

At Muscat International Airport, Indian nationals were the most prominent travellers, totalling 153,396. Omanis followed with 99,236 passengers, and Pakistanis ranked third with 51,172 passengers.

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MUSCAT WANTS MORE

The recent National Day holiday drew massive crowds to Muscat’s beaches and parks, highlighting their popularity as recreational spots. What can be done to improve these facilities and provide more options for outdoor activities? Here’s what Muscat Daily readers said:



YOUR SAY

Ali al Maamari
Engineer

Muscat’s beaches and parks are some of our most treasured spots, but they can get overcrowded during holidays. To enhance the experience, we need more shaded seating areas, public washrooms, and designated barbecue zones. Activities like kayak rentals, volleyball courts, and jogging tracks would give families and youth more options for fun.

KH Kumar
Retiree

I visited Seeb beach twice last month and noticed that it is poorly lit, with long stretches in darkness. Lighting needs to be improved. Also, many parks only open after 9am, which means they’re unavailable for morning walkers.

Priya Nair
Homemaker

As someone who loves spending time outdoors, I feel there’s room for

Salim al Harthy
University student

Muscat needs proper sports facilities in public parks, such as football nets or basketball courts. Interactive

features like outdoor gym equipment and skate parks would be popular among young people. Concerts and food festivals could also be great additions.

improvement. Adding well-maintained cycling paths and playgrounds for children would make parks more family-friendly. Seasonal outdoor markets or food festivals could also provide entertainment for all age groups.

Aisha al Zadjali
Tutor

To cater to families and children, we could add picnic-friendly spaces and nature trails with informative signs about Oman’s flora and fauna. Installing water sports facilities like paddleboarding or jet skiing areas would attract more tourists. More public washrooms and designated barbecue spaces are also needed.

Ramesh Kumar
Software developer

Recreational areas would benefit from better lighting for evening use and improved parking spaces to handle large crowds. Setting up mobile food trucks or temporary kiosks selling snacks and drinks at reasonable prices near parks and beaches could enhance the visitor experience.

 **NEXT ON YOUR SAY**

UAE residents enjoy free entry into Oman, while Omani residents pay a hefty visa fee to travel to the UAE. Should there be a uniform visa fee across the GCC? Share your views!

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

SEND YOUR COMMENTS

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

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MUSCAT MUNICIPALITY
Advertisement No. (40 / 2024)

Muscat Municipality invites Companies specialized in the field and registered with General Secretariat of Tender Board, to participate and obtain tender documents from the website via the following link: (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om> starting from the date of this announcement and until the end of deadline stipulated below.

Tender Number	Description of Tender	Last date to collect the tender	Tender return date
PRE-24-286	Construction of Water Storage & Pump Room at Seeb (Al Mabeila)	22/12/2024	12/01/2025
PRE-24-335	Supply of irrigation materials	22/12/2024	12/01/2025
PRE-24-316 (Re-Call)	Construction of Qantab Walkway	22/12/2024	12/01/2025
PRE-24-316 (Re-Call)	Survey Study of visitor's satisfaction with events and services of Muscat Nights (Festival 2024-2025)	10/12/2024	16/20/2024
PRE-24-331	Supply of Devices and their Accessories for Inspectors	22/12/2024	12/01/2025

1. Bidders shall submit their offers electronically.
2. Clarification and Support:
• For any inquiries regarding tenders, please visit e-tendering website: (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>) . .
• For technical support of e-tendering system please send an email to (etenderhd@gstb.gov.om) or call (+96824402200).

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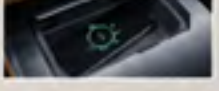


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MCSY launches second edition of ‘Share the Change’ contest

Muscat - The Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth (MCSY) launched the second edition of the ‘Share the Change’ competition on Sunday, aiming to foster creativity, innovation, and ideas for societal development.

The initiative invites individuals and teams to propose solutions, projects, or concepts that bring positive change in areas such as culture, sports, and youth empowerment. Building on the success of the first edition, this year’s competition expands its scope to engage a wider audience while maintaining its focus on community collaboration and innovation.

Ibrahim al Shibli, chairman of the competition, highlighted that this edition will prioritise education and awareness. “We chose this focus to encourage a cultural shift, helping the community view physical activity as a lifestyle rather than a scheduled task,” he said.

To further enhance the competition’s impact, 25 shortlisted projects will participate in ‘laboratories’—an initiative introduced following the evaluation of the first edition. These labs will provide workshops and skill-building sessions to refine project proposals and boost their potential to serve the community effectively. Entries can be submitted through the competition’s official platform.

Send your comments to muscatdaily@apexmedia.co.om

Governor reviews cable car, new road project in Wakan

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Efforts to enhance tourism in South Batinah are gaining momentum, with plans for a cable car project and a new access road to Wakan Village being reviewed by Eng Masoud bin Saeed al Hashimi, Governor of South Batinah, on Sunday.

Wakan Village, located in the wilayat of Nakhal, is a sought-after destination during the winter months, drawing thousands of domestic and international visitors. Its cool climate, comparable to that of Jabal Akhdar's villages, and stunning natural beauty make it a popular choice for tourists.

The meeting, chaired by Hashimi, focused on the design and execution of the proposed infrastructure projects. "The collaborative effort reflects the commitment of various government and local entities to develop Wakan Village as a key tourism destination, combining modern infrastructure with the preservation of its natural and cultural heritage," Hashimi said.

The collaborative effort reflects the commitment of government and local entities to develop Wakan Village as a key tourism destination

MASOUD BIN SAEED AL HASHIMI



The company responsible for the road construction presented detailed plans, including the layout and features of the new access route. The cable car project, which promises to offer a unique and convenient way to explore Wakan's scenic landscape, was also discussed. Together, these developments aim to improve connectivity and enhance the visitor experience.

The meeting brought together representatives from the South Batinah governorate, the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, members of the Nakhal Municipal Council, and the project's implementing company.

This initiative aligns with the directives of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to develop Wakan Village as a premier tourist destination. With over 32,000 visitors recorded in 2023, the new infrastructure is expected to elevate Wakan's status as a major landmark in Oman's tourism landscape.

Suhar Festival draws over 100,000 visitors

Our Correspondent
Suhar

The third edition of the Suhar Festival, which began on November 19, has attracted over 100,000 visitors in its first ten days. Running until January 3, the festival offers a variety of attractions designed to boost tourism in Suhar and the surrounding areas.

An official from the governorate of North Batinah highlighted several new additions to this year's festival, including a water park, an electronic games city, a children's activity area, and an enchanting dancing fountain. The 'Lighting Environments' display, featuring creative light installations, has become a major attraction, drawing visitors from across the region.

Throughout the festival, visitors can enjoy 35 performances



on the Grand Theatre stage, 40 shows on the Children's Theatre stage, and 105 events in heritage villages that celebrate Oman's bedouin, agricultural, and marine traditions.

Sports enthusiasts are well catered to with events such as the Suhar Football Festival Championship, featuring 30

teams, and the Sports Academies Championship, involving ten local sports academies. Other highlights include the Suhar International Chess Championship and dhow rowing races, with participants from across the Gulf.

Adding to the excitement, football fans can watch live

broadcasts of Gulf Cup matches, starting December 21, on a large screen, creating a vibrant festive atmosphere.

With its diverse lineup of activities and attractions, the Suhar Festival continues to delight visitors and highlight the cultural and sporting heritage of the region.

Muscat hosts German travel conference to boost tourism

Muscat - Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MHT) is hosting the annual conference of DERPART, Germany's largest travel agency network, from November 30 to December 2.

This high-profile event, featuring 130 directors of German travel agencies and top executives, highlights Oman's growing prominence as a destination for business tourism and international conferences.

The gathering provides a platform to showcase Oman's cultural heritage, natural beauty, and modern infrastructure to decision-makers from Germany's tourism sector, fostering partnerships that contribute to the growth of the sultanate's tourism industry.

Khalid bin Walid al Zadjali, Director of the Oman Convention Bureau at MHT, called the conference a milestone in the ministry's efforts to establish Oman as a global hub for business tourism. "Hosting the annual conference of DERPART is an important achievement in the ministry's ongoing efforts to position the sultanate as a global destination for business tourism."

Recall



2019-2022
Range Rover/
Range Rover Sport

Recall Date: 02 December 2024

Brand of Commodity	Year of Production	Number of Affected Commodities
Range Rover/ Range Rover Sport	2019-2022	488

Problem Description

A potential concern has been identified on specific vehicles within the above vehicle range. The 48V Mild Hybrid Electric Vehicle (MHEV) battery enters an offline state where the MHEV battery no longer communicates or functions as intended. This is noticed through loss of start/stop functionality and no Battery Energy Control Module (BECM) communication during diagnostic sessions. This affects certain 48V MHEV batteries on Range Rover and Range Rover Sport vehicles.

Recall Action

Update Battery Energy Control Module (BECM) software.

To check the serial numbers of the affected commodities, please visit the website for Recalls & Warnings (www.mht.gov.om)





Starting price mentioned is for the Tonne T1 2024MY. Limited stock available. Vehicle image shown is for illustration purposes only.

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The Chairman's Report
For the Period ending SEPTEMBER, 2024

On behalf of the Fund Management Body, I am pleased to present the financial results of Jabal Real Estate Investment Fund for the period ending September 30, 2024.

Below is a summary of the financial results:

in OMR	
Rental income	165,010
Interest income	31,576
Other income	40,506
Total Income	237,092
Operating costs	1,266
Management, custodian and other fees	5,159
Total Expenses	6,425
Profit	230,667
Profit per unit	0.0013
Assets	17,652,733
Liabilities	22,066
NAV	17,630,667
NAV per unit	0.101

Fund Performance

Jabal Real Estate Investment Fund has been established in Q3 2024; the Fund was registered and listed on 10 July 2024; the constitutive general meeting (CGM) of the Fund was held on 1 September 2024. Therefore, the Fund was not operating a full calendar quarter and as a result, the fund profit in Q3 2024 is not fully representative of the full quarter.

During the Q3 2024 the Fund has acquired one anchor asset - Barka Warehouse- logistics complex in Al Ramais, Oman. Rental income of the Fund for the quarter amounted to 165,010 OMR, which corresponds to accrued rent payments for Barka Warehouse from the acquisition date - 25 July - till 30 September 2024. The rent is in line with the initially expected results for this property (as per Prospectus).

The Fund keeps cash on call account, bearing interest income in Q3 2024 the interest income amounted to 31,576 OMR (accrued from August 2024). The Fund plans to utilize the initially collected funds for acquisition of assets in Q4 2024 - Q1 2025 (the second anchor asset described in Prospectus - Sama building - was transferred in October 2024).

Market performance and outlook

The Oman real estate market continues a steady growth. There is a positive outlook on the market driven by favourable economic conditions, government initiatives as well as large infrastructure projects. As to NSCL in Q3 2024 (YTD) total traded volume of properties in Oman reached 2.15bn OMR (+4.5% to Q3 2023 YTD).

Among the key driving factors of Oman real estate market there are improving economic conditions, including credit rating upgrade: In September, Standard & Poor's (S&P) upgraded Oman's sovereign credit rating from "BB-" to "BBB-", marking its return to investment grade status after seven years of being rated below investment grade. Real estate market continues to be reliant on government spending and expatriate numbers (as to Savills) and the recent positive trends in these indicators have a favourable effect on real estate sector.

One of the main still remaining challenge in the market is alignment between supply and demand; meanwhile, well-located projects are in demand from both tenants and investors side.

The Fund and the Investment Manager will use reasonable efforts to perform necessary due diligence while taking into

consideration the recent market trends, in order to choose attractive yielding real estate properties for the portfolio

Acknowledgements

On behalf of the members of the Fund Management Body, I would like to extend our thanks to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq bin Taimur for the leadership and vision and the Omani government for the efforts towards driving growth and economic stability. I would like also to thank the Financial Services Authority and the Muscat Stock Exchange for their relentless efforts in developing the capital market, and also for the fund manager and the service providers for their efforts in managing the fund, and our valued unitholders for their confidence and support given.

On behalf of the Fund Management Body
Chairman
26 November 2024

Statement of profit or loss and other comprehensive income
For the period ending 30 September 2024

	30-09-2024 RO
Income	
Rental income	165,010
Interest income	31,576
Other income	40,506
Total Income	237,092
Expenses	
Management fees	4,110
Custodian and administration fees	1,027
Operating costs	1,266
Finance charges(net)	22
Total expenses	6,425
Profit and total comprehensive profit	
And increase in net assets attributable to the unit holders for the period.	230,667
Profit per unit	0.0013

Statement of Financial Position
As at 30 September 2024

ASSETS	
Investment properties	8,909,500
Rental income accrued	78,986
Other receivables	81,596
Cash and cash equivalents	8,582,651
Total assets	17,652,733
LIABILITIES	
Accruals and other payables	22,066
Total liabilities	22,066
Total net assets attributable to the unitholders	17,630,667
Total liabilities and net assets attributable to the unitholders	17,652,733
Net assets value per unit attributable to the unitholders	0.101

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MARKET WATCH

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(RO1 equals)

India	219.72
Pakistan	722.36
Bangladesh	309.84
Philippines	152.26
Sri Lanka	753.66

*Rates as on December 02
Source: xe.com

BRIEFS

\$21bn deals signed at China supply chain expo

The second China International Supply Chain Expo wrapped up on Saturday, having witnessed the signature of over 210 trade deals and tentative agreements totaling more than \$21.17bn.

During the five-day expo, over 600 exhibitors from nearly 70 countries and regions established cooperative ties with more than 37,000 upstream and downstream suppliers, the organizer said.

The CCPIT scheduled over 6,000 matchmaking sessions for exhibitors and visitors, facilitating the establishment of more than 6,700 cooperation intentions.

This year's expo attracted over 200,000 visitors, an increase of about a third compared to the inaugural event.

As the world's first national-level exhibition focusing on supply chains, the event has garnered significant interest from multinationals. Nearly one-third of this year's exhibitors came from overseas, up from 26 percent last year. Major global players, including GE HealthCare and SAP, have already secured their participation in the third edition of the expo.

Zhang Shaogang, vice chairman of the CCPIT, emphasized that the expo is a platform for both domestic and international companies to showcase their innovations, engage in meaningful business discussions, and exchange views on strengthening supply chain cooperation.

