'one of the most difficult' was insufficient funds for humanitarian actors, harming children in need of life-saving assistance, especially in ongoing conflict zones, as 'you cannot do more with less', said the Unicef's deputy executive director.

"I think 2023 has been one of the most difficult years for children worldwide. And I think the things that have struck me the most is, firstly, the horrendous, unprecedented violence that we've seen in Gaza," Ted Chaiban told Anadolu in an interview.

In Gaza, the proportion of children killed as a percentage of the total death toll is 'over 40 per cent', Chaiban said, adding that this is 'twice what we've seen in over 40 conflicts where we have this aggregated data'.



According to Unicef, insufficient funds for humanitarian actors is harming children in need of life-saving assistance

"It's something that's unprecedented we've seen, an indiscriminate level of violence in Gaza," he said. "And that's just absolutely horrendous."

This is a world where conflict

is profoundly affecting children, where climate is causing increased displacement, and where the humanitarian system is going to need to continue to be there to respond, Chaiban

stressed.

He added that the magnitude of the ongoing hostilities in Gaza is overshadowing the other ongoing hostilities which needed to be remembered.

"It's hard to think that the crises that were even before Gaza, you know, were a stain on our consciousness, and that's what's happened in Sudan," he said, noting that he worked in the country 20 years ago when the

Darfur crisis was at its height and what is occurring right now is a repeat of history.

"We're seeing children and their families that are being pulled out of their villages, forced to go across the border in Chad, in what is community-based targeted violence, essentially," he said.

Noting that this is not only happening throughout Darfur but the violence has spread to Kordofan and Khartoum, Chaiban said: "The whole country is being dislocated. We've got the largest child displacement in the world occurring as we speak in Sudan."

Then the world has an 'almost forgotten' crisis in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of Congo, where there is sexual and physical violence against children in a conflict that, frankly, has been going on since the 1990s, he said.

"How can something like that be forgotten?" he questioned.

Although 'every dollar counts', Chaiban said, Unicef's 2023 appeal for children was 'roughly 50 per cent funded'.

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Trump set for unprecedented 2024 campaign as legal jeopardy mounts

Washington, US - The past year has seen former US President Donald Trump's legal troubles intensify as his efforts to delay mounting trials have been met with varying degrees of success.

Trump now faces at least five major cases that include charges of election interference at the state and federal levels, hush money payments, mishandling classified US documents, and illegal business practices. At each juncture, his legal team has sought to draw out the proceedings by requesting procedural delays, or requesting timelines that would have deferred the trial's start, sometimes until well after the 2024 election in November. Trump remains the presumptive Republican nominee, holding a commanding lead over his partisan challengers in nationwide polling.

Republicans will kick off their primary season when they hold their first nominating contest in Iowa on January 15. That will include public gatherings, known as caucuses, where people will gather to discuss and vote on a candidate.

But Trump's legal jeopardy has set the stage for an unprecedented campaign season in which a leading candidate may not be best-known for their electioneering, but instead by winding courtroom intrigues that risk imprisonment.

Here is a look at the cases against the ex-commander-in-chief, and their implications for a likely unprecedented campaign season.



This file photo shows Donald Trump speaking in Columbia, South Carolina on August 5, 2023 (AFP)

Trump remains the presumptive Republican nominee, holding a commanding lead over his partisan challengers in nationwide polling

This is the only case against Trump that has gone to trial in 2023. The lawsuit was brought by New York Attorney General Letitia James. It centres on whether Trump overvalued his

properties to secure preferential loan terms from banks, while undervaluing them when reporting to state authorities to skirt taxes. Justice Arthur Engoron on Monday rejected Trump's effort

to have the case concluded with a verdict in his favour after prosecutors with James' office completed 11 weeks of arguments. At stake is the future of Trump's business empire in New York, where he turned his name into a national symbol of wealth and prosperity. Engoron has already found Trump, his sons, and his business liable for fraud. The trial is to determine whether Trump's business empire will be

dissolved, and to what extent they will have to pay financial penalties. "While the judge already ruled in our favour and found that Donald Trump engaged in years of significant fraud and unjustly enriched himself and his family, this trial revealed the full extent of that fraud - and the defendants' inability to disprove it," James said in a statement. As with the other cases

against him, Trump has denied wrongdoing, maintaining that the legal challenges against him are part of an orchestrated campaign of 'election interference', and a 'witch hunt'.

Trump's legal team did not request a jury trial, making Engoron the final decision-maker in a case that could lead to Trump being barred from running a business in New York state. Closing arguments are expected on January 11, with each side facing a January 5 deadline for filing their final briefs. Trump separately faces prosecution on 34 counts of falsifying business records in connection with hush money payments made to adult film star Stormy Daniels and Playboy model Karen McDougal. Both have alleged extramarital affairs with Trump.

The payments were made during Trump's first White House run, which began in 2015. Prosecutors have alleged that Trump attempted to conceal them by writing them down as retainer fees to Trump's former longtime attorney Michael Cohen. Those fees, prosecutors say, were actually reimbursements for Cohen paying off the women over the course of a year.

Cohen, who has fallen out with Trump, testified before the grand jury that brought the charges, and is expected to be the prosecution's star witness.

