



H M the Sultan appreciates qualitative shift in judiciary

His Majesty Sultan Haitham chairs meeting of Supreme Judicial Council

Muscat - His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik chaired a meeting of the Supreme Judicial Council at Al Barakah Palace on Monday.

At the outset of the meeting, His Majesty the Sultan underscored the fundamental role of the judiciary in serving justice and consolidating the principles of law and order. He stressed the need to regularly update the justice system in a manner that suits the requirements of time and the aspirations of citizens and in line with Oman Vision 2040.

His Majesty also stressed the need to continue serving justice promptly by accelerating litigation procedures, diminishing adjudication time and avoiding backlog of unresolved cases.

His Majesty the Sultan underlined the importance of developing the digital infrastructure of the judicial sector to support realisation of prompt justice and enhancing transparency. In this context, His Majesty the Sultan commended the Supreme Judicial Council's 2024-2040 Strategy. He laid emphasis on taking immediate action to implement the strategy's operational plans.

Stresses on accelerating litigation procedures, diminishing adjudication time and avoiding backlog of unresolved court cases

Underlines developing the digital infrastructure of the judicial sector to support timely justice and enhancing transparency

His Majesty the Sultan expressed his satisfaction with the 'qualitative shift' - the tangible transformation - in the functioning of the judiciary, which, he observed, broadly met the aspirations of citizens, residents and investors by providing high-quality judicial services using modern technologies.

His Majesty the Sultan lauded the efforts of members of the Supreme Judicial Council and all other personnel, including judges, members of the Public Prosecution and notary public.

Directs establishment of 'Court of Investment and Trade' to resolve commercial disputes efficiently and bolster investment environment

Praises judiciary's transformation in providing high-quality services using modern technology

His Majesty the Sultan appreciated the Supreme Judicial Council members' commitment to integrity in performing their duties. His Majesty gave his directives to intensify professional training and application of programmes for judges, Public Prosecution members and employees of the Supreme Judicial Council, to ensure that they keep pace with legal and technical developments. He also underlined the need to staff the council with specialised cadres.

Pursuant to his Royal keenness on

the development and advancement of the investment sector and consolidation of the investment environment in Oman, His Majesty the Sultan gave his directives to finalise procedures for establishing the 'Court of Investment and Trade'. The court will be mandated to adjudicate investment and settle commercial disputes in a prompt and professional manner.

His Majesty the Sultan pointed out that this step stems from Oman's vision to promote the investment environment and attract capital by providing a specialised judiciary that supports growth of commercial activities and ensures protection of rights of litigants.

His Majesty the Sultan also gave his Royal directives to complete procedures to issue the Supreme Judicial Council's organisational structure so that it can continue to provide high-quality judicial services that consolidate confidence in the rule of law.

At the conclusion of the meeting, His Majesty the Sultan reiterated his full support for the independence of the judiciary.

ONA

Royal Directive to establish trade court welcomed

Our Correspondent Muscat

The Supreme Judicial Council and Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) have praised the Royal Directive to establish the 'Court of Investment and Trade', which is expected to strengthen Oman's legal framework and enhance its appeal to foreign investors.

Sayyid Mohammed bin Sultan al-Busaidi, Deputy Chairman of Supreme Judicial Council, described the directive as a significant development for the judiciary. "The Court of Investment and Trade will handle lawsuits involving merchants and disputes arising from investment contracts. It will reduce the burden on general courts by deploying specialised judicial expertise at all levels of litigation," he said.

Sayyid Mohammed added that commercial disputes require swift judicial procedures and the new court will provide expedited resolutions, facilitating a business-friendly environment for both merchants and investors.

He noted that the court's establishment would help create a stable legal environment, making Oman more attractive to local and foreign investors while boosting the nation's economic competitiveness. He emphasised that the court will complement ongoing government efforts to stimulate sustainable economic growth by improving the



Commercial disputes require swift judicial procedures and the new court will provide expedited resolutions

SAYYID MOHAMMED AL BUSAIDI

overall investment climate.

Faisal bin Abdullah al Rawas, Chairman of OCCI, highlighted the court's potential to support Oman's judiciary and serve as a cornerstone for attracting investments. "This initiative will strengthen the private sector by providing a specialised judiciary for investment and trade matters," he said. He stressed that the court's objective to resolve disputes efficiently aligns with Oman's vision to develop its investment sector and attract capital.

Rawas further remarked that the court's establishment will reassure investors by offering a robust legislative framework guaranteeing efficient dispute resolution in economic and commercial matters. "It will bolster confidence in Oman's legal and business infrastructure."

Sayyid Shihab chairs Social Protection Committee meet

Muscat - The ministerial committee entrusted with the Social Protection Scheme held a meeting under the patronage of H H Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs and Chairman of the Social Protection Committee, on Monday. The meeting was attended by ministers who are members of the committee.

The meeting discussed a number of topics on its agenda and took appropriate decisions.

The meeting also touched on the main indicators of the number of beneficiaries of social protection benefits, as well as indicators of insured persons.

The meeting discussed annual plans of two related funds - Social Protection Fund and Military and Security Services Retirement Fund.

One of the most important objectives of the Social Protec-



H H Sayyid Shihab al Said

tion Committee is evaluation of and monitoring the performance of the Social Protection Scheme. The overall aim is to ensure the application of a fair, functional and sustainable insurance coverage for all segments of society and to achieve the objectives set for the Social Protection Scheme.

ONA

Oman to host regional office of International Science Council

Our Correspondent Muscat

A memorandum of intent was signed between Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation and International Science Council (ISC) during Muscat Global Knowledge Dialogue, which began on Monday. The agreement outlines plans for a regional office of ISC to be established in the Middle East, with Muscat as its headquarters.

The memorandum was signed by H E Dr Rahma bint Ibrahim al Mahrouqi, Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, and Sir Peter Gluckman, President of ISC.

The regional office is expected to facilitate exchange of international expertise, foster collaboration in scientific research and innovation, and promote activities such as researcher exchange, conferences, workshops and technology transfer. It also



aims to support the growth of start-ups in the region.

H E Dr Saif bin Abdullah al Haddabi, Undersecretary for Research and Innovation, described the regional office project as a 'milestone' for Oman. "Establishment of the ISC regional office in Muscat is global recognition of Oman's role in the Middle East and North Africa region. It re-

flects the international community's trust in Oman's ability to bring together diverse perspectives and address global challenges, whether political or scientific."

Highlighting the significance of the dialogue in Muscat, H E Haddabi said, "This global science event has been in planning for years, particularly the ISC

General Assembly, which will convene on January 29-30. Delegates from more than 132 countries will gather marking its first in-person meeting since its establishment in 2018 through merger of International Social Science Council and International Council for Science."

He further emphasised that hosting the Global Knowledge Dialogue and ISC General Assembly strengthens Oman's position as a hub for science, technology, research and innovation. "This exercise aligns with Oman Vision 2040, which aspires to place the sultanate among advanced nations in these fields," H E Haddabi said.

The agreement on the ISC regional office marks a significant step for Oman in advancing regional and global scientific cooperation, positioning the sultanate as a key player in addressing pressing challenges through research and innovation.



03

Renewable energy contest for schools launched



05

China's DeepSeek rattles global tech stocks



10

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Bahla to host innovation forum at several sites on February 6

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) in Dakhliyah will host a forum titled 'Bahla - Gateway to Innovation and Entrepreneurship' in collaboration with Bahla Wali's Office on February 6.

The event will bring together public and private sector organisations, small and medium enterprises, and business leaders from across the wilayat.

An OCCI official informed that the objective of the forum is to position Bahla as a hub for creativity, innovation and entrepreneurship. It aims to facilitate the development of

youth talent, harnessing their skills to contribute to the advancement of both society and the nation.

"Innovation is the gateway to the future, and entrepreneurship is the bridge that links ambitious ideas with sustainable development," the official said. The forum is set to be the first of its kind in Bahla, featuring an exhibition that will showcase over 65 entities including entrepreneurs in fields such as artificial intelligence and innovation.