Oman's Islamic finance market to cross \$40bn in medium-term: Fitch

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Increasing public demand, expanding distribution channels, the growing use of sukuk as a public funding tool, and recent regulatory reforms are expected to drive further growth in Oman's Islamic finance sector, according to Fitch Ratings.

Fitch projects the size of Oman's Islamic finance industry will exceed \$40bn in the medium term, estimating it at \$30.9bn as of September 2024. Islamic banking assets represent more than two-thirds (69%) of this total, followed by outstanding sukuk (30%) and takaful contributions (1%).

A key regulatory development came in October 2024, when the Central Bank of Oman (CBO) introduced the Bank Deposit Protection Law, addressing a structural gap by extending deposit protection to Islamic banks.

'We expect this will enhance confidence in Oman's Islamic banking sector, as the previous deposit insurance scheme only covered conventional banks,' Fitch said in a report.

As of end-Q3 2024, total assets of Oman's Islamic banks and windows reached RO8.2bn (approximately \$21.3bn), with Islamic banking holding a market share of 18.7% of the Omani



As of end-Q3 2024, total assets of Oman's Islamic banks and windows reached RO8.2bn, with Islamic banking holding a market share of 18.7% of total banking sector assets

banking sector's total assets, according to the latest CBO data.

'Favourable economic conditions, improving asset quality, stable profitability, solid capitalisation, and adequate liquidity should provide Islamic banks with the flexibility to absorb moderate shocks, particularly if

geopolitical tensions in the region intensify,' Fitch noted.

The agency highlighted that Islamic banks in Oman outpaced their conventional counterparts in terms of financing growth, with Islamic banks growing their financing portfolios by 12.6% year-on-year by Q3 2024, com-

pared to just 3.2% for conventional banks. Islamic deposit growth also exceeded conventional banks, rising 23.7%, compared to 11.3% for conventional banks.

'Islamic banking windows benefit from the established infrastructure of their parent con-

ventional banks, which results in greater cost efficiency,' Fitch said. Profit-and-loss-sharing contracts remain central to Oman's Islamic banking system, with diminishing musharaka accounting for 43.1% of total financing and wakala making up 23.6% at end-2023, it added.

Sukuk growth

Fitch also noted a significant rise in Omani sukuk issuance, with sukuk now comprising 21% of the outstanding debt capital market (DCM) mix. As of end-Q3 2024, the Omani DCM reached \$45bn in outstanding debt, a 0.8% increase year-on-year. Fitch rated \$6.5bn in outstanding Omani sukuk in Q3 2024, split evenly between the government and corporates.

Sukuk issuance in Oman surged by 86% year-on-year, reaching \$2bn in the first nine months of 2024, outpacing growth in Omani bond issuance, which rose by 53% to \$5.6bn.

Despite the growth, Fitch does not expect a significant short-term surge in overall debt issuance, as the sultanate's government has been using its budget surplus, bolstered by high oil prices, to prepay debt.

Fitch also highlighted efforts by the Omani authorities to develop the DCM, including a CBO circular issued in October 2024

aimed at bolstering the banking sector's resilience to climate-related risks. Additionally, Oman introduced a sustainable finance framework earlier this year and issued new sukuk and bond regulations.

'These initiatives provide regulatory clarity and could support further development of Oman's debt-capital market,' Fitch said.

On the other hand, the Omani takaful (Islamic insurance) sector grew modestly in 2023, with gross direct premiums reaching RO76.8mn, a 0.8% increase from the previous year. Takaful policies totaled 316,933 at the end of 2023, a 24% year-on-year rise, with general takaful representing 89% of the total policies, as per Fitch's calculations.

Despite these advances, Fitch noted that Oman's Islamic finance sector remains one of the smallest in the GCC and faces challenges, including a lack of Islamic liquidity-management instruments and smaller capital bases compared to conventional banks. These factors could limit the sector's participation in major government financing projects, the agency said.

'Nonetheless, the sector has long-term growth potential, driven by the recent regulatory reforms and Oman's predominantly Muslim population,' Fitch added.

ONEIC wins RO6mn contract from Nama

Muscat - Oman National Engineering & Investment Company (ONEIC) has secured a RO5.98mn contract for the construction of a sewer network in A'seeb, awarded by Nama Water Services Company.

The company disclosed in a filing to the Muscat Stock Exchange on Sunday that it was awarded the tender on



November 28, 2024. The project will be completed over three years, with a total value

of RO5,980,121.

ONEIC said it expects to generate significant returns from the project, which forms part of a series of key infrastructure initiatives recently awarded to the company.

It added that the contract will further strengthen its expertise in the construction and maintenance of infrastructure projects.

Sarooj wins RO90mn road construction contracts

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Sarooj Construction Company, a leading player in Oman's construction and infrastructure sector, has secured two major road construction contracts valued at a total of RO90.22mn from the Ministry of Transport, Communications, and Information Technology (MTCIT).

The first contract, worth RO70.03mn, involves the construction of a 120-kilometer dual carriageway linking Adam to Thumrait. The project aims to enhance regional connectivity, bolster economic integration, and improve transportation efficiency across Oman, according to a company statement.

The second contract, valued at RO20.19mn, pertains to road construction at Jabal Shams. This project highlights Sarooj's ability to manage complex engineering challenges in mountainous terrains. The single carriageway will establish a vital link in one of Oman's most iconic and remote regions, promoting accessibility and sustainable development.

'Together, these projects, valued at a combined total of RO90.22mn, underscore Sarooj's capability to execute large-scale, high-impact developments that contribute to the country's long-term progress,' the company said.

The Adam-Thumrait dual carriageway project is being implemented in multiple phases. Earlier this month, Oman's Tender Board, acting on behalf of MTCIT, awarded contracts for three sections of the highway, including Part 4 for RO118.37mn. Part 3 was awarded for RO70.03mn, while Part 5 was valued at RO69.79mn.

Galfar Engineering and Contracting Company was awarded the contract for Part 4 of the Adam-Thumrait dual-carriage-



First contract, worth RO70.03mn, involves construction of a 120km dual carriageway linking Adam to Thumrait. Second contract, valued at RO20.19mn, pertains to road construction at Jabal Shams

way project, with a value of RO118mn.

Eng Yousef bin Abdullah al-Mujaini, Director General of Roads and Land Transport at MTCIT, recently said that the work on the Adam-Thumrait dual-carriageway project is expected to begin in early 2025, following the completion of contractual procedures. "Once completed, the dualisation of the Adam-Thumrait road will be one of the longest infrastructure projects undertaken by the ministry," Mujaini added.

Sarooj, which has a proven track record in executing diverse and complex projects, reaffirmed its commitment to delivering infrastructure that not only meets

immediate functional needs but also supports Oman's broader vision of sustainable growth and innovation.

'These awards reinforce our trusted reputation for delivering critical infrastructure projects that align with Oman's vision for sustainable development. By combining technical expertise, innovative practices, and an unwavering commitment to quality, Sarooj continues to play a key role in shaping the sultanate's future,' the company said.

Sarooj has been at the forefront of Oman's infrastructure development, offering end-to-end solutions that span road construction, civil works, and complex engineering challenges.



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INVITATION TO EXTRAORDINARY GENERAL MEETING OF MUSANDAM POWER COMPANY SAOG

The Board of Directors of **Musandam Power Company SAOG (the "Company")** is pleased to invite its respected shareholders to attend the Extraordinary General Meeting ("EGM") to be held on Sunday, at 3 p.m., 29th December 2024, on the e-portal for convening general meetings through Muscat Clearing and Depository (SAOC) ("MCD") website (www.mcd.gov.om).

Failing quorum of the EGM, a second EGM shall be convened on Tuesday, at 3 p.m., 31st December 2024, on the e-portal for convening general meetings through Muscat Clearing and Depository (SAOC) ("MCD") website (www.mcd.gov.om). The agenda include the following:

- To consider and approve amendments to Article 2 of the Articles of Association of the Company (as per annexure 1 hereto)

In accordance with the Rules for Convening General Meetings via Electronic Means, issued by the FSA we would like to call your attention to the following:

only a corporate person may authorize a natural person to attend and vote on its behalf on decisions/resolutions of the EGM through electronic means, provided such natural person has an investor number with the MCD.

- voting on any item of the agenda shall commence prior to the convention of the EGM at a maximum of three (3) days and ends on the day of the EGM. If a shareholder's balance is changed either by increase or decrease, the voting process shall stand canceled and must re-vote at the EGM.

Please attend at the e-portal at least 30 minutes prior to the EGM.

For more information, please contact **Mr. Abdulhameed Al Jabri of Musandam Power Company (SAOG) on telephone No. 24063555.**

Chairman

Legal Advisor

Tender issued for new water desalination plant in Duqm

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Centralized Utilities Company, known as Marafiq, has launched an international tender for the construction of a reverse osmosis water desalination plant in the Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD).

The facility will have a capacity of 45mn liters per day (45,000 cubic meters per day) and will provide industrial water and a drainage system for an international steel manufacturer operating in the zone, according to an Oman News Agency report.

Eng Abdullah bin Mohammed al Hashimi, CEO of Marafiq, said that the new plant is part of the company's strategy to expand and diversify its operations, enhance financial sustainability, and increase its sources of income.

Hashimi emphasised that Marafiq is a key provider of integrated industrial services for companies in the Duqm Special Economic Zone. These services include electricity, industrial cooling water, industrial gases, and sewage management. The company's model allows businesses in the zone to focus on their core operations while Marafiq takes care of essential infrastructure and industrial services.

Hashimi also noted that the new desalination plant will build



The plant will have a capacity of 45,000 cubic meters per day and will provide industrial water and a drainage system for an international steel manufacturer operating in SAZAD

on the company's previous successes in the sector, particularly the Duqm Integrated Power and Water Plant. This facility, which has a capacity of 326MW of electricity and 36,000 cubic meters of water per day, supplies power to the Duqm Refinery, the Ras Markaz Oil Storage Terminal, as well as industrial cooling water and a drainage system for the Duqm Refinery.

Additionally, Marafiq manages the drinking water system in the Duqm Special Economic Zone. The company has made significant progress in expanding the distribution network, reducing losses, increasing production and storage capacity, and supplying water to residential, commercial, and tourist properties, as well as projects within the zone. Marafiq is a joint venture be-

tween the Oman's OQ Group and Gulf Energy Development Company of Thailand. It specialises in providing essential industrial services such as electricity, cooling water, industrial water, industrial gases, waste treatment, and drinking water under a single umbrella strategy, supporting investors and various industries within the Special Economic Zone in Duqm.

UAE's ADNOC launches \$80bn low-carbon energy investment company

Abu Dhabi, UAE - Following the board's strategic endorsement, UAE's ADNOC recently announced the launch of XRG, a groundbreaking international lower-carbon energy and chemicals investment company, with an enterprise value of over \$80bn.

XRG aims to more than double its asset value over the next decade by capitalising on demand for low-carbon energy and chemicals driven by three megatrends: the transformation of energy, exponential growth of AI, and the rise of emerging economies. Building on ADNOC's expertise and transformational international acquisitions, the independently operated investment company will initially focus on developing three core strategic value platforms:

XRG's Global Chemicals platform aims to be a top 5 global chemicals player, producing and delivering chemical and specialty products essential for modern life, to meet the projected 70% increase in global demand by 2050, according to a press release.

XRG's International Gas platform will build a world-scale integrated gas portfolio to help meet the anticipated 15% increase in global natural gas demand over the next decade, as a



lower carbon transition fuel, as well as meet the expected 65% increase in demand for LNG by 2050.

XRG's Low Carbon Energies platform will invest in the solutions needed to meet increasing demand for low carbon energies and decarbonization technologies to drive economic growth through the energy transition. The market for low carbon ammonia alone is expected to grow by between 70-90 million tonnes per annum by 2040, from close to zero now.

Dr Sultan Ahmed al Jaber, ADNOC Managing Director and Group CEO, said, "In line with our board mandate to prioritise

transformational growth, XRG marks a bold new chapter for ADNOC. Building on our unrivalled track record in energy and investments, network of global partners, and strategic market access, XRG will drive sustainable economic growth, foster technological innovation, and deliver the energy and products needed to improve lives around the world. We are committed to delivering long-term value for our stakeholders and reinforcing Abu Dhabi and the UAE's role as a global energy and chemicals leader."

XRG will formally commence activities in Q1 2025. A global strategy day will be held in 2025.

Pakistan's surprise solar surge shocks experts, grid

Islamabad, Pakistan - Thanks to cheap Chinese solar technology imports, Pakistan is expected to add an estimated 17 GW of solar power in 2024, which is more than a third of the country's entire generating capacity.

The surge is "probably the most extreme" case "that has happened in any country in the world with the speed that has happened," according to energy analyst Dave Jones, who tracks the global energy transition at think tank Ember in the UK.

This growth places Pakistan as one of the top installers of solar panels globally for 2024, in the company of much bigger, richer economies like China, the US and Germany, Jones' team found.

Countrywide, consumers, businesses and industries are rushing to tap into the cheap renewable power source as an alternative to the erratic and expensive state-provided, largely fossil-fuel-based energy.

Pakistan's unreliable power grid, compounded by under-supply and poor infrastructure, means that millions of people live in constant uncertainty. Many households around the country have also been crippled by soaring energy prices over the past three years, inflated by high oil and gas prices post Putin's invasion of Ukraine, an over-investment in thermal power plants and government subsidy cuts to meet International Monetary Fund loan conditions.

"It's come to that point now that, for daytime electricity, it is a no-brainer for people in Pakistan to go out there and to be doing this on the scale that they're doing it," Jones said.

It is unclear exactly how much of the total imported solar capacity will be installed in 2024, as government records cannot keep pace with the speed of the consumer-led transition. But for homes across the country, the energy switch is already making a difference.



Short-lived surge as grid suffers?

The boom puts Pakistan on a better pathway to achieve its goal of 60% renewable energy by 2030. But the mass solar upswing hasn't been without complications.

As increasing numbers of people use solar power to meet their own energy needs during the day, the sudden drop in demand is causing problems for operators of the main national electricity grid.

A solar surge has reached new heights in Pakistan, sparking what some experts are calling one of the fastest solar revolutions in the world

"The way those power plants were planned and funded was to run a minimum amount of hours," said Jones. Because they're no longer meeting those minimum hours, the electricity they do provide is becoming significantly more expensive for the remaining consumers, Jones explained.

"It's also causing problems for balancing the grid more generally," he added, as operators are struggling to predict how much energy they will need to provide and when.