The case marked the first time an ex-president was criminally charged after leaving office. Each count carries a punishment of up to four years behind bars if

Trump is convicted.

His attorneys have since dropped efforts to have the case moved to federal court. A trial date has been set for March 25.

Meanwhile, Special Counsel Jack Smith is prosecuting two cases against Trump in federal court that centre on whether Trump criminally interfered in the 2020 election, as well as his handling of classified US documents after he left office in January 2021.

Trump's legal team has been trying to get the election interference case thrown out on claims of presidential immunity. The judge in the case, Tanya Chutkan, rejected the claim, prompting an appeal from Trump's legal team.

Smith, however, asked the Supreme Court to quickly take up the matter in an effort to preserve the looming March 4 trial date in Washington.

Chutkan has temporarily frozen the trial's start date, and all other deadlines, as the appeals over presidential immunity play out. The judge has acknowledged that the pause could affect the start of the trial.

The Supreme Court asked Trump's legal team to explain last week why they believe the court should not agree to take up the case ahead of a decision from the appellate court. In a Wednesday filing, they said it should not be fast-tracked because of its unprecedented nature against an ex-president, claiming Trump's actions amounted to 'official acts'.

Anadolu Agency

India's Jaishankar arrives in Russia for 4-day visit

Moscow, Russia - External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar arrived in Moscow on Monday for a four-day visit to Russia. Upon his arrival in Moscow, Jaishankar said he looked forward to his engagements in Russia. In a post shared on X, Jaishankar stated: "Arrived in Moscow. Look forward to my engagements."

Jaishankar is on a visit to Russia from December 25 to 29. During the visit, Jaishankar will meet with Russian Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Industry and Trade Denis Manturov to discuss matters related to economic engagement, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said in the press release. He will also meet his Russian counterpart, Sergey Lavrov.

In a press release, MEA said: "EAM will meet his counterpart, the Foreign Minister of Russia,



India's External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar (ANI)

Sergey Lavrov, for discussion on bilateral, multilateral and international issues." Jaishankar's visit to Russia will include engagements in Moscow and St Petersburg.

In the press release, MEA stated: "Focusing on the strong people-to-people and cultural ties between our two countries, EAM's programme will include

engagements in Moscow and in St Petersburg."

"The time-tested India-Russia partnership has remained stable and resilient and continues to be characterised by the spirit of the Special and Privileged Strategic Partnership," it added.

As per Indian figures, bilateral trade between India and Russia during April 2020-March 2021 amounted to US\$8.1bn, according to the Embassy of India in Russia. Indian exports amounted to US\$2.6bn, while imports from Russia amounted to US\$5.48bn.

As per Russian figures, bilateral trade between India and Russia amounted to US\$9.31bn, with Indian exports amounting to US\$3.48bn and imports amounting to US\$5.83bn, according to the Embassy of India in Russia.

ANI

Civilians in Ukraine's Chasiv Yar city struggle to survive in shelters

Donetsk, Ukraine - Civilians in the city of Chasiv Yar in Ukraine's eastern Donetsk region continue to live in shelters amid ongoing clashes between Russian and Ukrainian forces nearby.

Residents of the city, which is located only 7km (4.3 miles) from the frontline and is currently populated by approximately 800 people, are forced to spend most of the day in shelters due to Russian attacks in the area, thus serving as a reflection of the bitter face of war. "Only two families remain on the street where we live. There is no house left in the city that is not damaged. The situation in the city is difficult, but our army is keeping it alive," Nataliya, a resident who did not share her surname for security reasons, told Anadolu in an interview.

Expressing that most of the



People walk through a snowy street in Chasiv Yar, Ukraine on Sunday

residents spend their time at a warehouse or a shelter, Nataliya said she continues to live in Chasiv Yar with her husband Genna.

For his part, Genna told Anadolu that mostly retirees and elderly people continued to stay in the city, while most of the families took their children and

moved to safer areas.

"Sometimes the situation is calm, sometimes it is very active. It is not possible to predict what will happen in advance. There is no water, electricity, natural gas, nothing here," Genna said.

Genna thanked those who delivered basic needs such as food

and water to them, expressing that Nataliya and he decided to stay in Chasiv Yar because they had nowhere to go.

He added that evacuation procedures are still ongoing for those who want to leave the city.

Separately, Anatoliy, an 84-year-old resident of Chasiv Yar who lives alone in an apartment building damaged by attacks, told Anadolu that he is trying to survive in very difficult conditions. "The house is very cold. I installed the wood stove yesterday. The house is also very humid. I try to sleep by taking a few blankets at night," Anatoliy said.

He further said that the weather has become colder and it has become difficult to stay here because of the massive snowfall in the area.

Anadolu Agency

Woman activist calls for action against Taliban's ban on girls' education in Afghanistan

Kabul, Afghanistan - A woman activist in Afghanistan has come out openly against the Taliban's draconian policies, putting curbs on the education of girls in the country, Khaama Press reported, adding that she called for strict action against the ban.