In addition to the exhibition, 20 young innovators from schools in Bahla will participate, alongside a range of government agencies. The event will include entertainment and cultural activities

at notable local landmarks such as Bahla Fort, Jabreen Fort and the Bisya-Salut Visitor Centre.

Additionally, a series of training programmes will be conducted for entrepreneurs at the headquarters of Omani Women's Association in Bahla.

Bahla Wali's Office unveiled the logo of the forum at Bahla Fort on January 23. Designed with elements reflecting the rich heritage of the wilayat, it uses colours carefully selected to symbolise a balance between tradition and modernity, as well as the energy and determination of the youth.

The forum marks an important milestone in Bahla's push to establish itself as a centre for innovation, creativity and entrepreneurial growth in the sultanate.

MHUP reduces real estate fees to ease ownership, attract more investments

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning (MHUP) has introduced significant amendments to real estate service fees, with a key highlight being reduction of registration fee for sales contracts from 2% to 1% for Omani individuals and companies. The move aims to cut real estate ownership costs and enhance investment opportunities in the sector.

Other notable changes include reducing the fee for real estate transactions facilitated by Islamic banks to 0.5%, as well as capping mortgage registration fee at 0.5%. These measures are expected to provide greater flexibility and accessibility in real estate financing in alignment with market needs.

The amendments, related to 85 government services, include consolidating and merging fees of 47 services, cancelling fees of 11 services, and introducing 14 new services. Additionally, fees of eight services have been reduced to improve transparency and simplify procedures.

A key decision under the revised framework exempts agricultural lands used for non-investment purposes, provided these are located within government-planned areas, from land-use fee. The agricultural land registration fee has also been cancelled to support the agri sector and promote better land utilisation.

In an effort to ease financial burden on citizens, fees of some e-government services have been cancelled, contributing to the digital transformation initiative. Moreover, the land allocation fee via electronic auctions has been removed to create more opportunities for investors and developers.

Oman and India amend double taxation pact

Muscat - The Sultanate of Oman and the Republic of India signed an amended protocol to their agreement for avoidance of double taxation and prevention of evasion of taxes on income.

The protocol was signed on behalf of Oman by Nasser bin Khamis al Jashmi, Chairman of Tax Authority, while H E Amit

Narang, Ambassador, signed on behalf of India.

Highlighting the significance of the agreement, Jashmi emphasised its role in strengthening economic relations between the two nations. He noted that the protocol reflects ongoing efforts to enhance bilateral cooperation and facilitate greater

trade and investment opportunities.

The agreement aims to prevent tax evasion and ensure a fair taxation framework for businesses and individuals operating in both countries, further fostering economic collaboration between Oman and India.

ONA

RO300 a month.

MHUP has also regulated fees of services such as real estate brokerage, development, valuation and services provided to real estate owners' associations. Fees of contract forms, application forms and maps issued by the ministry have been standardised.

These changes reflect the ministry's strategic commitment to fostering a favourable business environment and supporting investors. By streamlining procedures, reducing costs and enhancing service transparency, MHUP aims to raise beneficiary satisfaction level to 90%, creating a more efficient and investor-friendly real estate sector.

Crackdown on illegal logging in Dhofar; 3t of firewood seized

Our Correspondent
Salalah

Environment Authority (EA) recently conducted an intensive inspection campaign in the Ain Arzat area of Salalah in collaboration with Royal Oman Police targeting illegal logging and firewood sales.

During the campaign, officials seized approximately three tonnes of unlicensed firewood from 17 sites where illegal activities were being carried out. The campaign is part of a broader effort to safeguard Oman's plant wealth and curb destructive logging practices.

EA informed that several violations were uncovered, including use of mechanical saws, injection of chemicals and illegal uprooting of trees. In a statement, the authority emphasised the importance of preserving natural resources and ensuring environmental sustainability. 'Protecting the environment is a shared responsibility between individuals and institutions,' EA stated.

Beaconhouse Oman Triumphs at the Beaconhouse International School Convention 2025

Beaconhouse Oman has once again demonstrated its exceptional achievement on the international stage, securing the E-STEAM Championship for the second consecutive year, at the prestigious Beaconhouse International School Convention (BISC) 2025, which was held in Manila, Philippines.

In addition to this remarkable victory, our talented students achieved an impressive total of 15 medals across the E-STEAM and Sports categories, including:

- 3 Gold Medals
- 2 Silver Medals
- 10 Bronze Medals

"This outstanding success is a testament to the dedication, innovation, and perseverance of our students and staff. We are also thankful for the support of all parents who were amazing," said Mrs. Sabeen Ahmed, our team lead.

"We are incredibly proud of our students and teachers for

their hard work and commitment. Winning the E-STEAM Championship for the second consecutive year and securing multiple medals across categories showcases the strength of our education system and the determination of our students," said Mr. David, Country Head of Beaconhouse, Oman.

Mrs. Zeba Masood, Principal of Beaconhouse, also expressed her pride in the students' accomplishments, emphasizing the school's commitment to nurturing talent, fostering innovation, and providing students with opportu-

nities to excel on global platforms.

Beyond the competitions, students had an unforgettable experience in Manila, where they made new friends, engaged in cultural exchanges, and created lasting memories. The event was not only a platform for competition but also an opportunity for learning, collaboration, and personal growth.

Beaconhouse Oman remains committed to fostering a culture of innovation, teamwork, and distinction, ensuring our students continue to shine on global platforms.

Advertorial

2-day Muscat Global Knowledge Dialogue highlights science as a tool for progress

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Muscat Global Knowledge Dialogue, a major international event focused on science and innovation, opened on Monday under the patronage of H H Sayyid Asaad bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for International Relations and Cooperation Affairs and Personal Representative of His Majesty the Sultan.

Organised by Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation in collaboration with International Science Council (ISC), the two-day forum will be followed by the ISC General Assembly on January 29 and 30.

In her opening address, H E Dr Rahma bint Ibrahim al Mahrouqi, Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, underscored the forum's aim to foster knowledge exchange and collaboration among nations. She emphasised the need to transform innovative ideas into tangible



This global event provides an exceptional opportunity to bring together over 500 participants, including scientists, researchers, policymakers and experts from across the globe

H E DR RAHMA BINT IBRAHIM AL MAHROUQI

economic and social benefits, aligning with Oman Vision 2040's goal of advancing a knowledge-based economy.

"This global event provides

an exceptional opportunity to bring together over 500 participants, including scientists, researchers, policymakers and experts from across the globe,"

said H E Rahma. "The discussions will address global challenges, set priorities for international scientific cooperation, and build partnerships in

research and innovation."

The forum's dialogue sessions will focus on three key themes - future of science, science diplomacy and the role of science in society. Topics include emerging technologies like artificial intelligence, trust in science, sustainable development, and the need for greater equality and social cohesion.

Highlighting her ministry's ongoing commitment to scien-

tific research and innovation, H E Rahma said, "We fund numerous research projects annually and support infrastructure, skills development, and partnerships among government, private sector and academic institutions."

On the significance of such global discussions, Sir Peter Gluckman, President of ISC, said, "These dialogues bridge the gap between science and politics, ad-

ressing regional and global contexts." He described ISC as a central organisation advocating the use of scientific evidence in policymaking and promoting multidisciplinary cooperation to tackle complex challenges.

Sir Peter emphasised the role of science in societal development, especially in emerging economies and least-developed nations. "Science must be at the core of solutions for the environmental, social and economic issues faced by governments at all levels."

Speaking on the importance of building trust in science, Ruth Morgan, Director of Centre for Forensic Sciences at University College London, said, "The question of who shapes the social contract for science and what it looks like today is critical."

The dialogue highlights the crucial role of science in addressing global challenges, fostering international collaboration and ensuring sustainable progress for all nations.

OCCI addresses private sector's challenges in implementing WPS

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Private sector businesses have raised concerns about the difficulties in complying with the Wage Protection System (WPS), highlighting its impact on their operations. The matter was discussed during the first meeting of the year held by Labour Market Committee of Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) chaired by Mohammed Hassan al Ansi.

Business owners have pointed out challenges in following WPS regulations, particularly the fines imposed for non-compliance. Employers who fail to adhere to WPS face penalties ranging from warnings to service suspension and fines of RO50 per affected worker, with repeat violations inviting doubled fines.