Jones warned that if the gov-

ernment perceives the consumer-led solar boom as too disruptive, it could cut the surge short.

"What really risks happening in Pakistan now is that you have a blanket ban on any more solar coming in," he said.

Pakistan's solar revolution is only possible because of the plummeting cost of solar PV modules, which have reduced in price by 90% in the last 15 years alone. Most cheap solar panels are sold by China, the world's number one manufacturer of solar PV modules.

Over four decades, solar power has gone from being one of the most expensive, out-of-reach electricity sources to just about the cheapest in most places around the world.

Pakistan is not the only country tapping into the cost-saving clean alternative. Throughout 2024, Jones' team at Ember tracked high numbers of Chinese solar exports to Saudi Arabia, the Philippines, the United Arab Emirates, Thailand, South Africa and Oman.

"It is transformative and it's affordable," said Azeem Azhar, author, tech entrepreneur and founder of research group Exponential View, who likens the exponential drop in the cost of solar technology to the PC revolution of the 1980s.

"What we saw then was an expansion of computing across our economies and the democratization of that particular technology," said Azhar. DW

China's manufacturing sector posts faster expansion amid policy support

Beijing, China - China's manufacturing sector registered accelerated expansion in November thanks to government policy support, data from the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) showed on Saturday.

The purchasing managers' index (PMI) for China's manufacturing sector came in at 50.3 in November, up from 50.1 in October, according to the NBS.

A reading above 50 indicates expansion, while a reading below 50 reflects contraction.

China's manufacturing sector saw accelerated expansion in November as a series of incremental policies and existing policies gradually took effect, according to NBS statistician Zhao Qinghe.

Both supply and demand in the manufacturing sector saw recovery in November, with the sub-indices for production and new orders rising to 52.4 and 50.8, respectively, Zhao said.

Notably, the general equipment and automotive industries reported rapid expansion, with their production and new order sub-indices coming in above 54.

NBS data also showed that key sectors such as high-tech manufacturing and consumer goods, as well as equipment manufacturing, continued to perform stably and positively.



Market sentiment continued to improve in November, with the business expectation index rising to 54.7, reflecting growing confidence among manufacturers.

Saturday's data also showed that the non-manufacturing PMI came in at 50 in November, down from 50.2 in October, and the general PMI stood at 50.8, unchanged from October.

The business expectation index for the services sector remained at a high level of 57.3 in November, while that for the

construction sector rose to 55.6, indicating improved market sentiment in both sectors, according to the NBS.

Since September, various government departments have introduced significant incremental policies aimed at bolstering economic growth.

These measures focused on five key areas: enhancing macroeconomic countercyclical adjustment, expanding effective domestic demand, increasing support for enterprises, stabilizing the real estate market, and

boosting the capital market.

As the benefits of the incremental policy package and existing policies unfold, there has been a boost to economic vitality, optimized industrial structures and enterprise confidence, said Wen Tao, an analyst at the China Logistics Information Center.

On the whole, positive changes have continued to accumulate, and China's current economic recovery has been consolidated further, Wen said. Xinhua

Turkish economy shrinks amid high interest rates

Eleanor Butler

Turkey's economy shrank 0.2% quarter-on-quarter in the period from July to September, said the Turkish Statistical Institute on Friday.

This comes after a decline of the same scale in the second quarter of the year, confirming that the economy is in recession.

Turkey recorded 2.1% year-on-year growth in the third

quarter, following a reading of 2.4% in the period from April to June.

Household consumption contracted by 0.3% quarter-on-quarter and government consumption dropped by 0.4%.

Compared to the previous year, household consumption increased by 3.1% and government consumption fell by 0.9%.

"The central bank suggested at its meeting last week that it

thought domestic demand was slowing, and today's data supports this view," said Nicholas Farr, Emerging Europe Economist at Capital Economics.

"This could raise expectations that the central bank may cut interest rates as soon as its December meeting," he noted - although he argued this would be "jumping the gun".

Inflation is still strong in Turkey, coming in at 48.6%

year-on-year in October. Farr predicted that interest rate cuts are likely to begin early next year.

The key rate has been held at 50% for eight consecutive months, which has dampened consumption.

Imports of goods and services also decreased 9.6% year-on-year in the third quarter, allowing Turkey to improve its trade deficit.

(Source: Euronews.com)

Avenir Career Fair brings bouquet of global educational opportunities

The Avenir Career Fair 2024 was inaugurated on Friday at Hotel Crowne Plaza Muscat, drawing a large crowd of eager students and their parents seeking guidance on pursuing higher education abroad.

The event, offers a unique platform to connect with top international universities, colleges, and financial institutions, providing valuable insights into the admission process, scholarships, visa counseling, and more.

With a dynamic atmosphere, the event has quickly become a hub for future scholars, offering a wealth of information on applying to prestigious institutions across the globe. The fair was open on Saturday from 10.30am to 8.30pm, Crowne Plaza Muscat OCEC (Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre).

The event was formally inaugurated by Prof Dr Ugur Guven, Advisory Council Member to the United Nations Center for Space Science and Space Technology Education in the Asia-Pacific Region (UN CSSTEAP), who commended the initiative for bringing together a wealth of educational institutions under one roof in Muscat.

"Avenir Career Fair 2024 provides a unique opportunity for students and parents to interact with top universities and colleges, making it easier to navigate the process of choosing and applying for higher education abroad," said Prof Guven.



With over two dozen of stalls featuring prominent universities and colleges, the fair offered a

one-stop platform for students looking to pursue their dreams overseas. Enthusiastic crowds filled the event space, with students accompanied by their parents, engaging in meaningful

conversations with representatives from a range of disciplines including engineering, medicine, arts, management, and more.

The Avenir Career Fair is not just about showcasing educational opportunities - it's also about empowering students with the essential tools and knowledge needed to make informed decisions. The list of participating institutions included world-

renowned universities and colleges, financial institutions offering scholarships and student loans, as well as companies providing career guidance and visa counseling.

Some of the key participating institutions are Manipal University College - Malaysia, University of Delhi, Banaras Hindu University, BITS Pilani, Amity University Dubai, Jain University -Bangalore, Symbiosis, S P Jain School of Global Management and many more.

"Fueling students' dreams with opportunities galore under one roof," said Tribhuvan Pratap Singh, Director of Edunial Infotech Services LLP, the event's marketing agency in India. He expressed his satisfaction with the high turnout on the first day and encouraged even more students to attend on Saturday.

"Such golden opportunities don't come around often. We invite all senior students and their families to visit today and make the most of this exceptional event. It's a one-stop destination for anyone seeking the right career path."

The fair emphasizes personalised interaction, offering tailored advice on admissions, visa processes, scholarship opportunities, career guidance, and financial assistance.

"The Avenir Career Fair 2024 aims to equip students with the tools and information they need to navigate their journey to study abroad," explained Mobin Beg, Business Head at Nexus Novel, the host of the event.



OPAZ initiatives to improve employees' health

The Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones OPAZ has adopted a number of initiatives aimed at improving the health of employees, with the goal of enhancing performance efficiency and creating suitable conditions in the workplace.

These initiatives include implementing several programs throughout the year to raise awareness on how to handle emergency situations, prevent chronic diseases, promote positive thinking among employees, and prepare them to deal with stressful work conditions.

The programmes aim to equip employees with the necessary skills to cope with challenges they may face in their daily work duties or in their personal lives.

Abdul Majid bin Abdullah al Ansari, General Director of the Support Services Sector at OPAZ, stated that these initiatives align with the Authority's strategic plan within the framework of the Institutional Excellence Programme.

This programme includes objectives that involve the Authority's management taking necessary measures to ensure the presence of employees

who enjoy good health and possess the skills suitable for the nature of the Authority's work and achieving its goals.

He added that this year, several regular health check-ups were conducted to ensure the physical well-being of employees during working hours.

In addition, workshops and initiatives were carried out for employees on first aid, healthy nutrition, and general health care through early detection of chronic diseases, as well as initiatives to promote mental health and ways to deal with stressful work conditions.

These initiatives were executed in cooperation with several hospitals and private healthcare centres.

He pointed out that the programmes implemented this year included increasing knowledge of first aid techniques, whether at work or at home.

They focused on training employees on how to deal with various emergency situations such as burns, fractures, wounds, drowning, head injuries, choking, and cardiac arrest, among other emergencies, with the goal of providing necessary support to the injured until medical care arrives.

ahlibank recognised as 'Best Conventional Bank'

Continuing its journey as a 'Partner in Excellence', ahlibank, one of the most prestigious banks in the Sultanate of Oman, has recently been recognised as the 'Best Conventional Bank in Oman' for the year 2024 by the Union of Arab Banks.

The award is a testament to ahlibank's leading status in the sultanate, showcasing its banking expertise and forward-thinking vision as a thriving center for banking. Receiving the award on behalf of the bank was Jumana al Hashmi, AGM Head of Marketing & Corporate Communications.

The award was given in recognition of the best in the banking sector, highlighting the various institutions whose efforts have made a significant impact on the economy. It shed the spotlight on ahlibank, attesting to its outstanding contributions in driving forward the Omani banking sector.

Above all, it underscored the dedication and hard work of the ahlibank team that has been at the heart of its successes, embodying the bank's ethos as a true 'Partner in Excellence.'



On receiving the award, Jumana said, "At ahlibank, we are committed to reaching new milestones in an ever-evolving and competitive market. The banking sector has experienced remarkable growth in recent years. And with resilience and adaptability, we have successfully navigated these changes, maintaining a steady upward trajectory."

"Our growth and success are a direct result of our unwavering commitment to customer-centricity. We remain focused on achieving sustainable growth and continuing to meet the evolving needs of our customers," she added.

Union of Arab Banks for honouring us with the Best Conventional Bank in Oman award. This recognition not only reflects our relentless drive but also motivates us to continue striving to attain greater milestones."

"We are deeply grateful to the



Tax Authority holds interactive workshop for entrepreneurs

As part of the second phase of the 'Tax Culture' initiative in Muscat governorate, and within the framework of targeting entrepreneurs, the Tax Authority organised an interactive workshop on 'VAT'.

The workshop - held in collaboration with the SMEs Development Authority - covered various aspects of VAT, such as: calculation mechanisms and the method of submitting tax returns. It also highlighted the pivotal role

of SMEs in the national economy and the incentives provided by the government to support them.

As part of this initiative, the Tax Authority opens several vital booths in the Ministry of Commerce, Industry, and Investment Promotion, SMEs Development Authority, as well as Ministry of Labour to provide direct support to entrepreneurs and answer their tax inquiries, thereby boosting their confidence in the tax system.

British singer Anthony Strong delivers jazz night at ROHM

British jazz singer Anthony Strong brought his signature charm and talent to the Royal Opera House of Musical Arts on November 28 and 29, treating audiences to two spectacular evenings of jazz. The programme featured timeless classics by jazz legends such as Nat King Cole and Frank Sinatra, alongside Strong's own original songs, all performed with the exceptional accompaniment of the Latvian Radio Big Band.

With his sharp suits and magnetic stage presence, Strong delivered an unforgettable performance, blending soulful renditions of iconic jazz standards like Whatever Lola Wants



by Adler and Ross, Luck Be a Lady by Frank Loesser, and Irving Berlin's Cheek to Cheek. Each piece, enhanced by the dynamic energy of the Latvian Radio Big

Band, celebrated a deep-rooted love for jazz that resonated with the audience.

Commenting on the concert, Anthony Strong said, "Performing

at the Royal Opera House of Musical Arts was a real honour for me. What a stage, what a venue! Sharing my music with the audience was deeply rewarding,

made even more special by the exceptional Latvian Radio Big Band. It's an experience that will remain a real highlight in my career and one I shan't forget soon!"

ROHM will continue its vibrant 2024/25 season with an exceptional line-up of events. On December 5 and 7, Gaetano Donizetti's much-loved opera La Fille du Régiment will enchant audiences with its witty and heartwarming tale of love and identity, performed by a world-class cast and accompanied by La Corelli Orchestra. An Opera Talk on December 4 at 7pm will offer insights into the history and artistry behind this celebrated work.

Injaz implements measures to develop student skills in Buraimi

The schools in Oman, in continuation of their various educational initiatives, is adopting newer measures to improve the country's education system with enhanced quality of education.

These initiatives include developing curricula, enhancing use of technology in education, in addition to supporting extracurricular activities, which can develop students' skills and abilities, a release stated.

The government is keen to improve the learning environment so as to prepare a generation capable of facing the challenges of the future, and participate effectively in building the nation, the release added.

The Injaz Initiative is one of these initiatives that aim to develop students' skills in applied science subjects, implemented by Amina bint Al Imam Jabir bin Zaid School (9-12) in Buraimi governorate.

This report reviews its positive impact on the educational process, students, and the most prominent successes achieved by the initiative represented in raising the academic levels of the school's students.

The Injaz Initiative focuses on developing students' skills in applied science subjects and targets students in grades 10 and 11. It provides incentives and discounts through the Injaz card for those who qualify for competitive tests, which are provided by the entities and companies supporting the initiative.



The Injaz card is rewarded after obtaining the three challenge cards (bronze, silver, gold). The initiative is implemented by conducting competitive tests at the level of Al Buraimi Governorate via the initiative's digital platform, and students passing periodic tests in applied science subjects to obtain the Injaz card.

Samia al Balushi, Headmistress of Amina bint Imam



Jabir bin Zaid School and Director of the Initiative, reiterated that the Injaz Initiative is keen to enhance the partnership between schools and the local community, which serves the educational process, by activating e-learning in the educational process, and raising the academic level of students in applied science subjects.

She stated that the initiative's

work team includes the initiative manager responsible for managing and implementing the initiative in general, the academic team 1, whose role is to formulate test questions, and the academic team 2, which implements the tests, evaluates student performance, and analyses statistics on the digital platform.

There is also a marketing and public relations team, and an

other team specialising in technology, which helps in developing the electronic system for managing competitions and distributing discount cards.

Mona al Alawi, an IT teacher at Amina bint Al-Imam Jabir bin Zaid School and a main member of the initiative, informed that the initiative goes through four stages, starting with the planning and preparation stage, by forming a work team consisting of executive officials and educational supervisors, identifying the supporting entities, and concluding agreements with them.

In the second stage, the team is promoting the initiative in schools and the local community to increase awareness and motivate students to work hard and persevere.

"In this stage, we encourage the supporting entities to participate and provide incentives and discounts to students."