Fatima Amiri, a survivor of the Kaaj Educational Centre attack and a staunch advocate for girls' education, criticised the suspension of scholarships for Afghan girls and requested that educational alternatives be considered rather than implementing prohibitive policies in the country.

Addressing a virtual conference on the education of girls in



Afghanistan, Amiri said that there should be a sustained fight against the ban.

She said that opposition to

girls' education derives from a gender apartheid that is continuing for decades, harming the development of hundreds or

millions, Khaama Press reported.

Significantly, Amiri was a part of the elite class at the Kaaj Educational Centre, which was tar-

Opposition to girls' education derives from a gender apartheid that is continuing for decades, harming the development of hundreds or millions

FATIMA AMIRI

geted by a terrorist attack in September 2022, killing over 60 students and seriously injuring her. She is presently receiving

therapy in Turkey. Fatima and her classmates, many of whom were also injured, sat the university entrance exam about a month after the attack, earning public attention with their university admissions. However, the Taliban forbade girls from pursuing further education. In December of the same year, Amiri was designated one of the BBC's 100 important and inspiring women, Khaama Press reported.

Fatima has time and again stressed that opening up possibilities for girls' education overseas is a priority and online education for girls should also be supported.

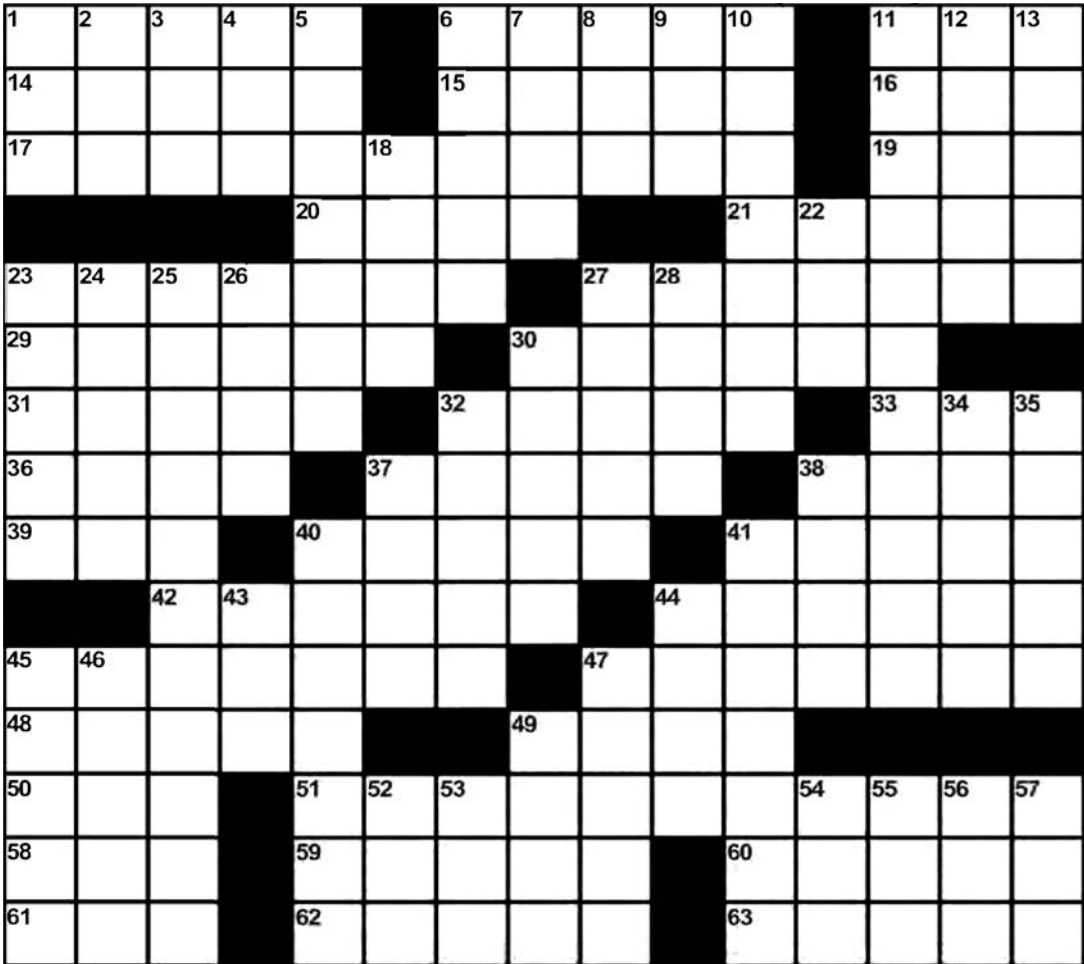
She posted on the social

media platform X that providing online classes for girls was another option, though not the primary one. Nonetheless, efforts should be made to guarantee that education does not come to a halt, she noted.

"The topic of discussion: Education of Afghan girls! In this emergency, many opportunities should be created for Afghan girls, not unlike many countries that have stopped giving scholarships to Afghan girls because they do not have the right to leave the country without Muharram, they should not suffer from both sides," she posted on X.