Introduced under Ministerial Decision No 299/2023, WPS mandates private sector employers to pay wages through an elec-



tronic system regulated by Central Bank of Oman. Salaries must be deposited directly into employees' bank accounts on time and in full, as stipulated by employment contracts and Oman's Labour Law.

Ministry of Labour receives between 17,000 and 18,000 complaints annually related to wage payments, underscoring persistent issues faced by workers in receiving their dues. While WPS aims to modernise labour practices, protect workers' rights and create a fair labour market, businesses are finding the transition challenging.

To address the challenges, the Labour Market Committee announced that it is studying the effects of WPS on private sector institutions in cooperation with relevant authorities. 'The goal is to develop practical solutions that consider the interests of all parties, support economic growth and promote job creation,' the committee stated.

Ansi emphasised the importance of collaborative efforts to overcome these challenges. "Joint work between different entities is essential to achieving a balanced and sustainable work environment," he said, praising

the role of the Labour Market Committee in addressing business concerns and formulating solutions that align with global trends.

Phased implementation of WPS will allow businesses time to adapt, with the Ministry of Labour providing sector-specific guidance and technical support. Despite these efforts, many businesses are still grappling with operational and financial adjustments to comply with the system.

The committee also reviewed its achievements of 2024 - challenges addressed and solutions implemented.

MoH opens 19-bed Al Amerat Heights Health Complex costing RO750,000

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Ministry of Health (MoH) has taken another step towards enhancing its healthcare system with the inauguration of Al Amerat Heights Health Complex on Monday.

Built at a cost of RO750,000, the facility is spread over 15,000sqm and was completed in 16 months. It aims to meet the growing demand for healthcare services while aligning with the goals of Oman Vision 2040 to build a sustainable healthcare system and improve community well-being.

The opening ceremony was officiated by H E Ahmed bin Saleh al Rashidi, Undersecretary of Ministry of Endowments and Religious Affairs, alongside H E Dr Ahmed bin Salem al Mandhari, Undersecretary for Health Planning and Regulation in MoH.

Dr Samira bint Musa al Maimani, Acting Director General of Health Services in Muscat governorate, said the complex re-



flects the ongoing development of Oman's healthcare sector. "This project is part of our efforts to provide high-quality healthcare services that cater to both citizens and residents. It represents a significant step towards improving the quality of life, raising healthcare standards, and enhancing prevention and health awareness."

The facility offers a wide range of primary healthcare services, including general medicine, chronic disease management, blood pressure and diabetes care,

asthma treatment and maternity care. It also provides specialised services such as early detection of non-communicable diseases, breast cancer screening, elderly health checks, and smoking cessation programmes.

The complex also features secondary clinics for internal medicine, paediatrics, ENT and ophthalmology, and has a laboratory, pharmacy, two examination rooms and a training hall. Currently of 19-bed capacity, plans are in place for future expansion.

MoE's AI-focused renewable energy competition for schools launched

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Ministry of Education (MoE) launched the seventh edition of the Petroleum Development Oman Renewable Energy Award on Monday focused on the theme 'Artificial Intelligence in Energy Sustainability' for the 2025-2026 academic year.

The award targets students of Grades 7 to 12 in public and private schools across Oman. A promotional film and posters in Arabic and English were unveiled during the launch to encourage participation. Following this, a registration link for the competition was made live, allowing students to submit entries in line with specified criteria.

This edition also introduces a competition for the best promotional campaign conducted by educational directorates in governorates to support participants, including remote training programmes and expert-led workshops aimed at guiding students and clarifying competition re-



quirements.

The competition will be conducted in stages, beginning with the launch announcement and initial screening of submitted ideas, followed by an evaluation phase to select teams for the finals. Winners will be announced during Oman Sustainability Week at Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre in April 2026.

The award seeks to raise awareness among students about the importance of renew-

able energy as a viable alternative to fossil fuels, emphasising its role in reducing carbon emissions and addressing environmental challenges. It also aims to nurture students' technical and problem-solving skills while encouraging innovative approaches to sustainability.

"The award serves as a platform to inspire young minds to think creatively and apply artificial intelligence in developing solutions for energy sustainability," MoE stated.



ANNOUNCEMENT

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

Ref.	Description	Last date for collection of bidding document	Last date for submission of tenders	Eligibility	Tender Fee (Non-Refundable)
4589/2024 Recall	Replacement of Nurse Call System at Buraimi Hospital	Before 10AM On 03/02/2025	Before 10AM On 09/02/2025	specialized companies registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board in the First degree	• 10 R.O Small & Medium Enterprises • 25 R.O Local Companies • 25 R.O International Companies

Please note the following:

- Companies wishing to participate in the Tender can purchase the tender documents electronically through the website (etendering.tenderboard.gov.om), provided that they are registered in the system.
- Companies must submit their bids electronically via the above-mentioned website, provided that a **Bid Commitment Declaration**, and bids received without the required Declaration will not be considered.
- The concerned entity is not obligated to accept the lowest bid or any other bid.
- For inquiries related to the above tender, please contact through the website of the Esnad system for electronic tendering: (etendering.tenderboard.gov.om)

MARKET WATCH	
MSX30	4,561.06
Sensex	75,366.17
FOREX RATES (RO1 equals)	
India	224.23
Pakistan	723.77
Bangladesh	316.72
Philippines	151.55
Sri Lanka	775.30
*Rates as on January 27 Source: xe.com	

BRIEFS

Oil prices slip amid Trump policies

US President Trump's tariffs on Colombian imports and his push for OPEC to cut oil prices have intensified downward pressure on crude, compounded by growing fears of a European recession.

The international benchmark Brent crude decreased by 0.6%, trading at \$77.19 per barrel on Monday, down from \$77.54 at the close of the previous session.

The US benchmark West Texas Intermediate (WTI) decreased by 0.4%, reaching \$74.06 per barrel, compared to its prior session close of \$74.38.

Oil prices began the week with a downward trend following US President Donald Trump's statements on new trade policies and his call for Saudi Arabia and OPEC.

Oman advances in digital payments, but 25% transactions still cash: Visa

Our Correspondent
Muscat

While Oman is at the forefront of digital payments, a quarter (25%) of transactions among consumers surveyed in the sultanate are still made in cash, according to the second edition of Visa's Where Cash Hides research report.

Visa, a global leader in digital payments, conducted the survey across the GCC to examine cash usage trends and explore opportunities to further accelerate the shift towards digital payments. The research, based on a survey of 2,800 individuals across the region, looked into the overall frequency of, and motivations for, cash usage. It identifies cash-heavy categories and proposes simpler, more secure digital payment solutions for both consumers and local businesses.

In Oman, peer-to-peer (P2P) transactions (42%) and everyday spending (28%) account for a significant proportion of cash usage.

Within the P2P segment, tips (66%) were the top category where surveyed Omani consumers used cash, showing the biggest drop from 2023. This was followed by money exchanges



Peer-to-peer transactions (42%) and everyday spending (28%) account for a significant proportion of cash usage in Oman

between friends and family (53%) and property rent (24%). However, international money transfers through exchange houses saw an increase (23% in 2024 vs 14% in 2023), suggesting opportunities to advance secure, digital cross-border payments.

Everyday spending – such as offline taxis (63%), farmers' markets (55%), and app-based taxis (33%) – are primarily where cash is used. Restaurants saw the most significant drop in cash usage (20% in 2024, down from 38% in 2023), indicating progress in digitising payments in these sectors.

The main reasons respondents prefer cash for P2P transactions are habit (32%) and convenience (28%). For everyday purchases, the leading reasons cited are speed (31%) and acceptance (26%).

According to Visa's report, efforts to introduce convenient and secure solutions, such as Visa Direct (for P2P, tips, other disbursements, and remittances), Click to Pay (for a better online checkout experience), and Tap to Phone (a low-cost acceptance solution for SMEs, freelancers, and taxis), will further promote digital payments and increase card acceptance in the identified categories.