The third stage is the organisation and implementation stage. In this stage, the digital platform is designed for the initiative's electronic content, in which competitive tests are also implemented, and challenge cards are presented.

The last stage is the monitoring and evaluation stage. In this stage, the progress of the students' level is monitored, they are motivated to excel and persevere, and the initiative's indicators are analysed in raising the academic level of the participating students.

Lexus ES300h with hybrid capabilities creates unique statement of elegance

The Lexus ES300h, with its dual-motor setup and hybrid capabilities, has come up as an exceptionally powerful and fuel-efficient sedan that adequately highlights the uniqueness of Lexus brand.

Thanks to its auto-charging system, there's no need to plug in - one can simply drive and enjoy. With advanced technologies, the ES Hybrid offers an impressive 24.1km per litre mileage.

The Lexus ES300h delivers a smooth and exhilarating ride with its 2.5L, 16-valve DOHC engine, featuring VVT-iE (intake) and VVT-i, producing 215hp.

At Lexus, every vehicle represents a journey of life. The ES300h stands apart with its sophisticated and modern exteriors. Designed with modern aesthetics in mind, it features Lexus' signature front grille, Bi-LED headlamps, a rear spoiler, a moon roof with tilt-and-slide functionality,



and power-retractable outer rear-view mirrors with auto-tilt-down in reverse mode.

The interior of the ES300h is a blend of luxury and advanced technology. The 3-spoke leather and wood-finished steering wheel offers a premium feel, while the cabin features a wireless charging tray, a 17-speaker Mark Levinson Audio system, an 8-inch touchscreen display, An-

droid Auto and Apple Car Play functionalities to experience seamless connectivity.

For added comfort, the ES300h is equipped with tri-zone air conditioning, an uplifting ambient lighting system with inner handle illumination, and a head-up display for increased visibility. With adjustable legroom and 8-way power-adjustable front seats that include cushion length ad-

justments and memory seats for the driver, Powered Sunshades and Smart Power Tailgate with kick sensors, passengers can enjoy a comfortable journey, whether short or long.

Lexus introduces a comprehensive set of safety technologies to ensure a composed and pleasurable driving experience. Make every drive a breeze and enjoy precious moments, the ES300h is equipped with advanced features such as blind-spot monitoring, Rear cross-traffic alert, lane tracing assist, pre-collision assist, SRS airbags, and an adaptive high-beam system that contribute to peace of mind and lets you drive with confidence. Additional safety features include an electric parking brake with brake hold, pre-crash safety system, auto speed sensing door lock, child restraint seat in the rear, and tyre pressure warning system among others.



Hyundai launches eight iPhone prizes in raffle

Hyundai Oman, represented by OTE Group, has launched an exclusive offer on its popular passenger car lineup, available till January 31, 2025.

This limited-time offer brings customers an exciting array of benefits and the chance to win one of eight iPhone 16s through a raffle. This offer extends to Hyundai's complete range of passenger vehicles, including the Grand i10, Accent, Elantra, Sonata, Creta, Kona, Tucson, Santa Fe, Palisade, and Staria.

According to a press statement, there will be a raffle draw

offering everyone a chance to win one of eight iPhone 16s. Under comprehensive ownership benefits, one can enjoy four years of unlimited mileage service, first-year insurance and registration, and a five-year/100,000km manufacturer warranty.

"Hyundai Oman is delighted to introduce this fantastic offer as we continue our commitment to providing added value, reliability, and excellence to our customers," said a senior spokesperson at Hyundai Oman.

"Our goal is to enhance the ownership experience by offer-

ing top-tier vehicles with comprehensive support and exciting rewards, such as our extensive warranty and service packages."

Hyundai's lineup is celebrated for its high-quality construction, advanced safety features, and modern design. Each Hyundai model, from the compact and efficient Grand i10 to the spacious and versatile Staria, combines innovation with comfort, providing an optimal driving experience for all. Hyundai vehicles are known for their durability, performance, and adaptability to diverse driving conditions.

Asalah Priority Banking customers get Bank Muscat WhatsApp service

In line with its customer-centric vision 'To serve you better, every day' and strategy to enhance communication with customers, Bank Muscat extended its automated communication service via WhatsApp to exclusively the bank's Asalah Priority Banking customers.

Through this service, customers can utilise advanced search features, both in Arabic and English, to learn more about the products and services of the bank.

They may also avail the ser-

vice to raise inquiries about these services from 8.00am to 10.30pm every day, with the help of a dedicated customer service team to respond to customer inquiries. The WhatsApp service has witnessed significant engagement from Asalah Priority Banking customers, since its launch. Customers are availing a wide range of services through the platform, that has facilitated and enhanced communication between the Bank and customers.

In addition, the bank has in-

troduced a general WhatsApp service for all customers to obtain details and features about the banking services.

Asalah customers can easily send 'Hi' or 'Hello' to the dedicated WhatsApp number to receive all information related to their Asalah membership whether it is travel or banking benefits. One can save the designated number on their phones, and it will automatically appear on WhatsApp as the dedicated account for Asalah customers.

United Finance inducts Omani graduates

United Finance Company has announced the induction of ten Omani university graduates into its team through its Training-to-Employment Programme, launched in collaboration with the Ministry of Labour and the Middle East Institute.

This initiative reflects the company's commitment to supporting young national talents and empowering them to enter the job market by providing hands-on training opportunities that equip them with the necessary skills and practical experience to advance their careers.

Commenting on the programme, Nasser al Rashdi, CEO of United Finance Company,



said, "At United Finance, we believe in the importance of our role in contributing to community development and enhancing the capabilities of young Omani

talents. This program reflects our dedication to supporting job seekers and helping them achieve their professional aspirations."

The company affirms that such initiatives are part of its ongoing strategy to support Omanisation efforts, in alignment with Oman Vision 2040.

Georgia: Clashes outside parliament on third protest night

Tbilisi, Georgia - Georgians protesting the government's decision to delay European Union membership talks clashed with security forces outside parliament in the capital Tbilisi on Saturday evening.

Thousands of protesters took to the streets for the third night in a row. The protests, which have seen over a hundred arrested, have been the biggest since the ruling Georgian Dream party claimed victory in October's contested parliamentary elections.

Police fired tear gas, rubber bullets and used water cannons in an effort to disperse the rallies.

Protesters outside parliament used fireworks, with flames reportedly seen coming out of a parliament building window.

Some of the protesters set up barricades on Tbilisi's main avenue. Others on the steps of parliament burned an effigy of Bidzina Ivanishvili, the Dream party's founder and Georgia's richest man. "I am afraid - I won't hide it - that many people will get injured, but I am not afraid to stand here," 39-year-old Tamar Gelashvili told the AFP news agency near the parliament building earlier in the day.

The Interior Ministry said that 'the actions of some individuals



present at the protest became violent shortly after the demonstration began'.

"Police will respond appropriately and in accordance with the law to every violation," it said. Protests also took place in various other cities across Georgia.

The EU's new foreign policy chief, Kaja Kallas, warned Georgian authorities on Sunday over violence against demonstrators.

"It is clear that using violence against peaceful protesters is not acceptable, and the Georgian government should respect the will of the Georgian people," Kallas said told journalists.

Earlier on Saturday, Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze had accused the pro-EU opposition of plotting a revolution, while the State Security Service said political parties were trying to 'overthrow the government by force'.

EU membership is a highly popular goal in the former Soviet republic.

"The people of Georgia are trying to protect their constitution, trying to protect their country and the state, and they are trying to tell our government that rule of law means everything," protester Tina Kupreishvili told the Reuters news agency outside parliament.

DW



Vietnam plans to build north-south highspeed rail link

Hanoi, Vietnam - Vietnam on Saturday announced plans to build a US\$67bn high-speed railway from the northern capital, Hanoi, to Ho Chi Minh City in the south.

The Vietnamese government said that it hopes the much-needed boost to infrastructure can drive growth and raise Vietnam's reputation among foreign investors.

60% of the route will run over bridges. Another 10% will run through tunnels, and only 30% is planned to be at ground level. Financing for the project is still unclear.

The route is expected to pass through 20 provinces and cities, with 23 passenger stations and five freight stations along the way. State media said the trains would transport both people and goods and also service defence needs.

What we know about the plan

"The national assembly voted to approve... a resolution on investment policies for the high-speed railway project on the North-South axis," said a statement on the Vietnamese parliament's website.

The railway is planned to stretch more than 1,500km (930 miles) from the capital in the north to the country's business hub, formerly known as Saigon, in the south.

Construction is expected to start in 2027, with Vietnam hoping that the first trains will operate by 2035. However, the country has been dogged by delays on previous infrastructure projects.

Due to the difficult terrain,

The project would reduce the current journey time by rail from 30 hours to around five.

Deputy Minister of Transport Nguyen Danh Huy said studies had highlighted a need for faster options on the north-south corridor.

"This project is pivotal for restructuring transport shares and serves as a cornerstone for Vietnam's leap into a new era of growth," he said.

Vietnam's transport infrastructure is considered relatively poor, with a road network struggling to meet demand and an underdeveloped rail system.

DW

Trump nominates loyalist Kash Patel as FBI director

Washington, D.C., US - US President-elect Donald Trump has nominated loyalist Kash Patel to lead the US Federal Bureau of Investigation, amid a series of controversial picks following his November victory.

"Kash is a brilliant lawyer, investigator, and 'America First' fighter who has spent his career exposing corruption, defending Justice, and protecting the American People," Trump wrote in a post on Truth Social announcing the nomination.

The nomination comes to confirm earlier expectations that Trump would replace the FBI's current director Christopher Wray, whom he had picked in 2017 but later turned against.

It was during Wray's tenure that the FBI carried out a court-approved search at Trump's Mar-a-Lago estate in search of classified documents.



The nomination is the latest in a series of controversial picks following Trump's November victory

Who is Kash Patel?

The 44-year-old former federal public defender and former federal prosecutor first emerged as a controversial figure during Trump's first presidential term.

He worked as an aide to former House Intelligence Committee Chairman Devin Nunes. Patel during that stint was an integral part of leading the House Republican's probe into the FBI's 2016 investigation into contacts between Trump's 2016 campaign and Moscow.

He was also suspected of secretly serving as a back channel between Trump and Ukraine without authorisation during the former president's first impeachment trial, although he denies this.

That impeachment came over allegations that Trump had with-

Kash is a brilliant lawyer, investigator, and 'America First' fighter who has spent his career exposing corruption, defending Justice, and protecting the American People

DONALD TRUMP

held aid from Ukraine to pressure Kyiv into probing Hunter Biden in an effort to boost his reelection chances against rival Joe Biden.

Even after Trump's presidential term ended, Patel remained within his orbit, being among several people the former president designated as a representative for access to his presidential records.

He was among the few former Trump administration officials who claimed without evidence that Trump had declassified all

the records in question.

He has previously shared controversial views regarding the FBI, including calls for stripping the bureau of its intelligence-gathering role, as well as hunting down any of its employees who refuse to support Trump's agenda.

Patel also said he would be after all 'conspirators', including in the media.

Trump also announced on Saturday that he nominated Charles Kushner, a prominent

New Jersey businessman, to serve as ambassador to France.

Kushner is the father of Jared Kushner, who is a son-in-law of Trump, who served as a senior adviser during his presidency.

"I am pleased to nominate Charles Kushner, of New Jersey, to serve as the US Ambassador to France," Trump wrote his Truth Social platform.

"He is a tremendous business leader, philanthropist, & deal-maker, who will be a strong advocate representing our Country & its interests," he added.

Kushner is the founder and chairman of Kushner Companies, a privately held real estate firm, and he has held influential roles, including recognition as New Jersey Entrepreneur of the Year by Ernst & Young.

He has also been involved in

public service, including serving on the US Holocaust Memorial Council and as chairman of the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey.

Trump highlighted the long-standing connections between the Kushner family and his administration, noting Jared's close work with Trump in the White House on initiatives like Operation Warp Speed to develop and distribute the coronavirus vaccine, criminal justice reform and the Abraham Accords, which say several Arab nations sign normalisation agreements with Israel.

"Together, we will strengthen America's partnership with France, our oldest Ally, & one of our greatest!" Trump added, emphasising the importance of the US-France relationship.

Agencies

A CHRISTMAS MARKET IN PRAGUE



A woman chooses holiday decorations at a Christmas market at the Old Town Square in Prague, the Czech Republic, on Saturday (Xinhua)

Romanians vote as far right, Russia loom large

Bucharest, Romania - Romanians are voting in parliamentary elections, just days after the NATO country saw far-right and pro-Russian candidate Calin Georgescu win the first round of presidential polls.

With far-right parties tipped to win Sunday's vote, many fear that the country's major role in supporting neighbouring Ukraine amid the full-scale invasion by Moscow could be undermined.

The vote comes as Romania is suffering from soaring inflation, while many fear being dragged into the war in Ukraine.

Polling stations opened at 7am (0500 GMT) and will close at 9pm. An exit poll due to be published shortly afterward.

The far-right Alliance for Uniting Romanians (AUR), whose leader George Simion - a fan of



Romanians are voting for a new parliament

US President-elect Donald Trump - won nearly 14% of the presidential vote, has topped the latest polls on more than 22%.

A survey by pollster AtlasIntel put it ahead of both the ruling leftist Social Democrats (PSD) at 21.4% and their coalition ally, the centre-right Liberal Party (PNL), at 13.4%. The opposition centre-

right Save Romania Union (USR), whose presidential candidate, Elena Lasconi, came second in the presidential elections, had 17.5% support in the poll.

Another far-right party, the Party of Young People (POT), which supports Georgescu, could reach the 5% threshold to enter parliament, as could the other

ultra-right contender, the SOS Romania party.

Altogether, the three far-right parties are predicted to win more than 30% of the vote.

The parliamentary election is taking place against the backdrop of a recount of the first round of last week's presidential election after the surprise victory by Georgescu, a NATO opponent who conducted his campaign largely over social-media platform TikTok.

The recount was ordered by the Constitutional Court amid allegations of irregularities and possible interference in the election. The court is to decide next week whether a run-off between Georgescu and Lasconi will go ahead as planned on December 8.

DW

415,000 Gazans sheltering in schools

Hundreds of thousands more are trying to survive in makeshift shelters, says UNRWA

Gaza City, Palestine - The UN agency for Palestinian refugees (UNRWA) said on Sunday that more than 415,000 displaced individuals in Gaza are currently taking refuge in its school buildings. In a statement shared on social media, UNRWA posted the testimony of Aisha, one of the many Gazan women taking shelter in a school.