ANI

DAILY CROSSWORD



ACROSS

- 1) Killed, gangster-style
6) Montezuma, for one
11) Dashboard abbreviation
14) Key in Florida
15) _-cotta
16) "I can't believe my eyes!"
17) Prepare to stop crying
19) Charged particle
20) Bank heist units
21) Indian social class
23) _ oblongata (brain part)
27) Simple shelters
29) Humiliates
30) Martin with an Oscar
31) Easy wins
32) Audacity
33) Backstabber
36) First-rate
37) Ratty or flea-bitten
38) Booby trap component
39) Leave white tracks
40) Dude kin
41) Certain mast (var.)
42) Arrange tidily
44) Mum
45) Some socks
47) Vast frozen expanses

48) Runway figure

- 49) Andean land
50) Busy bother
51) Be seductive, in a way
58) Use a needle and thread
59) Come to mind
60) Spooky
61) Member of the family, often
62) Marina sight
63) All-out attack

DOWN

- 1) Way past voting age
2) Wide's partner
3) Swelter
4) Teamwork inhibitor
5) Computer attachments
6) Baffled on the Pacific?
7) Zorro's marks
8) "Don't give up!"
9) Before, in poetry
10) Rush down in vast quantities
11) Certain skin cream
12) Quick snap
13) Fine-tunes
18) Slithering sea creatures
22) "Santa" tail

23) Convenient places to

- shop
24) Digital novel
25) Discouraging or dissuading
26) They often deliver good news
27) The "L" of XL
28) Jealousy
30) He's there late in Red Square
32) Directory contents
34) "Gladiator" setting
35) Army shelters
37) Bit of dust
38) Uncontrolled
40) Bedroom separator, often
41) Some simple math signs
43) CBS logo
44) "Certainly!"
45) Accumulate
46) Event with lots of bucks
47) Article of faith
49) Fancy-schmancy
52) Victorian, for one
53) First syllable of a simple game

54) Hawaiian giveaway

55) Anger

56) County fair animal

57) "Comprende?"

NOTE PAD



YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE



ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

Try not to let your focus on future adventures or travel plans keep you from getting the job done right today. You have to try to stay focused on the present and live this day conscientiously. Too many people are depending on you right now, and you are capable of blowing their expectations out of the water. One way to get your mind more focused on the here and now is by promising yourself that you can have an hour or two of time to goof off later in the afternoon.



LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

You might be in a new situation right now, and it's very exciting. But you are still learning the ins and outs of what you need to do and what you can expect, so try to be patient with yourself. Understand that it may take more time than you thought to get totally comfortable with this new aspect of your life. Rushing through the process is only going to frustrate you and deprive you of a valuable journey. You're getting a chance to know yourself in a whole new way. Savor it.



SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

It's a good day to hang out with your friends and just be together. Right now it's easier to have a good time when you are not trying so hard. So skip the party planning and get right to the party! Call up a few folks and tell them to meet you at a certain place at a certain time, then see what happens. There is so much creativity swarming around your group of friends that you guys are sure to cook up some fun without any trouble whatsoever.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE



TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

You can reach an important compromise in a power struggle with an authority figure if you follow the path of least resistance. But this isn't the same as giving in to them. You will soon see that your goals can align if you simply make a slight modification. Besides, making this small detour could put you in the right place at the right time for something even better. Being more flexible and adopting a more long-term vision will put you in a better position to negotiate in the future.



VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

This is going to feel like a long, slow day, but it is also a day that offers you plenty of time to experiment with new ways of reorganizing your stuff. Doing things in a different way might put off the people who think they know you inside and out, but don't let that stop you. When you're trying to figure out who you are, you cannot be held back by who other people think you are. You have to forge your own way in life, so why not start now?



CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

You'll be in the mood to mix things up today, which is healthy. Changing your approach or style every now and then is a good idea. Just be sure not to stray too far from your usual routines or else you will get too preoccupied with managing people's reactions. Shop at the same places for your outfits, but pick out some new colors you don't usually wear. Change is good, but it shouldn't come too abruptly right now. You should always stay true to who you are.



AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

Someone who has been trying to get to know you a little better is going to make a major overture today, so be ready to receive increased amounts of their attention. They won't accept shallow small talk from you this time. They want to know what you really want out of life and what you want out of the people in your life. You may be sidetracked by their questions, but that doesn't matter. You should give them all the energy you can right now



PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

There is a lot of divergent energy around you right now, and it could be hard for you to focus today. At work, making decisions that affect other people could be difficult and confusing, so it's best to hold off on those until another day (or ask someone else to do it for you). In your social life, you could loose concentration when a special someone is talking to you and miss out on an important revelation! Get used to asking for people to repeat things or explain things one more time.



GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

It's been difficult to muster up support for the way someone you care about has radically changed. Their life is different, but it doesn't look like much of an improvement from where you're standing. If you don't believe they are moving in the right direction, or you are having trouble accepting who they've become, you should address it today. Decide once and for all if you are going to give your unsolicited advice, or if you are just going to let them keep going down this path.



LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

Communication will be fun but a little bit complicated today. A culture clash could occur when you are trying to talk to someone from an extremely different background. The two of you might waste a lot of time talking to each other instead of listening to each other. Don't miss out on the chance to stir up some inspiring and energizing ideas that could perk up your creativity and get you motivated to make a change in your life. This person is someone you should work to understand



CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

Dreaming about making a change in your life is nice, but unless you actually do it, you are just wasting time and fooling yourself. Imagining how things could be different is a fun way to stay flexible and open-minded, but if all you do is think about changes all day long, you're never going to make any. Action is required to bring dreams to life, so it's time to roll up your sleeves and get to work. People can help if you let them in on your plans.



SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

A frustrating person who usually makes you cringe could actually make you think today. They have radical views that can be hard to swallow, but there is some brilliance in them, a fact you will finally start to see more clearly. You might surprise yourself by coming to this person's defense, but you won't be surprising them. Despite the semi-adversarial nature of your relationship, they always knew you would recognize a good idea when you heard it.

01. In the 1960s, how many African countries became independent from the UK and joined the "Commonwealth of Nations"?

A. 20
B. 13
C. 5
D. 1

02. British television journalist, producer and presenter Michael who, has made and/or fronted multiple science, medical and medical history TV programmes?

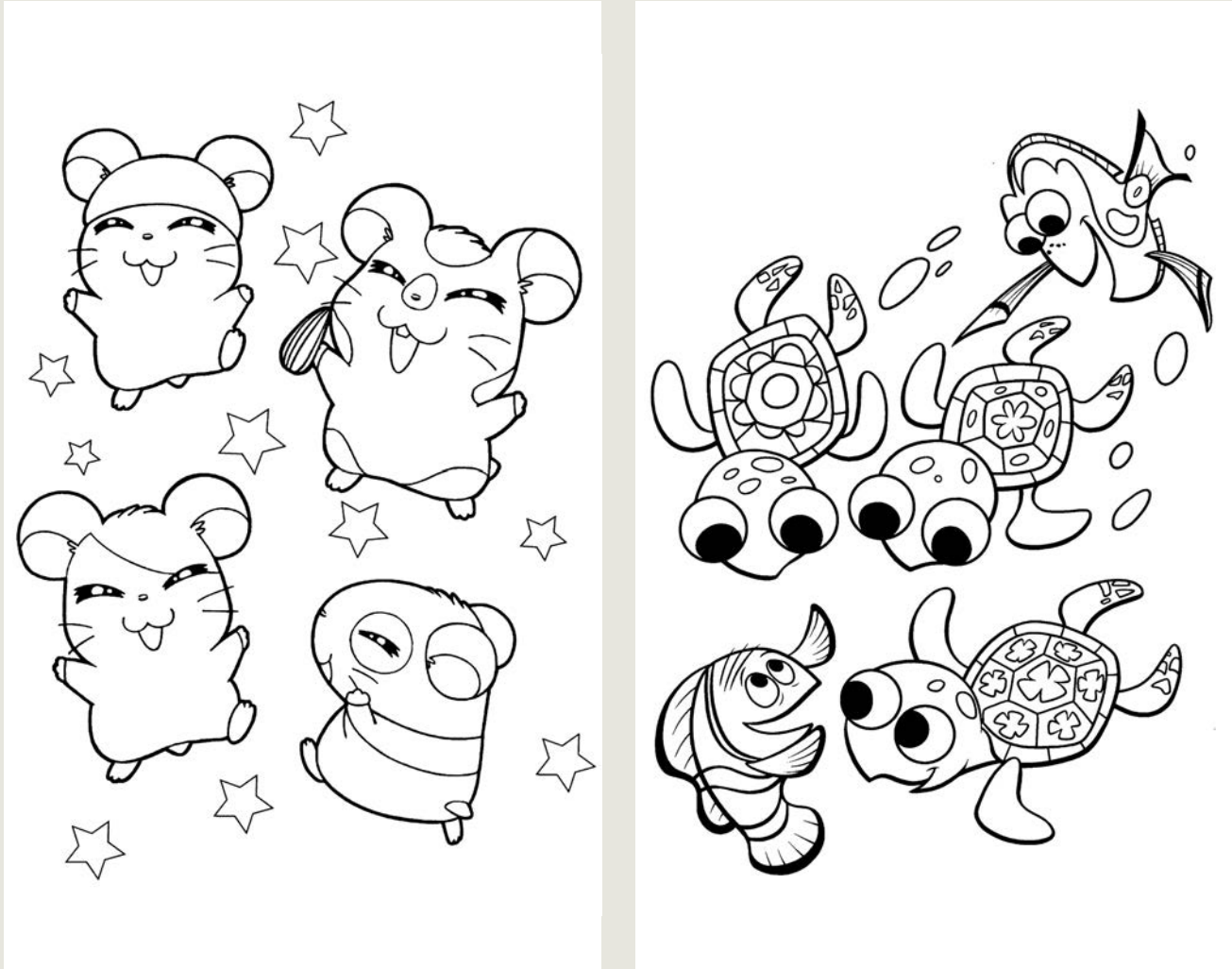
A. Mosley
B. Kitchen
C. Phelps
D. Flatley

03. In which sea is the British overseas territory of Montserrat?

A. Aegean
B. Caribbean
C. South China
D. Caspian

Answers: 1.B 2.A 3.B

KIDS COLOURING



BOGGLER

S	S	E	O
M	E	C	N
S	B	Y	G
K	M	A	E

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

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

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

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



Mohammad Rizwan

Rizwan replaces Sarfaraz for Boxing Day Test

Melbourne, Australia - The burning question of what Pakistan do with their wicket-keeping conundrum on Boxing Day has finally been addressed, with Mohammad Rizwan replacing Sarfaraz Ahmed for the second Test in Melbourne.