It said, 'Encouraging mobile and contactless payments also presents a pathway to increasing digital payment usage for every-

day expenses. This requires educating both banked and unbanked populations about the acceptance and security of digital payments.'

In a press statement, Manish Gautam, Visa's Country Manager for Oman, said, "Despite progress with digital payment adoption in Oman, 25% of consumer transactions are still in cash. For Visa, this represents an opportunity to further drive financial inclusion and digitise commerce in the country. Our second edition of Where Cash Hides research highlights precisely where and how Visa, together with our partners, can help grow the digital economy.

"As a global leader in digital payments, Visa remains committed to supporting the Omani government's cashless agenda and enabling local businesses to create a better payment experience for everyone, everywhere in the Sultanate."

Despite cash usage, consumers' overall reliance on cash remains low. Nearly half (49%) of respondents reported that only 1-2 out of their last 10 transactions were in cash. Just 2% of respondents claimed that all 10 of their most recent transactions were made with cash.

OETC launches green financing framework

Our Correspondent
Muscat

As part of its commitment to environmental sustainability, Oman Electricity Transmission Company (OETC) has launched its Green Financing Framework. This strategic initiative aims to support the company's goals in Oman's transition towards a low carbon economy, in line with the national objectives of Oman Vision 2040 and the target of achieving net-zero carbon emissions by 2050.

OETC's Green Financing Framework was structured in collaboration with the global banking giant Citi Bank.

This framework allows the company to increase its funding potentials through green bonds, sukuk, and green loans, which will be dedicated to green investments in areas such as electricity transmission, renewable energy, energy efficiency, green buildings, sustainable water and wastewater management, and pollution prevention and control.

These efforts aim to enhance the reduction of carbon emissions, improve energy security, and ensure grid reliability, among other benefits. OETC is well-positioned for success in this area, with one of its main strengths being its focus on transmitting



The framework allows OETC to increase its funding potentials through green bonds, sukuk, and green loans, which will be dedicated to green investments in areas such as power transmission, renewable energy, energy efficiency and more

clean and renewable energy through its nationwide electricity transmission network.

The company has also received a Second Party Opinion from Det Norske Veritas, which confirmed that the framework aligns with the latest guidelines of the Green Bond Principles issued by the International Capital Market Association, as well as the Green Loan Principles set by the Loan Market Association, Loan Syndications and Trading Association, and Asia Pacific Loan Market Association.

In a press statement, Eng Saleh bin Nasser al Rumhi, CEO

of OETC, highlighted the company's efforts, plans, and initiatives, along with the various projects it is implementing to strengthen the green and renewable energy sector. He also emphasised the meticulous steps OETC is taking to grow in this area, adhering to internationally approved frameworks, regulations, and standards.

Rumhi added, "Launching OETC's Green Financing Framework is a significant and bold step, and part of the strategies for enabling a more sustainable future for Oman and its economy. This initiative not only enhances our position as a responsible and leading company and as enablers of this green transformation but also supports Oman's broader objectives and contributes to achieving Oman Vision 2040."

OETC, a member of Nama Group, is the only company responsible for the transmission and control of electricity across the sultanate's network. The electricity is transmitted from production stations to distributed load centers in the governorates. The transmission network operates at a voltage of 132kV and above to cover most of the governorates in the sultanate, whether in the north or the south.



Omantel, Airgain join hands to redefine 5G connectivity in MENA

Muscat – Omantel, the leading telecommunication services provider in the sultanate, has formed a multi-year strategic partnership with Airgain, a global frontrunner in wireless connectivity solutions, to redefine 5G connectivity across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region.

The rapid expansion of 5G has brought new challenges for telecom operators, particularly in balancing cost-effectiveness with network performance. Traditional infrastructure solutions often fall short when it comes to extending coverage to hard-to-reach areas such as remote locations, large indoor spaces, and urban areas with signal congestion. This impacts both individuals and businesses, as connectivity is now an essential enabler of daily life and operations.

Omantel's partnership with Airgain addresses these challenges through Airgain's Lighthouse, a groundbreaking smart network repeater. This advanced solution amplifies and extends 5G signals, ensuring consistent, high-speed connectivity in areas where coverage is traditionally weak or unavailable.

What makes this partnership unique is that it extends beyond the traditional vendor-operator relationship. Omantel and Airgain are collaborating on research, development, and innovation to create solutions that are specifically designed to meet the needs of the MENA region. This strategic alignment ensures that the partnership delivers both immediate and long-term benefits, with scalable and energy-efficient solutions that address local connectivity challenges.

"We look forward to our collaboration with Airgain as part of our commitment to advancing innovation in the telecommunications and technology sectors," Talal Al Mamari, CEO of Omantel, said in a press release.

He said, "Airgain's solutions will enhance 5G performance across various environments with scalable, energy-efficient connectivity and unmatched speeds. By complementing our existing infrastructure, the Lighthouse solution will ensure comprehensive coverage indoors and outdoors, accelerating 5G deployment."

"We are privileged to strengthen our strategic alliance with Omantel as we lead this ambitious 5G expansion," said Airgain President and CEO, Jacob Suen. "Together, we aspire to revolutionise network performance with highly scalable and energy-efficient solutions, capitalising on unprecedented 5G revenue opportunities and laying the groundwork for future technological advancements that will redefine connectivity across the region."

Oman, India seek to boost economic cooperation

Muscat – H E Qais Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, on Monday received Piyush Goyal, India's Minister of Commerce and Industry, at the Invest Oman lounge.

The meeting took place within the framework of the 11th session of the Joint Omani-Indian Committee, held in Muscat.

During the discussions, both sides reviewed areas of cooperation in technology, pharmaceuticals, renewable energy, and



infrastructure. They also explored ways to attract Indian investment to Oman.

Both ministers emphasised the importance of the 11th session of the Joint Omani-Indian Committee as a strategic platform to enhance bilateral cooperation.

The ministers praised the flourishing economic relations between Oman and India. Trade

exchange between the two countries in 2023 reached RO2.05bn, while the value of Indian investments in Oman totalled RO298.8mn.

Additionally, the Indian delegation toured the Invest Oman lounge, where they were introduced to the services offered to investors, as well as the prominent investment opportunities available in Oman.

The meeting was attended by several officials from both sides.

ONA

China's DeepSeek rattles global tech stocks

Chinese tech startup DeepSeek has developed an AI model that is reportedly as good or better than OpenAI's ChatGPT, but the company claims to have done it at a fraction of the cost

New York, US - Global technology stock futures plunged on Monday to lead a stock rout on Wall Street as a Chinese startup rattled faith in US leadership and profitability in artificial intelligence (AI), taking a hammer to chip giant Nvidia and other Big Tech stocks.

China's DeepSeek has developed an AI model that is reportedly as good or better than OpenAI's ChatGPT, but the Chinese-based company claims to have done it at a fraction of the cost.

In the US, contracts on the tech-heavy Nasdaq 100 sank nearly 4%, while S&P 500 futures tumbled over 2%. Dow Jones Industrial Average futures fell 0.9%, or about 380 points, on the heels of a winning week for the major gauges.

Markets have been rattled by claims by DeepSeek that its AI assistant uses cheaper chips and less data than leading models, but performs equally well. A surge in DeepSeek's popularity has spurred a scramble by investors to reassess bets that AI demand-driven growth will keep fueling gains for stocks.

AI bellwether Nvidia's shares tumbled over 11% in pre-market trading, as chip-related names took a bruising. ASML lost 9%, while Arm, Broadcom, and Micron Technology also got hammered.

US AI optimism dented

DeepSeek released a new AI model on January 20 viewed as a threat to OpenAI. American venture capitalist Marc Andreessen called the model "one of the most amazing and impressive breakthroughs I've ever seen."

The news came just a month



after DeepSeek said one of its latest AI models cost just \$5.6mn to train. Meanwhile, OpenAI's GPT model cost more than \$100mn to train.

The announcements spurred fears that AI models may begin to require fewer chips and energy than they currently use. Nvidia has grown to be the world's largest company on the back of exploding demand for its high-

end chips that help train AI models.