Expressing her exhaustion, Aisha said: "This place is meant for education, not for living."

"We suffer immensely under the health conditions we are experiencing, the economic conditions, the struggle to secure food and drink - there is no support, no assistance," she added.

"Hundreds of thousands more are trying to survive in even worse conditions in makeshift shelters," the UN agency said.

On Sunday, the UNRWA also suspended the delivery of humanitarian aid into the Gaza Strip through the Israeli-held Kerem Shalom crossing due to insecurity.



"We are pausing the delivery of aid through Kerem Shalom, the main crossing point for humanitarian aid into Gaza. The road out of this crossing has not been safe for months," UNRWA Commissioner-General Philippe Lazzarini said in a statement.

He said a large aid convoy moving into the territory was stolen by armed gangs last month.

"Yesterday, we tried to bring

in a few food trucks on the same route. They were all taken," Lazzarini said.

"This difficult decision comes at a time hunger is rapidly deepening. The delivery of humanitarian aid must never be dangerous or turn into an ordeal."

The UNRWA chief said Israel's ongoing siege, restrictions, lack of safety, and targeting of local police make it impossible to carry out humanitarian operations in Gaza.

"The responsibility of protection of aid workers and supplies is with the State of Israel as the occupying power. They must ensure aid flows into Gaza safely and must refrain from attacks on humanitarian workers," Lazzarini said.

"I call once again for a ceasefire that would also secure the delivery of safe and uninterrupted aid to people in need."

Gaza death toll surpasses 44,400

At least 47 more Palestinians were killed in Israeli attacks in the Gaza Strip, bringing the overall death toll since last year to 44,429, the Health Ministry in the enclave said on Sunday.

A ministry statement added that some 105,250 others were injured in the ongoing assault.

"Israeli forces killed 47 people and injured 108 others in six

massacres of families in the last 24 hours," the ministry said.

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

Meanwhile the Civil Defence Agency said on Sunday that Israeli attacks killed nearly 100 Palestinians in the Gaza Strip in the last 24 hours.

"Israeli massacres claimed nearly 100 lives in the last 24

hours in Gaza," spokesman Mahmoud Basal said.

He said one of the deadliest attacks targeted an inhabited house in Tel Zaatar in the northern town of Jabalia on Saturday, leaving over 40 people dead.

"The Civil Defence Service is still forcibly disabled in northern Gaza due to Israeli attacks with thousands of people without humanitarian and medical care," the spokesman said.

Since October 5, Israel has launched a large-scale ground operation in northern Gaza to allegedly prevent Palestinian resistance group Hamas from regrouping.

Palestinians, however, accuse Israel of seeking to occupy the area and forcibly displace its residents.

More than 2,300 people have since been killed in the onslaught, according to Palestinian health authorities.

Israel has launched a genocidal war on the Gaza Strip following a Hamas attack last October, killing nearly 44,400 people, most of them women and children, and injuring over 105,000.

On November 21, the International Criminal Court (ICC) issued arrest warrants for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and former Defence Minister Yoav Gallant for war crimes and crimes against humanity in Gaza. Israel also faces a genocide case at the International Court of Justice for its deadly war on Gaza.

Anadolu Agency

Syria: Airstrikes kill four civilians

Idlib, Syria - Airstrikes by the Syrian regime and Russian warplanes on Idlib's city centre killed four civilians, local sources reported on Sunday.

The attacks, which began early on Sunday morning, involved at least nine airstrikes on the Idlib city centre, according to an opposition-affiliated aircraft observatory.

Civil Defence sources said preliminary findings indicate that four civilians lost their lives and 20 others were wounded in the attacks.

The airstrikes, which targeted a marketplace and residential areas, caused significant damage.

The fighting erupted on November 27 between Assad regime forces and anti-regime armed groups in the western countryside of Aleppo province in northern Syria.

Since last week, the anti-regime armed groups have made rapid progress from the western countryside toward the city centre, capturing much of it by Saturday.



The armed groups took control of the town of Khan Shaykhun later on Saturday, establishing control of all of Idlib.

Meanwhile, the US is closely monitoring the escalating situation in Syria, according to a statement on Saturday from National Security Council spokesman Sean Savett.

The statement criticised the Assad regime for its refusal to

engage in the political process outlined by UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 2254.

"The United States has nothing to do with this offensive, which is led by Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), a designated terrorist organisation," it said.

Savett stressed that the US called for immediate de-escalation, protection of civilians and minority groups, and the initiation

of a credible political process to end the Syrian civil war through a settlement aligned with UNSCR 2254.

"We will also continue to fully defend and protect US personnel and US military positions, which remain essential to ensuring that ISIS (Daesh) can never again resurge in Syria," he added.

Anadolu Agency

Over 150,000 evacuated in Malaysia as floods worsen

Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia - More than 150,000 people have been forced out of their homes as floods in several northern states of Malaysia have worsened.

Pahang is the latest addition to the number of states affected by the massive floods, which have killed four people so far.

The number of flood evacuees housed in temporary relief centres nationwide has soared to 152,377 on Sunday morning, state-run Bernama news agency reported. Kelantan state has been the hardest hit, with 96,743 people evacuated, according to data from the National Disaster Management Agency.

Around 35,000 people were evacuated in Terengganu, with the rest of the displacements reported from seven other states.

The Department of Irrigation and Drainage reports that five major rivers remain above danger levels but are showing a decreasing trend.

The Malaysian Meteorologi-



Kelantan state has been the hardest hit, with 96,743 people evacuated

Pahang is the latest addition to the number of states affected by the massive floods, which have killed four people so far

cal Department warned that heavy rains will continue until Sunday in Kelantan, Terengganu and Perak.

Floods are a common phenomenon in Southeast Asia due to the northeast monsoon, which brings heavy rain from November to March.

Anadolu Agency

Three people killed as Cyclone Fengal disrupts life in India's Tamil Nadu

Chennai, India - At least three people were killed as Cyclone Fengal made landfall in India's southern Tamil Nadu and Puducherry coasts on early on Sunday morning, packing heavy rains and powerful winds, and forcing a brief flight suspension.

After landfall, Fengal is forecast to move west-southwestward. But so far, the storm remained stationary for six hours near Puducherry, *Hindustan Times* reported on Sunday.

Tamil Nadu's coastal districts bore Fengal's brunt, with flooded streets, disrupted travel, and lives lost in state capital Chennai.

All three fatalities were reported in rain-related incidents across Chennai.

The Chennai airport resumed

flight operations on Sunday at around 4am local time after a brief suspension that grounded over 200 flights. Flyers, nonetheless, complained of delayed and cancelled flights even after the operations resumed.

The storm, the second to develop over the Bay of Bengal this season, brought strong winds reaching up to 90km per hour (56 miles per hour) as it crossed the coastline. Weather authorities warned of continued heavy rainfall through Sunday in Chennai, with varying intensity based on cloud cover.

The tropical storm also brought Chennai's transport network to a standstill as low-lying areas experienced severe waterlogging, with at least 53 roads



Indian Army personnel rescue an elderly woman from the severely flooded area following Cyclone Fengal, in Puducherry, India on Sunday (ANI)

submerged and seven subways closed. The Tamil Nadu government extended payment deadlines for electricity bills in an attempt to provide temporary relief to the affected citizens.

A year's rainfall in 36 hours

Meanwhile, Cyclone Fengal has delivered the equivalent of a year's rainfall in just 36 hours in some parts of Tamil Nadu, with certain areas receiving around 56cm of rain, according to Rajesh Lakhani, Tamil Nadu's Additional Chief Secretary of Revenue and Disaster Management.

Lakhani stated that as the cyclone has now crossed the region, the government is focusing on restoration efforts to address

the resulting damage.

The Additional Chief Secretary noted that 49 relief camps have been set up in the Viluppuram district alone.

"Now that the cyclone has crossed, our focus has shifted to restoring the damage caused. Heavy rainfall continued until recently, with some areas recording 56cm of rainfall since 8:30am yesterday. This is equivalent to an entire year's rainfall occurring in just 36 hours. The cyclone remained stationary for some time, which led to such intense rainfall. People were evacuated in advance. Efforts are underway across the state to restore normalcy in the shortest possible time," Lakhani said.

Agencies

China flays US arms sales to Taiwan

Washington on Saturday had announced that it has approved \$385mn worth of arms sales to Taiwan

Beijing, China - China on Sunday deplored and ‘firmly’ opposed US arms sales to Taiwan, saying it ‘seriously’ violates the one-China principle and the three Beijing-Washington joint communiques.

A Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson said that Beijing has lodged ‘serious’ protests to the US over the latest arms sales, according to the state-run Xinhua news agency.

Washington on Saturday announced that it has approved US\$385mn worth of arms sales to Taiwan.

“The US arms sales to China’s Taiwan region seriously violate the one-China principle and the three China-US joint communiques, especially the August 17 Communiqué of 1982 and China’s sovereignty and security interests,” the spokesperson said.

The decision to sell arms to Taiwan is simply inconsistent with US leaders’ commitment of not supporting ‘Taiwan independence’, Beijing further said.

“We call on the US to immediately stop arming Taiwan and stop abetting and supporting ‘Taiwan independence’ separatist forces in seeking ‘Taiwan independence’ by building up its military,” the spokesperson said, adding: “China will take strong and resolute countermeasures to firmly defend national sovereignty, security and territorial integrity.”

Meanwhile, Taiwanese President Lai Ching-te on Saturday kicked off a weeklong tour of the Pacific with a two-day stopover



A Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson said that Beijing has lodged ‘serious’ protests to the US over the latest arms sales

in the US state of Hawaii that has provoked much anger in Beijing, which sees the visit as another

sign that Lai is pursuing ‘separatist’ goals. “Peace is priceless, and war

has no winners; we have to fight, fight together to prevent war,” Lai said during a visit to the USS

Arizona Memorial in Pearl Harbour, which commemorates the Japanese attack that provoked

the US’ entry into World War II. Lai’s remarks reflect his country’s perilous position as China continues to reject its sovereign status, claiming it as Chinese territory.

Much-feted visit

Lai received a red-carpet welcome in Hawaii, the first time a Taiwanese president had been accorded such an honour, according to his office.

He also received a standing

olutely crush’ any move toward independence.

In a statement, China’s Foreign Ministry said it ‘strongly condemns’ the US for hosting Lai’s stopover, adding and that it had ‘lodged serious protests with the US’. “China will closely follow the developments and take resolute and strong measures to defend our nation’s sovereignty and territorial integrity,” it said.

Although Washington does not recognise Taiwan diplomati-

Taiwanese President Lai Ching-te on Saturday kicked off a weeklong tour of the Pacific with a two-day stopover in the US state of Hawaii that has provoked much anger in Beijing, which sees it as another sign that Lai is pursuing ‘separatist’ goals

ovation ahead of a dinner with US government officials and Taiwanese people resident in the island US state.

In a speech, he said he was ‘grateful’ to the US for helping ensure the success of his trip, during which he will also visit Taiwan’s allies the Marshall Islands, Tuvalu and Palau.

The three countries are the only Pacific island nations among the 12 countries that recognise Taiwan’s sovereign status.

Beijing’s fury

The Chinese government, which has branded Lai a ‘separatist’, has responded to what is his first overseas trip with threats to ‘res-

cally, it is its most important backer and biggest supplier of arms.

The chairperson of the American Institute in Taiwan (AIT), which serves as the de facto US Embassy in Taiwan, highlighted the strength of the partnership between Washington and Taipei.

“The opportunity for you to engage with thought leaders, the diaspora’s community and state and local leaders is invaluable, and I know will contribute to further strengthening the rock solid US-Taiwan partnership,” Laura Rosenberger said in a pre-recorded video played at Saturday’s dinner.

Agencies



Stacks of mud-covered cars are seen piled along a road in Valencia, Spain

Spain: Thousands protest over handling of flood

Oviedo, Spain - Around 100,000 poured onto the streets of the Spanish city of Valencia on Saturday to protest the government’s handling of last month’s deadly floods.

“One month later, and our towns and cities are still destroyed. The regional government is morally and ethically incapable of handling the reconstruction,” Anna Oliver, a spokesperson for the march, told the media. On October 29, historic rainfall triggered flash floods in several parts of Spain, but the province of Valencia was hit the hardest.

In what is now deemed the worst natural disaster in Spain’s modern history, at least 222 people died in Valencia, while eight others died in other regions.

Authorities are still searching for the bodies of four missing people.

This is the second massive protest targeting the regional government of Valencia, with the main demand being for the President of Valencia, Carlos Mazon, to step down.

Our towns and cities are still destroyed. The regional government is morally and ethically incapable of handling the reconstruction

ANNA OLIVER

An estimated 130,000 people attended the first protest, according to government figures.

Mazon is bearing the brunt of the anger because his government failed to alert citizens about the floods until it was too late. Many people died after being caught off guard by the rapid flooding while driving, in ground-floor apartments, or even while attempting to move their cars from parking lots.

It later emerged that he was having a long lunch on the day of the floods and arrived two hours

late to the emergency meeting, according to Spanish media reports. “He has not asked for forgiveness or provided any reasonable explanation for what happened that day,” Oliver added.

Much of the criticism is also levelled at the slow response time.

Thousands of children still have not been able to return to school, and many basements and garages remain filled with mud and debris, along with a smell that grows more putrid each day.

Others complain that not enough aid has reached the victims. Protesters also slammed the awarding of reconstruction contracts to companies previously involved in corruption scandals and the government’s move to remove the cap on their own wages.

Spain’s central government was also criticised in the protest’s manifesto, which accused it of failing to intervene or pressure the Valencian government when faced with its ‘inaction’.

Anadolu Agency

Voting in Namibia general election enters 4th day due to technical glitch

Lusaka, Zambia - Voting in Namibia’s general election was extended to a fourth day on Saturday because of a technical glitch, according to the Electoral Commission of Namibia (ECN).

President Nangolo Mbumba granted the ECN permission to extend voting in selected areas through fixed and mobile polling stations.

“The Presidency wishes to assure the Namibian public that the President is committed to upholding the Constitution, including the right of every citizen who has reached the age of 18 years to vote,” according to a statement on Mbumba’s Facebook page that said he thanked



Namibians for their patience and calm during the electoral period.

Namibia went to the polls November 27 with more than one million registered voters to elect a new leader. Mbumba has

held office for nine months after the death of Hage Geingob in February.