It follows a difficult Perth Test for Sarfaraz, particularly with the bat, after he scored seven runs across both innings, struggling particularly against Mitchell Starc's pace. It's one of at least three changes Pakistan will make for the second Test at the MCG after they named a 12-man squad, which will be cut to 11 on match day.

Khurram Shahzad has been ruled out of the series while allrounder Faheem Ashraf will also miss out after a poor Test with bat and ball, with Pakistan to take a final call on the sort of combination they play with.

There is a possibility, however faint, that the visitors line up with another all-seam attack, which leaves Sajid Khan, named in the 12, out.

That, however, is believed to be a remote possibility, with Sajid and one of Hasan Ali and

Mir Hamza getting the nod considered much more probable. Mohammad Wasim Jnr was not part of the trimmed squad, so the pace bowling debate comes down to Hasan and Hamza.

However, it is Sarfaraz's omission that remains the

Khurram Shahzad has been ruled out of the series while allrounder Faheem Ashraf will also miss out

most significant. His inclusion for the first Test received significant scrutiny because of his historical record in Australia and on similar, bouncy surfaces, only exacerbated by how the Perth Test went.

At the time, Pakistan team director and coach Mohammad Hafeez pushed back against suggestions playing Sarfaraz was a mistake, saying it wasn't right to label Sarfaraz as "someone who can only perform in a limited set of conditions".

ESPNCricinfo

'Rahul keen on giving wicketkeeping a go'

Coach Dravid says it will be an exciting challenge for the batsman

Pretoria, South Africa - KL Rahul has started only one first-class match as the designated wicket-keeper, but that doesn't seem like it will hold India back from playing him as a wicketkeeper in the two-Test series in South Africa. Two days before the first Test in Centurion, coach Rahul Dravid spoke at length about the challenge for Rahul but also the opportunities it opens up for both Rahul, who will be making a Test comeback, and India.

"I see it as an exciting challenge and an opportunity for him to certainly do something different," Dravid said. "With Ishan [Kishan] not being available, the opportunity came up. We have a couple of keepers we can choose from. Rahul is certainly one. We have had this discussion with him, we've discussed this with him. You know, he is very confident, he is very keen on giving it a go. We do understand that it's probably something he has not done as often. He has been doing it regularly in 50-overs cricket. So



KL Rahul (L) with Rahul Dravid

that's certainly tough, you know, to play 50 overs and then bat as well in a full day. That can take a lot out of your body.

"So he has prepared well, I must say, over the last five, six months. He has done a lot of

keeping, even though it's in the white-ball format. But this will be a new and exciting challenge for him as well. I guess one of the things here is that if anything there is not going to be that much of spin bowling. Probably

more pace bowling here than there is spin, so it will ease him into that role a little bit if anything.

"It's something that we will see how it goes and how it pans out, but it's really nice to have someone like him and the op-

tions that he provides us. Just having his ability with the bat would be something that would be really useful. And let's see how he goes with the gloves. I mean, he has kept really well in one-day cricket. So just a question of now transferring that into red-ball cricket for longer."

The window has opened up for Rahul, who scored a century as an opener on India's last tour of South Africa, in the absence of the injured Rishabh Pant, who scored one in the middle order himself. India are conscious their keeper contribute with the bat.

"For us, the big challenge is if we can really put some runs on the board and score those critical, extra 60-70 runs that gives you a great chance. If I go back to the last series that I was here, the one thing we did here [in the first Test] really well was we had a really good first innings. We had a really good first day and got to 327 in the first innings. If you can put up those kinds of scores on challenging wickets, you put yourself ahead in a Test match. But in the next two Test matches, I just felt in our third innings, we could not score those 50, 60 extra runs. You know, we just felt short and they bowled well."

Since the last trip, India have seen the introduction of more attacking batters. Dravid said they weren't asking the young batters to alter the game but to be aware of match situations.

ESPNCricinfo

Muscat CT defeat Yalla Shabab, AER beat Orient Travels

Muscat - Muscat CT defeated Yalla Shabab in a low-scoring thriller in the Premier Division League 2023-24 powered by Muscat Pharmacy LLC at the Oman Cricket Academy Turf 1 on Saturday.

Yalla Shabab started brightly as Bilal Khan and Kaleemullah exploited the conditions to pick four Muscat CT wickets for nine runs. Though Shoib Khan and Suraj Kumar tried stitching a partnership Muscat CT only managed a

paltry 111. Bilal Khan and Mujibur Ali picked three wickets each.

But in response, Afriedh KT and Samay Shrivastav picked four wickets each to bundle out Yalla Shabab for a mere 67. Muscat CT are unbeaten in the league.

Earlier on Friday, AER beat Orient Travels in the A Division League.