"If DeepSeek's innovations are adopted broadly, an argument can be made that model training costs could come down significantly even at US hyperscalers, potentially raising questions about the need for 1-million XPU/GPU clusters as projected by some," wrote Raymond James semiconductor analyst Srinu Pa-

jjuri in a note to investors Sunday evening.

The US AI optimism has been dented by the release of an AI model from DeepSeek that performs well against models made by US companies, and does so at a lower cost. The progress that DeepSeek is making raises questions about whether the US will remain at the forefront in the AI race and heightens concerns

about the massive amounts that major technology companies are spending to develop AI.

Several of the stocks that rode last week's wave of AI enthusiasm - after the announcement of a \$500bn joint venture between software giant Oracle, OpenAI and SoftBank to develop AI infrastructure - were sliding before the bell on Monday. Oracle was down 8%, while analytics soft-

ware maker Palantir and Constellation Energy fell 4% and 12%, respectively.

Shares of Meta and Microsoft both slid about 6% amid worries about megacaps' hefty investment in AI. Tesla and Amazon also lost ground as techs sold off across the board.

Chip stocks also dropped across the board premarket Monday, with Broadcom down

nearly 12%, Micron off almost 8%, and Advanced Micro Devices down over 4%.

Pajjuri said, "A more logical implication is that DeepSeek will drive even more urgency among U.S. hyperscalers to leverage their key advantage (access to GPUs) to distance themselves from cheaper alternatives."

Bernstein analyst Stacy Rasgon also called into question the \$5.6mn training cost for DeepSeek's model, which "does not include all the other costs associated with prior research and experiments on architectures, algorithms, or data."

Rasgon believes DeepSeek's announcement was "not really worthy of the hysteria that has taken over the Twitterverse over the last several days."

Tightened US export restrictions announced in former president Joe Biden's final days in office could also add a threat to DeepSeek's ability to continue training new models.

The new rules limit China's ability to buy Nvidia's AI chips through resellers and to access chips in remote data centers. And China is restricted from importing the most advanced chipmaking machines required to make AI chips from the Dutch firm ASML.

At the same time, the US is ramping up investment in its own AI infrastructure.

President Trump last week announced the Stargate AI project, which plans to immediately invest \$100 billion to build US data centers and other infrastructure - with funding from SoftBank, Oracle, OpenAI and UAE-based MGX - to power generative artificial intelligence. The project would include another \$400bn in spending over the next four years.

Agencies

Dubai's real estate sector records AED761bn worth of transactions in 2024

Dubai, UAE - Dubai's real estate sector recorded a total of 2.78mn procedures in 2024, the highest in its history.

The record number of procedures, which include both real estate transactions and rental agreements, represent a 17% increase compared to 2023.

Real estate transactions alone totalled 226,000, with a combined value of AED761bn, a remarkable 36% growth in volume and 20% growth in value year-on-year.

Solidifying its position as a global hub for investment, Dubai's real estate market achieved exceptional milestones in 2024. The sector recorded 217,000 investments valued at AED526bn, reflecting impressive growth rates of 38 and 27% in number and value respectively.

Furthermore, Dubai attracted 110,000 new investors to its real estate sector, achieving a remarkable 55% increase. These unprecedented achievements highlight the emirate's leading role in creating a world-class investment ecosystem that attracts investors from around the globe and supports the sustainable growth of the real estate sector.

Marwan Ahmed bin Ghalita, Director-General of Dubai Land Department, said, "These indicators serve as tangible evidence of the resilience of Dubai's real estate market, its ability to adapt to



Dubai attracted 110,000 new investors to its real estate sector, achieving a remarkable 55% increase in 2024

global changes, and its success in attracting high-quality investments. The results achieved in 2024 reflect the emirate's ambitious vision and ongoing efforts to enhance its investment attractiveness under the guidance of our wise leadership, in line with the Dubai Economic Agenda D33, which aims to position the emirate among the top three urban economies."

He further said, "Attracting

110,000 new investors to the real estate sector last year is a clear indicator of our efforts to enhance global investor confidence. This achievement underscores Dubai's commitment to developing an advanced real estate environment managed using state-of-the-art artificial intelligence and proptech solutions. These technologies play a crucial role in boosting operational efficiency and ensuring the satisfaction of both investors and stakeholders alike."

Dubai continues to achieve transformative milestones, reaffirming its commitment to shaping the future and realising its ambitious goal of becoming the world's leading destination for real estate investment and sustainable development.

WAM

Perplexity AI proposes \$300bn TikTok merger with 50% stake in US operations

Ankara, Turkey - Perplexity AI has submitted a revised proposal to TikTok's parent company, ByteDance, for a merger with TikTok's US operations, allowing the US government to acquire up to 50% ownership in a new entity, according to media reports.

The updated plan, sent last week, builds on a proposal made on January 18, just before TikTok was officially banned under a bipartisan law, CBS News reported on Sunday.

ByteDance has yet to respond to the original proposal, which sought to merge Perplexity with TikTok's US operations while securing investments from other parties.



Under the new plan, the US government would acquire its stake during the entity's initial public offering, which could be

valued at \$300bn or more. However, the shares would not come with voting rights or a seat on the company's board,

the broadcaster reported, citing a source familiar with the matter.

The proposal also ensures ByteDance retains its ties to TikTok but requires "full US board control."

TikTok's US operations would exclude the proprietary algorithm that personalizes user content.

The plan reflects strategies previously suggested by former Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin, who emphasized separating TikTok's technology from Chinese ownership.

Mnuchin said: "The technology needs to be disconnected from ByteDance."

Anadolu Agency

Bitcoin drops below \$100k amid equity rout

Vahid Karaahmetovic

Bitcoin fell below \$100,000 on Monday, tracking a broader decline in equity markets as tariff threats from US President Donald Trump rattled risk appetite, while technology stocks were unsettled by a disruptive new artificial intelligence offering from China.

Bitcoin remained under pressure from persistent uncertainty over just what Trump's policies will entail for crypto, after the President announced new, albeit vague plans to draft a regulatory

framework for the industry.

Risk appetite was also pressured by anticipation of a Federal Reserve meeting this week, where the central bank is widely expected to hold interest rates and strike a hawkish chord.

Broader risk-driven markets sank in Asian trade, with tech stocks under pressure from DeepSeek, which recently released an AI program that claimed to match

rivals such as ChatGPT in performance for a fraction of the cost. Losses in equities appeared to have spilled over into crypto.

Bitcoin fell 5.1% to \$99,227.0 by 10:35 GMT on Monday.

A memecoin launched by the President earlier in January, \$TRUMP, also slid further on Monday after wiping out about 60% of its value since a post-launch peak.



Risk appetite was sapped by Trump threatening to impose 25% trade tariffs on Colombia over refusal to comply with his stance on deporting migrants. But Colombia's government accepted Trump's terms shortly after his tariff threat, with the White House stating that the proposed tariffs were now on hold.

Still, Trump's move drummed up fears that he will make good on his threats to impose tariffs on other major economies, including Mexico, Canada, and China. (Source: Investing.com)



Evian official sponsor of DDF Tennis tourney

Dubai Duty Free (DDF) has officially announced Evian as the ‘official water sponsor’ for the next two editions of the Dubai Duty Free Tennis Championships.

The French water brand has signed a strategic sponsorship agreement to provide its premium water during one of the UAE’s most anticipated sporting events, ensuring athletes and spectators remain hydrated throughout the championships, a press release said.

As part of the two-year partnership, Evian will supply water during the event and introduce a tennis-inspired limited-edition bottle, available exclusively in the UAE. This year’s Dubai Duty Free Tennis Championships starts on February 16 with the WTA week, which marks its 25th anniversary, followed by the ATP week,

which marks the 33rd edition.

“We are delighted to welcome Evian as the official water sponsor of the Dubai Duty Free Tennis Championships,” said Ramesh Cidambi, managing director of Dubai Duty Free and Chairman of the tournament organising committee. “Evian has been a long-standing supplier for Dubai Duty Free, and we are excited to continue working with the brand. Its legacy of supporting major global events aligns perfectly with the stature of our tournament, and we look forward to a fruitful partnership in the years ahead.”