The ruling South West Africa People’s Organisation (SWAPO) has fielded Netumbo Nandi-

Ndaitwah, 72, the nation’s vice president, who, if elected, would become Namibia’s first female president.

Fourteen other candidates are vying for the presidency.

If none of the 15 attain the winning mark of 50% of the vote, the two top vote-getters would face off in a second round which has never happened in the country.

Mbumba met the African Union election observer mission to Namibia on Friday and said: “We should fight for democracy, whoever is going to lead us, should lead us in peace, not in chaos.”

Anadolu Agency

Muslim artist makes history in Germany

Munich, Germany - We meet Mahbuba Maqsoodi in her Munich studio, sitting among sketches and colourful mock-up drawings. One of this year’s special Christmas postage stamps issued in Germany features one of her artworks. “I’m happy. I feel honoured,” she told DW.

Maqsoodi says that while making art, she ‘always tries to stimulate ideas and encourage the viewer towards contemplation, and also reflection, to move them. In this case, with respect to the subject of birth. It would be nice if this stamp made people think about this heavenly light again’.

She was unaware that she is the first female artist ever be chosen for the special Christmas stamp - and that it is also the first contemporary artwork to be featured. In fact, since the German postal service Deutsche Post began issuing Christmas stamps in 1969, they have never printed



an image by a living contemporary artist, nor an artwork by a woman. So this is a milestone in both respects.

Mahbuba Maqsoodi, now 67, was born in the western Afghan city of Herat. As an adult, she worked there as a secondary school teacher. Her sister Afira ran the city’s largest girls’ school - and was shot dead on the street by an Islamist in 1979.

Following the killing, Maqsoodi quickly left the country with

her husband, Fazl Maqsoodi. She moved to Leningrad (now St Petersburg) in Russia, where she had received an art scholarship. After graduating, it was impossible for Maqsoodi to return home to Afghanistan due to the civil war. The Maqsoodis and their two young sons arrived in Munich in 1994 as refugees, and were quickly granted asylum. They have long been German citizens. “But my foundation is Afghanistan - the early years,”

she says. “That was instilled in me.”

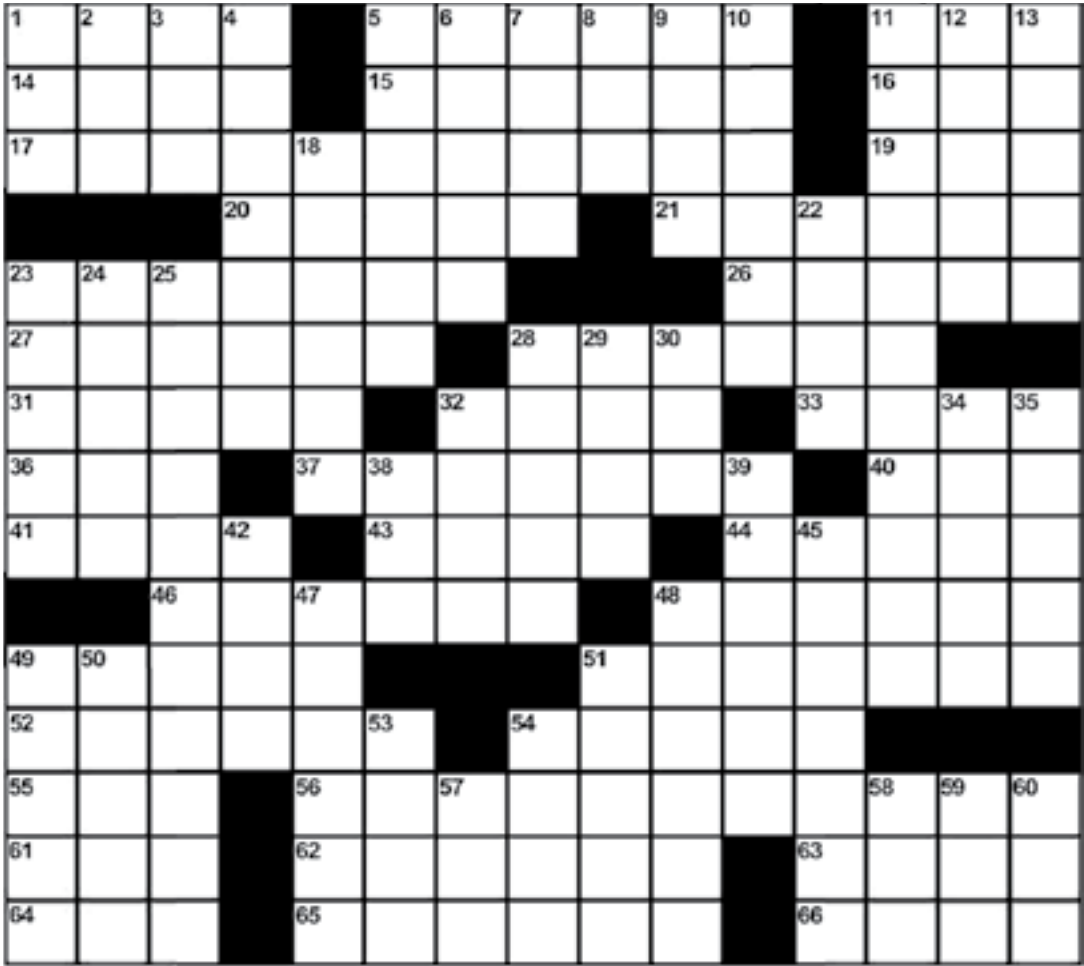
In Munich, Maqsoodi’s artistry was discovered by experts working in glass workshops. They encouraged her to start designing stained glass windows for churches. That eventually led to her shaping one of the most spectacular modern art projects in German ecclesiastical spaces in recent years, at the Tholey Benedictine Abbey, in the federal state of Saarland.

The 13th-century abbey is Germany’s oldest monastery. Once dark and sooty, its monks undertook a 15-year-long renovation, and it is once again shining.

The abbey church’s most important elements are its stained glass windows, which characterise the interior space. Three were designed by Germany’s world-famous artist, Gerhard Richter and Maqsoodi designed 29 of them.

DW

DAILY CROSSWORD



ACROSS-----
1) For students of both sexes
5) Metrical foot (Var.)
11)F amous couples' trans- port
14) Respiratory sound
15) Peanut butter choice
16) "What'd I tell ya?"
17) Experimental show site
19) " _ got an idea"
20) Mythical breastplate
21) Chair, as a committee
23) Chowhound
26) Dance maneuvers
27) Recruit through de- ception
28) More or less
31) Belittle
32) Frolic and gambol
33) Say the Lord's Prayer
36) Follow or tail
37) Links hits
40) Valuable rock
41) Old Testament twin
43)F odder for a mudder
44) Development devel- opments
46) Gold quantities

48) Part of USMC
49) Complex unit
51) Former Spanish coins
52) Left on the store shelf
54) Imitates a boxer
55) On, as a lamp
56) Hook-and-ladder site
61) Hawaiian dish
62) Exceedingly
63) Almond shade
64) Red army member
65) More adroit
66) Stone paving block
DOWN
1)_-Magnon
2) Awkward, stupid per- son
3) Polar helper
4) Pre-election events
5) Geometric figure with equal angles
6) At full speed, nautically
7) Young '60 s Brits
8) Fiddle stick
9) Bonneville Salt Flats state
10) Most withdrawn
11) Not including some- thing
12) Gun an engine
13) "The gift that_ on giv- ing"
18) Fixes a shoelace
22) Straddling
23) Transcript item
24) Timber wolves
25) In a difficult situation
28) Match game?
29) Thousand_ Calif.
30) "The Catcher in the_"
32) "Fall" attachment
34) Sports venue
35) Affirmatives
38) "Not_ shabby!"
39) Cascades high spot
42) Annul
45) Electra's co-conspira- tor
47) Played 18 holes
48) Guide
49) Mea_
50) Type of dip or bagel!
51) Hardly current
53) Deliberate loss, to a pug
54) Chipper
57) Call, as a game
58) Road hazard
59) Crumb
60) Cashew, e. g.



YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE

ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19
Lately, it seems as if there just aren't enough hours in the day to accomplish all of your goals. In many ways this feels like the busiest time of your life. The details just seem endless. Be sure to keep your body loose and in motion, especially if your mind is stuck in gridlock. Get plenty of exercise and take as many breaks as necessary. Your hectic schedule may cause you to miss an important social event, but going to bed early may be a blessing in disguise.

LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22
As the stars change their positions, it would be in your best interests to keep your reputation clean. Keep your private life out of the public sphere unless you are prepared to deal with nosy neighbors and prying eyes. Tonight, you feel quietly satisfied by a sense of renewal that sweeps through your body. Reconsider a long-standing habit, especially if it costs lots of money. Keeping things simple is the key to a successful future.

SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER21
Try to ignore your impulses to run away from whatever is bothering you today. Take a good look at your life's path. When your principles only seem to make your life more difficult, it is time to reexamine them. Recognize that an insoluble problem might not even be your problem. Your best move is to back up and wait. Avoid asking for a raise or any similar type of monetary compensation.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

01. About two thirds of Africa's active volcanoes follow roughly what line?
A. The East Africa Rift
B. The Mediterranean coast
C. The Drakensberg escarp- ment
D. The Red Sea

TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20
It seems as if everyone has already chosen teams and grabbed their equipment while you're still in the locker room suiting up. Don't worry. Once you know the rules, you can play any variation of the game. The correct procedure is just as necessary in your personal life. You may have to go through the proper channels to get someone's attention, but once you do, get ready for some unexpected excitement.

VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22
Everything is looking up and you're heading in the right direction. Your relationships glow with health, your system runs so smoothly you can accommodate someone else without major adjustments, and you learn to open minds to other ways of thinking. Putting in your two cents' worth could bring some interesting results. You are recognized for both your intelligence and your initiative later in the day.

CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19
A lot of important information may be passing by you today, so if you don't have a good memory, be sure to write everything down. File away important knowledge for future reference. You never know when you may need it. Today's random fact could be tomorrow's missing puzzle piece. A project needs your help later in the day. Volunteer your services with confidence. Your solid grasp of reality helps you achieve a lot at this time.

02. The hovercraft was in- vented In which decade?
A. 1930s
B. 1960s
C. 1940s
D. 1950s

GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21
Today, you go out of your way to gather information, but the facts are no good by themselves. It's all in how you use them. Make sure you've done all the necessary research before presenting your hypothesis. It turns out all your work might be used in multiple ways. Way to multitask! You could be so absorbed in this project that you miss an obvious signal. Don't forget to come up for air.

LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22
Although you can't pinpoint the exact moment you noticed the difference, something has definitely changed in your life. Your freedom of movement is somehow restricted. Don't worry. If you've dug yourself into a hole, you should be able to get yourself out. If you're feeling ignored, make your voice heard. The Universe has a way of mixing things up when the time is right. Look inward for answers that aren't apparent to everyone else.

AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18
The stars put an entirely new spin on the mundane and ordinary. A wildly different idea presents itself as an obvious solution, leaving you wondering why you didn't think of it sooner. If you lack the energy to lead, a suggestion whispered in a friendly ear could make all the difference, which definitely has its advantages. Remember that trust and friendship are the best starting points for any group endeavor.

CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22
There are no unfair advantages today. Do everything in your power to get a leg up on the competition! This might be a good time to acquire additional computer equipment or electronic devices that can put you ahead of the game. Increased power connects you to a whole new world. You are especially quick at making sense of unintelligible manuals today. What seems like an unbreakable code to everyone else seems quite simple to you.

SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21
Talking to strangers doesn't have to be a bad thing. Meeting new people today might actually be a breeze when you let your charm come into play. Making small talk with someone at a bus stop or in a restaurant could lead you down an entirely different (and exciting) path! Let your instincts guide your first impressions. Thinking about the new folks you've met will help ease your day.

PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20
Now is the time to lend a helping hand wherever you can. There are many ways to make a contribution. Your compassion and understanding are endless. It also helps that you know exactly what to say and how to say it. When others come to you for advice, think of it as a true compliment instead of an intrusion. Be especially easy on family members who are having a difficult go of it.

Answers: 1.A 2.D 3.D

KIDS COLOURING



BOGGLER

M	E	M	Y
W	O	A	R
O	A	P	E
N	A	B	R

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.

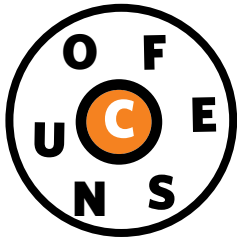
SOLUTION
20-25 words: Excellent,
15-20 words: Very good,
10-15 words: Good,
5-10 words: Average

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

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

WORD BUILDER



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

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

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER

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

ALL GUNS BLAZING

Saka, Odegaard shine as five-star Arsenal thrash West Ham

London, England - Resurgent Arsenal romped to a 5-2 victory at capital rivals West Ham United in Saturday's Premier League derby with all seven goals coming in a mind-boggling first half in the evening kickoff at the London Stadium.

Gabriel's trademark ninth-minute header opened the floodgates and Arsenal ran riot, with Leandro Trossard tapping in after 26 minutes before Martin Odegaard's penalty and Kai Havertz's cool finish in the space of a minute sent some home fans heading for the exits.

Incredibly, West Ham responded almost immediately with Aaron Wan-Bissaka slotting home before a stunning free kick by Emerson offered hope of an unlikely comeback.

But Arsenal were awarded a second penalty of the game in first-half stoppage and this time Bukayo Saka stepped up to dispatch his spot kick past Lukas Fabianski.

By comparison the second half was something of an anti-climax as Arsenal cruised to the win that moved them up to second in the table with 25 points, six behind leaders Liverpool who host struggling champions Manchester City on Sunday. Arsenal have now scored 13 goals in their last three games as they return to form in spectacular fashion after a slump.

"I was happier with the first 30 minutes rather than the last 15 minutes of the first half that's for sure," said Arsenal manager Mikel Arteta, whose side beat

Sporting 5-1 away in the Champions League this week.

"We started incredibly well, so positive, so much energy and a

We started incredibly well, so positive. Immediately after we scored the fourth we conceded a sloppy one and an unbelievable free kick and then it was game on.

MIKEL ARTETA

lot of quality. Immediately after we scored the fourth we conceded a sloppy one and an unbelievable free kick and then it was game on. Thank goodness we scored the fifth and we were able to manage the game in the second half."

For the second season running Arsenal went to West Ham and dished out a humiliation. Last year they won 6-0 and the way they began on Saturday they looked like surpassing that.