AER got off to a terrible start losing five wickets cheaply before Syed Amir Ali came to their res-



Syed Amir Ali

cue with a blistering run-a-ball 113 to help them post a healthy 233.

Ibrar Hussain picked five wickets. In response, Sajith Fernando and Ibrar Hussain looked to dominate AER's bowling attack, but they fell short by 57 runs.

Syed Amir Ali, Muhd Ihtesham and Amandeep Singh picked two wickets each while Akbar Ali claimed three. AER's third win of the league have saved them from relegation.

BRIEF SCORES :

Muscat CT 111/10 in 39.2 overs (Suraj Kumar 26(47); Mujibur Ali 3/23) beat Yalla Shabab 67/10 in 21.3 overs (Mohd Naseem 22(21); Samay Shrivastav 4/4, Afriedh KT 4/26)

AER 233/9 in 50 overs (Syed Amir Ali 113(113); Ibrar Hussain 5/39) beat Orient Travels 176/10 in 35.1 overs (Ibrar Hussain 88(73); Akbar Ali 3/19) by 57 runs.

CLASSIFIEDS

BIRTHDAY WISHES



RAJA

Happy Birthday Mr Raja,
Thank you for leading us and guiding us
throughtout our journey here.
Wishing you a long life of
good health, wealth and happiness
Best wishes from Vilas Sarkil

BIRTHDAY WISHES



DEBORAH ANKITA

As you turn 13, remember that you have
the power to make a difference in the
world. Let your kindness and compassion
inspire others. May you forever sparkle
and shine like the star that you are.
Happy Birthday our princess!
With love, Mom & Dad

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mai alkaline

pH 9.1 to 9.5

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- ✓ Revitalizing
- ✓ Energizing
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WOLVES ADD TO BLUES WOES

Lemina and Doherty score as Chelsea beaten again

Wolverhampton, England - Wolves secured a piece of history by winning only the second Premier League match on Christmas Eve, beating Chelsea 2-1 to move level on points with their visitors.

An end-to-end encounter was settled by second-half goals from Mario Lemina and Matt Doherty, condemning Chelsea to a third defeat in four Premier League matches. Christopher Nkunku scored his first goal for the Blues in stoppage time, but there was to be no equaliser.

Wolves made two changes following their 3-0 defeat at West Ham United last time out, with goalkeeper Jose Sa and Rayan Ait-Nouri returning in defence.

Chelsea head coach Mauricio Pochettino also shuffled his pack, recalling Lesley Ugochukwu, Malo Gusto and Armando Broja to his starting XI.

The away side started much brighter, making most of the running in the opening exchanges. Inside the first 10 minutes, Chelsea had their first real sight of goal as Raheem Sterling played in Nicolas Jackson - but just as Jackson was about to shoot at



Wolves players celebrate their goal against Chelsea on Sunday

goal, Nelson Semedo stole the ball off his toe to enable Wolves to clear the danger.

On 26 minutes, Sterling again caused alarm in the Wolves defence. Picking up possession at the halfway line, he spun into space and drove towards goal, only to be brought down by Lemina inches outside the Wolves' penalty area. The England forward picked himself up and lined up the free-kick himself - before firing it high and wide of Sa's goal. Five minutes later, Sterling was presented with the best chance of the match so far. Sa's pass left Joao Gomes with little room or

time to manoeuvre. Sterling pounced to steal the all away and find himself clean through on goal - but the Wolves 'keeper atoned for his hurried pass, producing a fine save to deny Sterling one-on-one.

The home side had been largely outplayed for the majority

of the opening half, but did produce their best spell as the interval approached - without creating anything clear-cut enough to threaten Djordje Petrovic in the Chelsea goal.

There was time for one more chance for Chelsea before the break, with more sloppy defend-

ing from the Wolves defence allowing the ball to break to Cole Palmer - but the Blues midfielder saw his shot deflected over the crossbar as the teams went in level at half-time.

Three minutes into the second half, Petrovic made a fine stop to deny Toti Gomes's close-range header. Wolves had been quicker out of the blocks in the second period and in the 51st minute they took the lead.

Pablo Sarabia delivered a corner from the right and Lemina guided a deft header past Petrovic into the corner of the net to send the home fans into raptures.

Wolves were now on top and their visitors were reeling. There were shouts for a penalty, which came to nothing, after Hwang Hee-chan was pulled back in the Chelsea area, before Lemina threatened again with a shot from distance that stung the palms of Petrovic.

Having started the second period on the back foot, Chelsea began to find their rhythm. Toti Gomes reacted well to clear Gusto's shot off the line. Moments later, the Blues worked the ball across the penalty area from left to right. It dropped to Sterling, but he was denied again - this time by a lunging block from Craig Dawson.

As Chelsea pushed for the equaliser they started to leave space for Wolves to exploit. In the 81st minute Petrovic made another good save, this time diving at waist height to his left to stop Tommy Doyle's powerful shot. In the third of 11 minutes of stoppage time, substitute Doherty doubled Wolves' lead, slotting home after the ball deflected into his path off Benoit Badia-shile's heel.