Salah Tahlak, tournament director and deputy managing director of Dubai Duty Free, added, “We are thrilled to have global brands such as Evian onboard as sponsors”

ISWK celebrates 76th Republic Day at primary school grounds

Indian School Wadi Kabir (ISWK) commemorated the 76th Indian Republic Day with enthusiasm, patriotism, and cultural splendour on its primary school grounds.

The occasion brought together students, parents, staff, and distinguished guests in a vibrant celebration of India’s rich heritage and democratic spirit, a press release said.

The theme for this year’s Republic Day, ‘Swarnim Bharat: Virasat aur Vikas’ (Golden India: Heritage and Development), celebrated India’s cultural legacy and its progressive strides in development.

The event was graced by chief guest Arvind Toprani, a distinguished businessman and community leader, besides Anil Khimji, Kiran Asher, Rajendra Ved – executive director of the school management committees of ISWK CBSE and ISWK Cambridge, Alkesh Joshi – assistant executive director, the presidents of ISWK CBSE and ISWK Cambridge, Sachin Toprani and Gargi Chugh respectively, and representatives from the Embassy of India.

The celebration began with the symbolic release of tri-coloured balloons, followed by the singing of the Indian national anthem, which evoked a deep sense of patriotism. A dignified Guard of Honour, led by Master Samarth Pramod Pujari, Head



The theme was ‘Swarnim Bharat: Virasat aur Vikas’ (Golden India: Heritage and Development)

Boy of ISWK Cambridge, set the tone for the proceedings. The event also featured an impressive march past by contingents from both the CBSE and Cambridge wings, exemplifying discipline and teamwork.

The school choir of the senior wing of ISWK CBSE captivated the audience with a melodious rendition of a patriotic song- ‘Bela Hain Balidaan Ki’, while the tiny tots of the primary wing of ISWK enthralled everyone present

with a vibrant dance performance titled, ‘Tirange Ki Chhaon Mein’. Also, ‘Mati Ko Ma Kahete Hain’ was the title of the energetic dance performance showcased by the dancers of the senior wing of ISWK CBSE.

Arab Health’s landmark 50th edition opens

Arab Health, the Middle East’s largest and most important healthcare event and congress, celebrates its landmark 50th edition at Dubai World Trade Centre (DWTC) this week (January 27-30).

The milestone event, held under the theme ‘Where the World of Healthcare Meets,’ brings together over 3,800 exhibitors and will welcome more than 60,000 visitors, providing a unique platform for innovation, collaboration, and education in healthcare, a press release said.

Building on the momentum of last year’s event, which saw record-breaking business deals exceeding AED9 billion, Arab Health 2025 is expected to set new benchmarks for success when it welcomes some of the biggest names in the industry, including global innovators such as GE Healthcare, Philips, Siemens Healthineers, Cleveland Clinic, and UCLA Healthcare, alongside regional leaders like PureHealth and Mubadala Health.

This year, Arab Health will



host more than 40 country pavilions, with exhibitors representing over 80 countries in total, covering the Middle East, the US, Europe, Africa, and Asia. The UAE will be represented by over 200 companies, showcasing the latest innovations across nine product sectors, ranging from medical equipment and devices to imaging and diagnostics, as well as wellness and prevention.

Ahmed Al Khaja, CEO of

Dubai Festivals and Retail Establishment, said, “As we mark the 50th edition of Arab Health, we can reflect on the pivotal role this event has played in driving the healthcare and medical sector in the region, through innovation and collaboration.”

Over the past five decades, Arab Health has served as a powerful platform for medical professionals to connect, share knowledge, and collaborate, and

contributed to establishing Dubai as a leading business events destination, fostering an environment where industries and professionals thrive.

“Arab Health now stands as a key pillar in the city’s business events calendar, joined by an ever-increasing number of international conferences and congresses throughout the year, attended by delegates from around the world,” he added.

ISG students shine at 4th World Teen Parliament

Students from Indian School Al Ghubra participated in the 4th edition of the World Teen Parliament (WTP) on January 19.

This global event brought together teenagers from 25 countries and over 100 schools, with approximately 295,000 teen registrations leading to the selection of participants, a press release said.

The WTP empowers youth aged 13 to 19 to voice their ideas and propose solutions to pressing global challenges. This year’s themes included sustainable development, social justice, and entrepreneurship. Participants submitted video entries and engaged in live discussions, culminating in the election of the top 100 candidates as Teen Members of Parliament (MPs) who will work on implementing their ideas over the next year.

Fourteen students from Indian School Al Ghubra submitted their videos and participated in



the World Teen Parliament. Aqeedath Khanum, Behag Iyer, Bhoomi Toprani, Shreeja Thakur, Arunima Das and Seethalakshmi Kishore, who gave an outstanding performance, got the prestigious opportunity to become a Member of the Parliament while Aayath Khanum, Sakina Kantawala, Anshul Date, Ardra Menon, Ananya Goyal, Niranjana

Sunil and Minha Shameer were elected as influencers in WTP.

The involvement of Indian School Al Ghubra’s students highlights the school’s commitment to fostering global citizens equipped with leadership skills. Their participation in the WTP not only enhances their personal development but also inspires others to contribute positively.

OETC launches Green Financing Framework for low carbon economy

As part of its commitment to environmental sustainability and in alignment with the high standards of environmental, social, and governance (ESG) practices, Oman Electricity Transmission Company (OETC) has recently launched its Green Financing Framework (the Framework).

This strategic initiative aims to support the company’s goals in Oman’s transition towards a low carbon economy, in line with the national objectives of Oman Vision 2040 and the target of achieving net-zero carbon emissions by 2050. The OETC’s Green Financing Framework was structured in collaboration with the Citi Bank.

This Framework allows the company to increase its funding potentials through green bonds,

sukuks, and green loans, which will be dedicated to green investments in areas such as electricity transmission, renewable energy, energy efficiency, green buildings, sustainable water and wastewater management, and pollution prevention and control. These efforts aim to enhance the reduction of carbon emissions, improve energy security, and ensure grid reliability, among other benefits.

OETC is well-positioned for success in this area, with one of its main strengths being its focus on transmitting clean and renewable energy through its nationwide electricity transmission network.

The company has also received a Second Party Opinion (SPO) from Det Norske Veritas



(DNV), which confirmed that the framework aligns with the latest guidelines of the Green Bond Principles issued by the International Capital Market Association (ICMA), as well as the Green Loan Principles set by the

OETC is well-positioned for success in this area, with one of its main strengths being its focus on transmitting clean and renewable energy

Loan Market Association (LMA), Loan Syndications and Trading Association (LSTA), and Asia Pacific Loan Market Association (APLMA).

Eng Saleh bin Nasser al Rumhi, CEO of OETC, highlighted the company’s efforts,

ternationally approved frameworks, regulation/standards.

“Launching OETC’s Green Financing Framework is a significant and bold step, and part of the strategies for enabling a more sustainable future for Oman and its economy,” he said.



India Utsav 2025 unveiled at LuLu

LuLu Oman launched 'India Utsav' 2025 to coincide with the 76th Republic Day of India as well as to highlight the close ties between Oman and India.

The week-long festival, held from January 26 to Feb 2, will showcase the rich and diverse culture, heritage, traditions and regional flavours of India, a press release said.

The event was inaugurated at Lulu Hypermarket at Darsait by H E Amit Narang, the Ambassador of India to the Sultanate of Oman, in the presence of a host of officials from the Indian com-

munity, LuLu dignitaries and customers.

From fresh food and grocery to lifestyle and fashion, the 'India Utsav' festival will offer customers a unique opportunity to experience Indian extravaganza in every section. There will also be amazing promotions and offers on a wide range of Indian products on display. Selected brands of Home appliances and home furnishing are also featured as part of this promotion.

The festival will enable customers to savour the real taste of India's finest dishes and enjoy a

wonderful culinary experience. Shoppers can experience the genuine flavours of India in a variety of dishes that speak for themselves in terms of the authenticity and the rich history of India. There will be special stalls for customers to savour a selection of melt-in-the-mouth Indian sweets and snacks.