As it was, all the fireworks arrived before halftime and they

ended in cruise control with West Ham's Danny Ings even going close to salvaging some more home pride late on.

It was only the fourth time in a Premier League match that seven goals had been scored in the first period, the last occasion being Reading against Manchester United in 2012.

While Arsenal manager Mikel Arteta was purring at his side's

display, West Ham manager Julen Lopetegui, who was forced to watch from the stands because of a touchline ban, is back under pressure after having appeared to turn the corner with his side's win at Newcastle United on Monday.

West Ham are 14th in the table and have now lost four times at home in the league this season under the Spaniard, who

replaced David Moyes in May.

Lopetegui would surely have told his players about the threat from Gabriel at set pieces but they clearly were not heeding when he met Saka's corner with a deft header.

Arsenal oozed confidence early on and their second goal was a masterclass as Saka and Odegaard combined to tee up Trossard for a close-range finish.



Bukayo Saka (L), Martin Odegaard, and Kai Havertz were all on target for Arsenal who ran riot in the first half

Manchester United crush Everton, thumping victory for Chelsea

Manchester, England - Marcus Rashford and Joshua Zirkzee bagged two goals apiece as Manchester United thumped Everton 4-0 on Sunday in new manager Ruben Amorim's first Premier League match at Old Trafford.

Rashford put United ahead in the 34th minute when he darted in to fire home Bruno Fernandes's corner with a side-footed volley that sailed in off the outstretched foot of Everton defender Jarrad Branthwaite.

The goal ignited Amorim's side, who dominated the rest of the match, and Zirkzee doubled the lead in the 41st minute when Amad Diallo intercepted Jordan Pickford's goal kick and the

Dutch forward fired home Fernandes's cross from close range.

Rashford completed his brace 20 seconds after halftime when he ran on to a through ball from Amad who caused Everton problems all afternoon.

The Ivory Coast forward stripped the ball off James Tarkowski in the 64th minute and drove forward before feeding Zirkzee to slot in his second.

United climbed three spots to ninth in the table after 13 games, while Everton, who have not scored in four matches, are two points above the relegation zone in 15th.

Meanwhile, expertly taken goals from Nicolas Jackson, captain Enzo Fernandez and Cole

Palmer earned Chelsea a 3-0 home win over Aston Villa, lifting them to joint second in the table.

In another match, Fulham captain Tom Cairney came off the bench to rescue a point before being sent off in a 1-1 draw at Tottenham Hotspur, after Brennan Johnson's volley gave the hosts the lead

At Stamford Bridge, Chelsea took advantage of a tired-looking and error-ridden Aston Villa side who have now failed to win in eight games in all competitions.

The Londoners made their mark early when Senegal striker Jackson neatly side-footed a Marc Cucurella cross from the left, knocking it in off the post in the seventh minute.



Manchester United's Marcus Rashford celebrates after scoring against Everton on Sunday



Mikel Arteta

We are in a great moment right now, says Arteta

London, England - Arsenal are building momentum again after their bad patch but must maintain their resurgent form, manager Mikel Arteta said after his side's 5-2 demolition of West Ham United.

The victory lifted Arsenal back to second place in the Premier league and confirmed they have engaged top gear again after a run of four winless league games before this month's international break.

Gabriel, Leandro Trossard, skipper Martin Odegaard, Kai Havertz and Bukayo Saka were all on target in a frenetic seven-goal first half at the London Stadium as Arsenal moved to 25 points, six behind Liverpool who host troubled champions Manchester City at Anfield on Sunday.

"Yeah, we've got some momentum. I think we have some flow back, a real determina-

tion, winning consecutive matches against three opponents is great," Arteta, who side beat Nottingham Forest 3-0 last Saturday and then followed up by beating Sporting 5-1 away in the Champions League, told reporters.

"We're going to enjoy tonight and watch a beautiful game of football tomorrow. We are in a great moment right now.

"But in football be on your toes and prepare the best way possible," added the Spaniard whose side host Manchester United in the Premier League on Wednesday.

The return to fitness of captain Odegaard after a long lay-off with an ankle injury has been a major boost for Arsenal, while Saka looked rejuvenated after sitting out the last England camp with a niggling injury.

PSG held to frustrating draw at home by Nantes

Paris, France - Paris Saint-Germain were held to a rare 1-1 home draw against underdogs Nantes in a Ligue 1 clash on Saturday when an early goal from Achraf Hakimi was cancelled out by Matthis Abline.

The match had barely started when Goncalo Ramos flicked a cross into the box to Hakimi, who easily slotted the ball into the net, giving PSG a flying start after just two minutes.

However, underdog Nantes refused to give up against the league leaders, equalising seven minutes before the break with a

goal from Abline.

PSG pressed hard for a late winner, driving Nantes into a resolute defensive stance, but the visitors held firm, weathering the storm. PSG are still alone at the top with 33 points, seven points ahead of AS Monaco who play Marseille on Sunday.

PSG manager Luis Enrique lamented his team's failure to convert chances despite dominating possession, and stressed the need for persistence.

Luis Enrique's team dominated possession to such an extent that they set a new Ligue 1

record, with 84.1 per cent possession, the highest since records began in 2006.

"Efficiency is the key to football. It is very difficult to be efficient, to attack an opponent who is very compact in his area," Luis Enrique said. "It's incredibly tough to create as many chances as we did. But it's clear that if you don't score, it becomes frustrating and draining.

"In the end, there's only one way forward: to persist, persist, continue trusting the players and the team, and keep moving forward."



Achraf Hakimi gave PSG an early lead against Nantes but despite dominating the game they had to settle for a draw

Botafogo win Copa Libertadores title

Buenos Aires, Argentina - Botafogo beat Atletico Mineiro 3-1 to win their first Copa Libertadores title despite being reduced to 10 men after Gregore was sent off just 30 seconds into the contest at the Monumental Stadium on Saturday.

Fans decked in black-and-white jerseys, the colours of both teams, barely had a chance to settle into their seats when Gregore was handed his marching orders for a foul on Fausto Vera, who was left with a bleeding head after being on the receiving end of a flying kick. Mineiro tried to make the most of their numer-

Botafogo defended well and goalkeeper John kept Mineiro's efforts at bay as Junior Santos put the icing in the cake in added time to give coach Artur Jorge's side their first title in the South American competition

ical advantage in the final, which featured two Brazilian teams for the fourth time in the last five years. However, Botafogo opened the scoring in the 35th minute, when Thiago Almada put the ball right into Luiz Henrique's path to fire home into the net.

Botafogo were awarded a

penalty seven minutes later when Everson crashed into Luiz Henrique as he attempted to grab the ball and, after a VAR review, Alex Telles converted the spot kick to make it 2-0.

Mineiro's hopes were restored immediately after the break when Eduardo Vargas headed

home a corner from Hulk.

But Botafogo defended well and goalkeeper John kept Mineiro's efforts at bay as Junior Santos put the icing in the cake in added time in an enthralling encounter that gave coach Artur Jorge's side their first title in the South American competition.

After 24-time tennis Grand Slam winner Novak Djokovic presented the trophy to the champions, a jubilant Almada said: "Today, with one less (man on the pitch), we played an intelligent game. A show of character for the team and I think we deserve this title."

Botafogo players celebrate with the Copa Libertadores trophy

MUSIALA TO THE RESCUE

Bayern Munich midfielder scores late goal to snatch draw at Dortmund

Dortmund, Germany - Bundesliga leaders Bayern Munich scored an 85th-minute equaliser through in-form Jamal Musiala to rescue a 1-1 draw at Borussia Dortmund in the Klassiker on Saturday and go seven points clear at the top.

Dortmund, who had won their previous six home games in the league this season, took a 27th-minute lead thanks to Jamie Gittens's superb solo effort before the visitors suffered another blow six minutes later when top scorer Harry Kane was taken off injured.

Kane, who was set for a scan later on Saturday, is now doubtful for next week's German Cup clash against holders Bayer Leverkusen.

The Bavarians, who had won their last seven matches across all competitions without conced-



Bayern Munich's Jamal Musiala celebrates his goal against Borussia Dortmund

We're annoyed with the first half because we did not play the way we had wanted. We improved in the second half but we would have liked to score earlier

THOMAS MUELLER

ing a goal, improved after the break and carved out a string of chances but lacked some clinical finish before Musiala's equaliser.

"We're annoyed with the first half because we did not play the way we had wanted. We improved in the second half but we would have liked to score earlier," said Bayern's Thomas

Mueller.

"I had a chance, (Dortmund keeper) Gregor (Kobel) did well to close the space. Leroy also had an opportunity. Overall the draw is in order."

In a rollercoaster first half, Dortmund had to take off injured defender Waldemar Anton after only 17 minutes.

The hosts, however, struck with their first chance of the game when England youth international Gittens shook off Konrad Laimer, charged into the box and whipped a shot past keeper Manuel Neuer for his fourth league goal.

Bayern, unbeaten in the league, then saw Kane, who has 14 league goals, taken off and replaced by Thomas Mueller.

The veteran player almost scored two minutes after the restart when Musiala found him in the box but his point-blank effort was blocked by keeper Gregor Kobel.

With the visitors now in control, Musiala tried his luck from 20 metres with a curled, low shot before Leroy Sane's poor finish saw his own effort from close range sail wide.

Bayern's Neuer still had to come to the rescue in the 62nd to deny Marcel Sabitzer and keep his team in the game before the unmarked Musiala struck with five minutes remaining, heading in Michael Olise's cross for his sixth league goal.

Bayern are on 30 points in top spot, seven ahead of Eintracht Frankfurt, who were in action at Heidenheim on Sunday.



Diego Simeone

We need to maintain humility, says Atletico coach Simeone

Valladolid, Spain - Atletico Madrid's winning run is down to a successful adaptation by their summer signings, said coach Diego Simeone on Saturday after his side beat Real Valladolid 4-0 and clinched their seventh-straight win across all competitions.

Atletico had a dry spell earlier in the season when they won just one out of six games despite spending more than 200 million euros (\$211.50 million) reinforcing the squad with sign-

Atletico had a dry spell earlier in the season when they won just one out of six games despite spending more than 200 million euros

ings such as Julian Alvarez, Conor Gallagher and Robin Le Normand after a trophy-less campaign.

A month since their last defeat, a 1-0 league loss at Real Betis, Simeone believes his team to be on the right track and having a solid game plan. "The growth of (Clement) Lenglet, Gallagher, Julian, (Alexander) Sorloth and the hope of recovering Le Normand soon is giving us a good collective work," said Simeone.

"We lost a very bad game against Betis, where we were not recognisable. And I think that was the breakthrough of what has come from then on. We can win, lose or draw, but we have to be recognisable."



Atletico Madrid's Julian Alvarez celebrates with teammates after scoring against Real Valladolid

Alvarez, Griezmann on target in Atletico's thrashing of Valladolid

Valladolid, Spain - Atletico Madrid hammered bottom side Real Valladolid 5-0 in a LaLiga encounter at the Jose Zorrilla stadium on Saturday and provisionally moved into second place in the standings.

Atletico, who claimed their seventh straight win in all competitions, are on 32 points, two ahead of Real Madrid, who have two games in hand. Barcelona, who lost 2-1 to Las Palmas earlier on Saturday, remain top with 34 points.

"I'm happy with the team's performance. We know that every match is important and we came out very well today. Three important points and let's keep going like this," Atletico forward

Antoine Griezmann told DAZN.

Clement Lenglet opened the scoring for Atletico after 26 minutes with a close-range finish from Marcos Llorente's cross from the right, marking the French defender's first LaLiga goal since 2020.

Julian Alvarez doubled the lead in the 35th minute, pouncing on a rebound from goalkeeper Karl Hein who had blocked Griezmann's shot but could not deny the Argentine striker from the second attempt.

Rodrigo De Paul made it 3-0 two minutes later with a first-time low shot, before Griezmann added another goal seven minutes into the second half after a brilliant move that drew ap-

plause from the opposing fans.

"I am grateful for the applause (from Valladolid fans). That's what we footballers want, for them to enjoy us, whether they are our opponents or our team," Griezmann added.

"The affection is appreciated. I feel very good and I hope to give more."

Valladolid's Ivan Sanchez got the closest chance to put the hosts on the scoresheet but his 72nd-minute attempt hit the crossbar.

Alexander Sorloth then scored a stoppage-time winner as Valladolid slumped to their tenth defeat in 15 games, leaving them bottom of the table on nine points.

Blow for Bayern as Kane suffers thigh injury

Munich, Germany - Bayern Munich striker Harry Kane is doubtful for Tuesday's German Cup clash with holders Bayer Leverkusen due to a thigh injury, the Bundesliga club said on Sunday.

The 31-year-old, top scorer in Germany's top flight this season, was taken off in the first half of the 1-1 draw at Borussia Dortmund on Saturday.

"Kane suffered a small muscle tear in the back of his right thigh," Bayern said in a statement. "Which means Bayern will have to do without Kane for the time being."

Bayern manager Vincent Kompany admitted Kane was unlikely to be fit to face Leverkusen.

"Obviously, it will be tight for Tuesday. I don't know many players who can recover that quickly," Kompany said after the Dortmund game.

German media reported that



Harry Kane suffered a small muscle tear in the back of his right thigh

England captain Kane would be sidelined for at least two weeks. Bundesliga leaders Bayern host Heidenheim on Saturday.

"Harry's goals are very hard to replace but we have said from the start that we trust our vsquad," said Kompany.

"You cannot replace players of his quality with another place but the boys can do it together."

Bayern looked to be heading to their first league loss without Kane's punch up front before Musiala's late equaliser.

"We don't start a game without wanting the three points but today we did not get the three points. That is the reality," Kompany said.

"We were a goal down so we showed character. We levelled and then kept on pushing and that showed that we have this belief. No successful team can go through a season without such moments."

Reijnders double inspires Milan to win against Empoli

Milan, Italy - Tijjani Reijnders's double and a goal by Alvaro Morata earned AC Milan a comfortable 3-0 win over Empoli at a foggy San Siro in Serie A on Saturday.

Morata gave Milan the lead in the 19th minute, scoring with a first touch on a rebound, before Reijnders doubled the advantage just before the break with a brilliant half-volley and added a third in the second half following an individual effort.

Milan are seventh in the standings with 22 points, seven points off leaders Napoli who visit 11th-placed Torino on Sunday.