It looked like game over, but there was still time for Nkunku to score his first Chelsea goal, via a pinpoint 97th minute header, to set up a tense finale.

But Wolves held on for a valuable win.



Jim Ratcliffe

Ratcliffe to acquire 25 per cent stake in Man Utd

Manchester, England - Manchester United have reached an agreement for Sir Jim Ratcliffe, chairman of INEOS, to acquire a shareholding of up to 25 per cent of the club.

A statement on the club's website confirmed that Ratcliffe will acquire 25 per cent of the club's Class B shares, up to 25 per cent of its Class A shares, and will provide an initial \$300million to enable future investment into Old Trafford. The statement said: "As part of the transaction, INEOS has accepted a request by the Board to be delegated responsibility for the management of the Club's football operations.

Man Utd Executive Co-Chairmen and Directors, Avram Glazer and Joel Glazer, said: "As part of the strategic review we announced in November 2022, we committed to look at a variety of alternatives to help enhance Manchester United, with a focus on delivering success for our men's, women's and Academy teams.

Chelsea coach Pochettino rues missed chances in defeat

Wolverhampton, England - Chelsea manager Mauricio Pochettino lamented his side's profligacy after they were stunned 2-1 by Wolverhampton Wanderers on Sunday, despite dominating the first half and squandering a golden opportunity through Raheem Sterling.

The misses proved costly as Mario Lemina headed home a corner to give Wolves the lead before Matt Doherty sealed the win in stoppage time. The defeat leaves Chelsea languishing in the middle of the table, while Wolves cling on to their hopes of escaping the relegation zone.

"We made a mistake, we need to blame ourselves. That's why we didn't win today, because in the first half we had the chances to score," Pochettino told reporters.

"In the Premier League if you're not clinical enough when you have chances, always you



Mauricio Pochettino

can concede. We didn't compete in the first five minutes of the second half, we conceded too many corners. In these moments it's about competing better and being stronger.

I agree we're our own enemy. I don't want to take credit away from Wolves

MAURICIO POCHETTINO

"I agree we're our own enemy. I don't want to take credit away from Wolves. They scored and they did their job. But in the first half we were the better side. And because of lack of capacity to score, we didn't win the game."

Chelsea, 10th in the standings, next host Crystal Palace on Wednesday.

Liverpool need luck as they battle injuries, says Klopp

Liverpool, England - Liverpool are praying defender Joe Gomez does not become yet another addition to the snowballing injury crisis at the Premier League club, manager Juergen Klopp said.

Liverpool's Kostas Tsimikas sustained a broken collarbone in their 1-1 draw with Arsenal on Saturday, leaving the Merseyside outfit with few options at left back, with first-choice defender Andy Robertson also sidelined due to a shoulder injury.

Gomez, who is right-footed, is likely to fill in at left back until Robertson returns.

"It is for us obviously really tough, it's really tough. You have injuries sometimes and we accept all of them, but a broken collarbone is really bad because it just takes (so) long," Klopp told reporters ahead of Tuesday's clash against Burnley at Turf Moor.

"Same what Robbo (Robert-



Juergen Klopp

son) had, a different injury but that takes long as well, how we all know.

"We all know we need luck in these moments to get through and now we will have Joey (Gomez) there and just have to make sure we put him in cotton wool and we have to make sure he is always ready for the games."

Liverpool, second in the standings, next face 19th-placed Burnley, who beat Fulham 2-0 in their last league match to move off the bottom of the table.

Klopp said he believes Burnley are better than their results show. "I have watched quite a few Burnley games and I am pretty impressed by what they are doing."

Online abuse of athletes increased at 2023 World Championships, says study

Monaco - More than half the online abuse of athletes at this year's World Athletics Championships in Budapest was of a racist or sexualised nature, according to a report published by World Athletics last Friday.

Building on the past two years of implementing greater safeguarding measures in athletics, 449,209 posts and comments were analysed between 18-28 August for abusive content in 16 different languages and additional dialects, protecting 1344 athletes with 1666 active ac-

counts across both platforms.

This included text analysis, through searches for slurs and other phrases (including emojis) that could indicate abuse. Image recognition tools were also deployed to flag potentially offensive images. These findings were then compared to results from the previous study, conducted a year earlier at the World Athletics Championships Oregon22.

The research identified clear instances of online abuse and threats, targeting athletes competing at the World Athletics



New research identified clear instances of online abuse and threats targeting athletes at Budapest Worlds

Championships Budapest 23. It detected notable examples of racist and sexualised abuse, with a selection of posts extending into potential action from law enforcement.

The study also said that social media platform X, formerly Twitter, was the preferred channel for abusers, with almost 90% of detected abuse - a 500 per cent relative increase compared to 2022.

"Athletes should not have to accept abuse as an inevitable consequence of being on these social media platforms," World

Athletics CEO Jon Ridgeon said in a statement.

"We are the No.1 Olympic sport and have a responsibility to protect our athletes, on and off the field of play. So as we enter an Olympic year, with the extra attention that brings, we are seeking urgent meetings with these platforms to achieve a greater level of enforcement and safeguarding for our athletes.

The study said male athletes faced an increase in abuse, with a gender split of 51 per cent targeting men.