H E Narang lauded LuLu's initiative in organising the Indian festival in Oman. "It is a very special occasion for every Indian citizen to be part of this event and LuLu has taken a major step in not only promoting Indian prod-

ucts in Oman but also enhancing trade and cultural relations between the two countries," he said.

Shabeer K A, regional director - Lulu Hypermarkets, Oman, stated, "We are glad to organise the 'India Utsav 2025' to showcase the beauty and diversity of Indian culture. It is also an opportunity for us to foster the cultural ties between Oman and India and strengthen and enrich the longstanding bilateral relations between the two countries. We have flown in many exclusive Indian products."

Oman marks International Day of Education on Jan 24



The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Education, participated in the International Day of Education, which falls January 24 every year.

The celebration of this year's International Day of Education comes under the slogan 'Artificial Intelligence and Education: Challenges and Opportunities', a press release said.

Dr Mahmoud al Abri, secretary of the Omani National Commission for Education, Culture and Science, said, "The Sultanate of Oman realises that digital transformation is no longer an option, but rather an inevitable necessity imposed by the variables of the modern era. It represents an essential pillar for achieving economic and social progress and reflects a deep awareness of the importance of smart integration between digital technologies, processes and skills in various sectors and levels."

Regarding interest in the digital transformation of the educational process, Abri said,



The Sultanate of Oman realises that digital transformation is no longer an option, but rather an inevitable necessity of the modern era

DR MAHMOUD AL ABRI

"The National Commission for Education, Culture and Science works with international and regional organisations to integrate artificial intelligence technologies and tools in the fields of education, especially with regard to teaching, evaluation, educational management, and curricula.

The Sultanate of Oman has also worked to benefit positively from international organisations in this field, and has established a number of scientific chairs specialised in artificial intelligence and its ethics, such as the UNESCO Chair at Sultan Qaboos Uni-

versity, and the (ICESCO) Chair at the University of Technology and Applied Sciences, in addition to its participation in international conferences and workshops, and its launch of the National Program for Artificial Intelligence and Advanced Technologies, with the 'Artificial Intelligence Makers' initiative with the aim of developing national talents and promoting a culture of innovation.

The Sultanate of Oman has achieved remarkable progress in the Government AI Readiness Index, rising to 45th position globally for 2024.



SBA floats 18th Toyota Dream Car Art Contest

Saud Bahwan Automotive recently announced the 18th edition of the popular Toyota Dream Car Art Contest, a vibrant platform that invites young minds to unleash their creativity and imagine the car of their dreams.

This annual competition has become a favourite among young artists across Oman. The deadline for submission is February 28 and eager participants can collect official drawing sheets from any Toyota showroom or service facility, a press release said.

The 18th Toyota Dream Car Art Contest will be held across Saud Bahwan Automotive's Toyota showrooms in Oman and is open to all legal residents aged 15 years or younger. This inspiring initiative encourages children to dream big and translate their creative visions onto paper, fostering innovation and imagination in a fun and engaging way.

A spokesperson from Saud Bahwan Automotive said, "At Toyota, we believe that every great innovation starts with a dream. The Toyota Dream Car Art Contest is a reflection of our

commitment to nurturing the creative spirit of young dreamers in Oman. We are excited to see their unique ideas come to life."

Winners of the national competition will not only receive thrilling prizes like gift vouchers but also get a chance to compete on the world stage in the global contest. Participants can create their automotive masterpieces using water colours, markers, crayons, or any other hand-drawn medium. Digitally created artwork is not permitted. Each submission should include a well-crafted background and must be completed on the official entry forms available.

The deadline for submission is February 28 and eager participants can collect official drawing sheets from any Toyota showroom

AJIA launches BMW M5 in Oman

Al Jenaibi International Automobiles (AJIA), the exclusive importer of BMW Group vehicles in Oman, has brought the seventh generation of the iconic M5 series which seamlessly blends breathtaking performance with ultimate luxury.

From its roots on the race-track to its evolution as a modern-day powerhouse, the BMW M5 continues to set new standards for excellence, now accessible to brand aficionados in Oman, a press release said.

At the core of the BMW M5's dominance is its M Hybrid Powertrain — a revolutionary combination of a high-revving 4.4ltr V8 engine with M TwinPower Turbo technology and an electric motor. Together, they deliver a staggering 535 kW (727 hp) and 1,000 Nm of torque. Whether on the open road or a demanding



track, this sedan can reach up to 305 km/h when equipped with the optional M Driver's Package, and it is capable of going from zero to 100 km/h in a jaw-dropping 3.5 seconds.

The M Hybrid technology used in the BMW M5 draws in-

spiration from the endurance racing BMW M Hybrid V8, bringing a racing DNA to everyday driving. This innovative system ensures smooth, instantaneous power delivery, making every journey both thrilling and efficient.

Design-wise, the BMW M5 presents bold proportions and an unmistakable athleticism. The flared wheel arches, M Carbon rear spoiler, and M kidney grille with BMW Iconic Glow are just a few bold exterior features that capture its race-inspired DNA,

making it as visually captivating as it is dynamic.

For tech enthusiasts, the M5 is equipped with BMW's latest iDrive controller with M Mode, a red start/stop button, and a customisable M Performance Parts package for those looking to further personalise their driving experience. With an electric range of up to 69km, the M5 offers the practicality of a plug-in hybrid alongside its unmatched performance capabilities.

The M5's design incorporates several lightweight carbon-fibre features, including an optional M Carbon roof and M Carbon ceramic brakes, which enhance the sedan's overall agility while maintaining safety and precision handling. The M rear spoiler and M sport exhaust system work together to deliver aerodynamic efficiency.

Indian School Bousher celebrates 76th Republic Day

The 76th Republic Day of India marked a proud celebration of democracy, unity, and progress, honouring the nation's rich heritage. Indian School Bousher celebrated the day with its Annual Athletic Meet and Drill Display for Grades I - V, showcasing students' energy, teamwork, and vibrant performances in a spectacular display of sportsmanship and precision.

The event began with a welcome address, followed by the memento presentation to the chief guest, Rushit Sanghvi, recognising his unwavering support for the institution's extracurricular activities, a press release said.

The proceedings began with a Torch Run, after which students dressed in vibrant colours,



marched proudly to represent the three defence forces of India, setting the tone for a day of sporting prowess and camaraderie.

Patriotism was beautifully showcased through a captivating Patriotic Dance, followed by a serene Mandala Yoga session that demonstrated the students'

focus and mindfulness. An energetic Cheer Dance led into the Steps of Unity, where Grade I students performed, illustrating teamwork and coordination,

while the highlight of the event, the Spirit of the Nation, was a powerful performance by Grade II students, celebrating India's unity and strength.

South Korea: Bird DNA found in engines of crashed Jeju jet

Seoul, South Korea - Bird feathers and bloodstains were discovered in both engines of the Jeju Air plane that crashed in South Korea, the first report on the aviation disaster confirmed on Monday.

The Boeing 737-800 was flying from Thailand to Muan in South Korea on December 29 when the plane crash-landed and slammed into a concrete barrier. The flight exploded into a fireball killing all but two of the 181 crew and passengers on board.

It was the worst aviation disaster on South Korean soil.

What did the report say?

"The samples were sent to specialised organisations for DNA analysis, and a domestic organisation identified them as belonging to Baikal Teals," the report said, referring to a migratory duck which flies to Korea from its breeding grounds in Siberia during the winter season.

"The pilots identified a group of birds while approaching runway 01, and a security camera filmed HL8088 coming close to a group of birds during a go-around," the report said about



The crash killed all but two of the 181 crew and passengers on board

the day of the incident, referring to the Jeju jet's registration number. It did not mention if the engines had stopped working in the moments leading up to the crash.

Data from the recorder shows that the air traffic control tower warned the pilots against potential bird strikes after giving it clearance to land. A minute later, both voice and data recording systems on board failed.

Within seconds, the pilots declared mayday due to a bird strike and attempted a belly landing when the landing gear did not deploy.

Officials have yet to officially determine the cause of the crash.

What's next?