They still have a game in hand after their match at Bologna was postponed in October due to flooding in the region.

Milan, who have recently



AC Milan's Tijjani Reijnders celebrates with teammates after scoring against Empoli on Saturday

struggled on the domestic front while excelling in the Champions League, gave the fans some respite, having won only once in their previous four league games.

Milan beat Slovan Bratislava 3-2 in the Champions League on Tuesday for their third consecutive victory in the competi-

tion, a streak that also included a 3-1 win at champions Real Madrid.

The hosts dominated Empoli in an entertaining clash, crafting 20 scoring opportunities overall, and made the majority of their four attempts on target count as visibility on the pitch was impaired by dense fog.

JOYOUS IN JEDDAH

Al Harthy and OQ by Oman Racing deliver second GTWCE podium of the season

Muscat - Ahmad al Harthy, Sam De Haan and Jens Klingmann made their second consecutive Fanatec GT World Challenge Europe powered by AWS Endurance Cup podium appearance with a faultless performance for OQ by Oman Racing at the Jeddah Corniche Circuit on Saturday.

Delivering an excellent showing throughout the season-concluding 6 Hours of Jeddah, the inaugural visit of GTWCE and, indeed, Al Harthy and his teammates to the Saudi Arabia venue, second place in the Bronze class also ensured a richly deserved top four finish in the championship standings.

Beginning the race from eighth in class, the trio maximised the team's strategy in the No.30 BMW M4 and a great opening double-stint from De Haan was followed by impressive charges by Al Harthy and Klingmann.

Following on from the teammates' remarkable history-making outright GTWCE Endurance Cup race win at Monza in Italy in September, they were able to repeat star form this weekend in Jeddah with Klingmann taking the chequered flag less than seven seconds shy of the class winning Porsche.

"I'm absolutely delighted, thrilled to finish the season with such an amazing result," said Al



Oman's Ahmad al Harthy (C) celebrates with teammates Sam De Haan (L) and Jens Klingmann on the podium

Racing in the Middle East, and racing in the Gulf especially, means such a lot and we had so much amazing local support here – it's a weekend I will always remember.

AHMAD AL HARTHY

Harthy. "Jeddah is such a difficult, such a fast and such a complicated race track. For us to come here for the first time in this championship and to come out with a podium, especially after what we achieved at Monza, is just testament to everything we have done as a team.

"Huge thank you to OQ by Oman Racing and everybody involved, our amazing partners OQ, the Oman Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, Omantel, Experience Oman and BMW Oman. The amount of support we have from back home is truly incredible. Racing in the Middle East, and racing in the Gulf especially, means such a lot and we had so much amazing local support here – it's a weekend I will always remember.

"I must say a huge thank you to my teammates as well, Sam and Jens have done a great job this season with OQ by Oman Racing. This is a really proud moment for me here in Jeddah and a proud moment for my country, it is an honour to be on the podium once again for Oman."

De Haan was tasked with the opening stint of the 6 Hours of Jeddah and after holding position on lap one he moved up into seventh the next time around. By the end of the first hour he was running in the top five in Bronze and then climbed into the podium placings as pit-stops played out. Racing fell under a lengthy Full Course Yellow period around that time, with De Haan then leading the class.

Remaining in the car for a double stint, the action resumed late in hour two and roughly 15 minutes into the third hour OQ, Oman Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, Omantel, Experience Oman and BMW Oman supported racer Al Harthy took control of the No.30 BMW M4.

Holding fourth place when the order settled, the Omani soon moved back into the podium placings and held second position with three and a half hours of action still to go.



Al Manar Racing by Getspeed's Al Faisal bin Khalid Al Zubair (C) celebrates with teammates Dominik Baumann and Mikaël Grenier

Al Manar Racing by Getspeed seal runners-up spot

Jeddah, Saudi Arabia - The Al Manar Racing by Getspeed trio of Oman's Al Faisal bin Khalid Al Zubair, Austrian Dominik Baumann and Canada's Mikaël Grenier sealed the runner-up spots in the Drivers' and Teams' championships in the 2024 Fanatec GT World Challenge powered by AWS Endurance Cup by finishing second in the Gold Cup category at the 6 Hours of Jeddah on Saturday evening.

The race was interrupted by a lengthy full-course yellow after a collision involving their pole-sitting rival Arthur Rougier in the CSA Racing Audi and Nicolo Schiro in the Kessel Racing Ferrari. The Al-Manar Racing crew gradually pulled themselves through the field to finish behind the championship-winning Sain-téloc Racing trio of Paul Evrard, Gilles Magnus and Jim Pla in front of large crowds at the Jeddah Corniche Circuit.

Al Faisal said: "GT World Challenge is always a difficult championship but the track here in Saudi Arabia was extremely

demanding. Honestly, we had a blast. All the drivers enjoyed it. What a blessing to see a championship like this in Saudi Arabia. Let's hope we see more races in other Gulf countries.

"It was chaotic. We got a 30-second penalty and we got a puncture. But we still finished second and second in the championship. That is something we should be really proud of. We would have liked to have won the championship but I guess that gives us the target to improve one step next year."

The Imperiale Racing Lamborghini crew of Dennis Lind, Alberto Di Folco and Philippe Denes rounded off the Gold Cup podium in Saudi Arabia after finishing four laps ahead of the Haupt Racing Team's Arjun Maini, Michele Beretta and Jusuf Owega.

The Al Manar Racing by Getspeed crew took part in a couple of pre-event paid test sessions before tackling the official free practice stint on the Jeddah Corniche Circuit.

Convincing win for England

Christchurch, New Zealand - England romped to an eight-wicket victory over New Zealand in the first test in Christchurch on Sunday to take a 1-0 lead in the three-match series and bring the Black Caps thudding back to earth after their recent triumph in India.

Big batting, notably Harry Brook's 171, and a fine display of seam-bowling from Brydon Carse, who was named Player of the Match for his 10-wicket haul, laid the platform for a comfortable victory inside four days.

Carse took six for 42 as the tourists dismissed New Zealand for 254 despite a defiant 84 from Daryl Mitchell on Sunday, and a team that prides itself on its ability to

score quickly was never going to be too bothered by a victory target of 104 runs.

Jacob Bethell, who was making his test debut, scored the winning run to reach his maiden half century while Joe Root, who was playing his 150th, chipped in with an unbeaten 23 to help get England safely across the line before tea.

Brook, whose monster innings turned the match decisively in England's favour, was left padded up in the grandstand, his services not required.

"Yeah, very good," said England captain Ben Stokes. "Very happy with the way we fought, particularly when we were put under pressure on day two."

Norris hands Piastri victory in Qatar sprint

Doha, Qatar - Lando Norris ignored team orders and gifted Oscar Piastri victory at the line in the Qatar Grand Prix sprint on Saturday as McLaren took another stride towards a first Formula One constructors' title in 26 years.

The team's lead over Ferrari, who had Carlos Sainz finish fourth and Charles Leclerc fifth, stretched to 30 points with 88 still to be won from Sunday's race and the final round in Abu Dhabi next weekend.

McLaren will win the championship under the Lusail floodlights on Sunday night if they score 15 points more than Ferrari - the equivalent of another one-two.

George Russell was third for Mercedes in the 19-lap race with teammate Lewis Hamilton sixth,



Oscar Piastri (L) with Lando Norris

Nico Hulkenberg seventh for Haas and Red Bull's Max Verstappen taking the final point a week after securing his fourth

with Russell close behind, was pay back for Piastri who gifted Norris a sprint victory in Brazil.

The Briton was still fighting for the championship at the time but Verstappen ended that battle in Las Vegas last Saturday.

Just 1.3 seconds divided the top four at the finish, with Australian Piastri crossing the line a mere 0.136 ahead of his teammate to take his second successive Qatar sprint win.

Russell on pole

Mercedes's George Russell was promoted to pole position at the Qatar Grand Prix on Saturday after stewards gave Red Bull's Max Verstappen a one-place grid drop for driving unnecessarily slowly during qualifying.

Quadruple world champion Verstappen had celebrated a

first pole in five months but then faced an investigation for an incident with Russell that the Briton described as "super-dangerous".

Stewards said the case was complicated but agreed that Verstappen, who clinched his fourth title in a row in Las Vegas last weekend, was going too slow on a cool down lap when Russell suddenly came up behind him.

"Unusually, this incident occurred when neither car was on a push lap," they said in a statement. "Had Car 63 (Russell) been on a push lap, the penalty would have most likely been the usual three-grid position.

"However in mitigation of penalty, it was obvious that the driver of Car 63 had clear visibility of Car 1 (Verstappen)."

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Adam Mirza (right) and sophomore Vi Eicher at a November jam session for Mirza's class, Live Electronic Music, which is one of the three classes taking place in this year's Arts and Social Justice programme

The future of sound

MUSIC COMPOSITION CLASS EXPLORES THE INTERSECTION OF AI AND ART

It begins with a voice calling out, "Follow a new norm."

Four dancers dressed in black move to the centre of the dimmed Emory Performing Arts Studio, where they fall, gracefully, to the floor and begin twisting and untwisting their limbs like the wings of butterflies freshly slipped from their cocoons. Musicians sit at a table in each corner of the room behind laptops, touchpads and keyboards.

A moment later, sound floods the room.

The Friday night jam session took place as part of a semester-long collaboration between an Emory live electronic music composition class and an improvisatory dance class at Spelman College.

The joint class is one of three this semester in Emory's Arts and Social Justice Fellows (ASJ) program, which is celebrating its fifth year. The programme is a partnership of Emory College of Arts and Sciences, Emory Arts and the Emory Center for Ethics that brings artists into classrooms to reimagine an existing course, exploring creative approaches to address the issues that surface within class conversations.

This fall's courses culminate in a live student showcase featuring all three classes at The Supermarket, an event space in Poncey-Highland, on Tuesday from 6-9 pm.

Adam Mirza, assistant professor in composition in Emory's Department of Music, has taught a more straightforward version of his Live Electronic Music class



I feel like I am a reflection of [the dancer's] movements
ELLA FERGUSON

for several semesters.

"Usually, it's a small group of undergraduate students learning to compose experimental electronic music that they can play live, with laptops and maybe a few synthesizers," he says.

But in addition to recording and editing samples and programming their own musical instruments, students in this semester's ASJ version of the class are also working with the dance class at Spelman and experimenting with AI, the social justice topic theme that both classes are taking on.

"We've been throwing stuff at them and they're just going with it," Mirza says.

The 'we' includes ASJ Fellow Kacie Luaders, an Atlanta podcaster and sound artist, who is co-teaching with Mirza and T Lang, an associate dancer professor at Spelman.

The music starts with sounds of police sirens fading in from one corner, which is soon eclipsed by a bass rhythm. Another musician complements this beat with a rhythmic tapping and together, the beats crescendo. The dancers' synco-

other. The music settles into a profound calm. Resolution.

AI as creative opportunity

Luaders, who has used AI in her creative work, says she hopes to bring a sense of optimism to students, so that they view the technology as a tool rather than a threat.

"When GPTs and generative AI first came out, my first thought wasn't, 'Oh, no; they're going to steal our jobs! They're going to steal humanity!'" she says. "My first thought was, 'How can I use this to make cool stuff?'"

Luaders says she hopes that the Emory and Spelman students she's working with come away with a similar glass-half-full approach to AI, which they've threaded into many aspects of this semester's work.

The prompts that begin each musical jam, (like 'Follow a new norm') come from a

These have included employing so-called 'mapping' software that allows AI to generate novel combinations of the sounds and effects the students have created. One student has generated an AI song that she plans to distort and remix when she performs it live. Luaders is also creating a voiceover consisting of an interview she conducted with an AI chatbot.

Meanwhile, class discussions wrestle with large questions, says Mirza. "Things like: What implications does AI actually have for social justice? Is it going to take datasets not representative of the people, and what implications does that have?"

The students bring these ideas to bear in the emotional landscape of their musical compositions, even as they use the technology to create new sounds.

Kevin Karnes, senior associate dean of faculty and divisional dean of arts, says that this semester's class exemplifies the goals of the ASJ programme. "Working with T Lang's students at Spelman, our undergraduate composers become part of a community of young artists," he says. "And they're really coming together to imagine how their artistic work can positively impact the world in which we all live."

Highlighting the human

Few of the Emory students in Mirza's class are music majors. "And that's been the cool part," he says. "Seeing the students realize that they have the capability to make powerful music events happen and that they can engage with a certain confidence."

There's also something to be said for having fun, Luaders says. "Because being an artist or a creator doesn't have to mean 'I want to do this full time,' or 'I want to make this my job.' It can also just be, 'I enjoy this.' They're expanding their own possibilities."

[Emory University/Emory News Centre]



pated move - ments intensify, too, before the music shifts and bridges into something atmospheric and dreamy.

All the while, Mirza prompts the musicians, encouraging more from one while fading down another with a gesture. At one point, he motions to students in opposite corners, shouting for one to 'pass the energy!' to the

chatbot that Luaders designed. It dispenses excerpts from poems written by the Spelman dance students.

In composing the five-minute pieces they'll perform in duets with the dance students at the showcase, the Emory students have also experimented with a variety of AI tools.



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Many Western destinations seem to have lost this touch. How often have visitors walked

This cultural gap has real consequences. Destinations with inherent hospitality don't just deliver better customer experiences - they foster loyalty and advocacy. A single positive interaction in Bali or Kyoto can outweigh multiple frustrating

Collectivist cultures, such as those in much of Asia, prioritise group harmony and empathy, naturally leading to better guest

This isn't to suggest that Western destinations are inherently inhospitable. But the lack of a deeply ingrained service culture has become a glaring disadvantage in a hyper-competitive tourism landscape. As destinations scramble to attract post-pandemic travellers, those that consistently deliver positive

Customer experience is not just a moral imperative; it's an economic one. Travellers are increasingly voting with their wallets, prioritising destinations and brands that offer authentic and memorable interactions. In an age where visitors are willing to spend more, stay longer, and

Essentially, the post-pandemic travellers are seeking more than convenience and cost-efficiency; they're searching for destinations that make them feel seen, valued, and welcomed.



Consider the reputational damage when frontline staff, disconnected from their organization's brand promise, deliver subpar experiences. Whether it's a car rental agent dismissing a two-month reservation or an airline crew member showing visible annoyance at passenger requests, these micro-interactions erode trust and loyalty. Conversely, destinations with a welcoming culture offer an intangible sense of safety, ease, and well-being that draws visitors.

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