Speaking about the next steps, the report said the investigation will tear down the engines, examine components in depth, analyse in-flight and air traffic control data, and investigate the embankment, localisers and evidence of the bird strike.

"These all-out investigation activities aim to determine the accurate cause of the accident," it said.

Some experts have said that the Muan airport's localiser - a set of antennas on a concrete structure which guide planes during landings - made the crash worse.

South Korea earlier announced that it will remove concrete structures in airports nationwide and replace them with 'breakable structures'.

DW

US: Trump suspends Colombia tariffs

The South American country agreed to take in deported migrants from the US, including on US aircraft

Washington, D.C., US - The White House announced late on Sunday that US President Donald Trump would not go forward with tariffs and some sanctions against Colombia, after the South American country agreed to take in deported migrants from the US, including on US military aircraft.

Colombia 'has agreed to all of President Trump's terms, including the unrestricted acceptance of all illegal aliens from Colombia returned from the United States, including on US military aircraft, without limitation or delay', Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt said in a statement.

Earlier, Trump said he was ordering punitive tariffs and travel bans on Colombia, among other retaliatory steps.

Leavitt said the measures which would have imposed 25% tariffs on all Colombian goods coming into the United States and then raised to 50% in one week will be 'held in reserve, and not signed'. But visa restrictions on Colombian government officials will remain in place 'until the first plane load of Colombian deportees is successfully returned'.

The move was triggered by Colombia refusing landing permission for at least two US deportation flights.

"These measures are just the beginning," Trump had written on his social media platform Truth Social. "We will not allow the Colombian Government to violate its legal obligations with regard to the acceptance and return of the Criminals they forced into the United States."

Following the White House's announcement, the Colombian government said it had 'over-



US President Donald Trump has used military planes for his deportation effort

come the impasse' with the US.

"We will continue to receive Colombians who return as deportees, guaranteeing them decent conditions," Colombian Foreign Minister Luis Gilberto Murillo said in a statement.

Colombian President Gustavo Petro said earlier in the day that flights carrying migrants deported from the US would not be accepted until the Trump administration established protocols that treated people with 'dignity'.

"A migrant is not a criminal and must be treated with the dignity that a human being deserves," Petro said. "That is why I returned the US military planes that were carrying Colombian

Colombian President Gustavo Petro said earlier in the day that flights carrying migrants deported from the US would not be accepted until the Trump administration established protocols that treated people with 'dignity'

migrants."

Petro added that his country would receive Colombians arriving on civilian aircraft and 'without treatment like criminals'.

Later, Colombia offered to send a presidential plane 'to facilitate the humane return of Colombian nationals'.

Petro criticised Trump in a defiant post on X, saying 'your blockade doesn't scare me'. Petro threatened 50% tariffs on US goods after Trump's earlier trade announcements in regards to the South American country.

Colombia then said it would go forward with a 25% tariffs on US goods, after Petro's threat.

Following Petro's refusal to

accept the flights, US Secretary Rubio promptly ordered the suspension of visa issuance at the US Embassy's consular section in Bogota.

Rubio is issuing 'travel sanctions on individuals and their families, who were responsible for the interference of US repatriation flight operations', the US Department of State said in a statement, adding that it 'will continue to enforce and prioritise an America First agenda'.

The statement also says measures will remain in place until Colombia fulfils its obligation to accept the return of its citizens.

Mike Johnson, the Republican speaker of the US House of Representatives, said the Congress is ready to enact sanctions on those that fail to 'accept their citizens who are illegally in the United States'.

"President Trump is putting America first, just like he said he would. And Congress will implement policies that reinforce his agenda."

Democratic New York congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, on the other hand, criticised Trump's move to impose retaliatory tariffs on Colombia. "Trump is all about making inflation worse for working class Americans, not better," she said.

Colombia is a major exporter of coffee, meaning breakfast

might get a little more expensive for some Americans due to Trump's tariffs.

Among a raft of Trump's campaign promises was to crack down on those entering the US illegally. Two Air Force C-17 cargo planes carrying migrants removed from the US touched down early on Friday in Guatemala.

On the same day, Honduras received two deportation flights carrying a total of 193 people.

According to figures from the advocacy group Witness at the Border, Colombia accepted 475 deportation flights from the US from 2020 to 2024.

DW

Finland supports Greenland remaining part of Denmark

Athens, Greece - Finland supports Greenland remaining part of Denmark, Prime Minister Petteri Orpo stated Sunday, according to public broadcaster YLE.

Orpo emphasised Finland's position on the sanctity of international borders, dismissing any unilateral efforts to alter them.

"The starting principle is that borders cannot be shifted by someone else," Orpo said, addressing discussions about Greenland's sovereignty.

Orpo also touched on US President Donald Trump's renewed interest in acquiring Greenland, a proposal Trump first floated in 2019. While the Danish government rebuked the idea at the time, Trump reiterated his stance last Monday, calling Greenland 'a wonderful place' and highlighting its strategic importance for international security.

"We need it for international security," Trump said, as he



Finland PM Petteri Orpo

signed executive orders.

Orpo, however, warned that any tariffs the US might impose on Europe could hurt Finland's export-driven economy. "Were tariffs to be imposed on Europe, it would, of course, be harmful to Finland," he noted.

Baltic Sea Tensions

The Finnish prime minister also addressed the escalating security concerns in the Baltic Sea following several infrastructure

incidents linked to Russia's 'shadow fleet'.

"It is quite evident that the Eagle S vessel is responsible for the cable damage. It's also clear that Russia's shadow fleet has caused these repeatedly," Orpo said, referencing the December detention of the Russian-linked tanker ship Eagle S after a submarine cable was damaged on Christmas Day. Orpo confirmed that investigations into the incident are ongoing.

The Baltic Sea has witnessed a series of high-profile disruptions since Russia - Ukraine war began in February 2022. Last November, telecommunications cables between Sweden and Denmark were severed, with Swedish authorities suspecting the involvement of the Chinese vessel Yi Peng 3. China has denied the allegations and blocked Sweden's request to investigate the ship.

Anadolu Agency

DRC: M23 claims to have captured Goma

Nairobi, Kenya - M23 rebels have claimed they have taken control of the key eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) city of Goma early on Monday.

The rebels had announced the city's capture in a statement minutes before a 48-hour deadline imposed by the group for the Congolese army to disarm and surrender expired.

M23 urged residents of Goma to remain calm and for Congolese forces to gather at the central stadium. The claims could not be independently verified.

UN urges Rwanda to pull back troops

Meanwhile, United Nations Secretary General Antonio Guterres called on Rwanda to withdraw its forces from DRC amid fierce fighting as M23 rebels closed in on the outskirts of the Congolese city of Goma.

Heavy fighting has already killed 13 soldiers from South Africa, Malawi and Uruguay. Some of the soldiers who lost



Several international peacekeepers lost their lives as M23 rebels moved towards the city of Goma

their lives were part of a UN mission, while others members of a regional peacekeeping force.

"The Secretary-General is deeply concerned by the escalating violence in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo and reiterates his strongest condemnation of the M23 armed group's ongoing offensive and advances towards Goma in North Kivu with the support of the Rwanda Defence Forces," spokesman Stephane Dujarric said in a statement. "He calls on the M23 to immediately cease all hostile actions and withdraw from occupied areas. He further calls on the Rwanda Defence Forces to cease support to the M23 and withdraw from DRC territory," Dujarric said.

The M23 rebels are mainly composed of ethnic Tutsis who

broke away from the Congolese army over a decade ago. Experts from Congo, the United States and the UN have accused Rwanda of backing the M23 armed group.

Meanwhile, the UN Security Council on Sunday demanded that M23 rebels halt their ongoing offensive and advance towards Goma.

DW

Thousands of Palestinians begin returning to northern Gaza Strip

Gaza City, Palestine - Thousands of Palestinians on Monday morning began returning to the northern Gaza Strip as part of the ceasefire between Israel and the Palestinian Hamas group that came into effect on January 19.

Thousands of people moved on foot toward northern Gaza through the coastal Al-Rashid street as of 7am local time (0500GMT), according to witnesses and an Anadolu correspondent on the ground.

Palestinian social media activists uploaded footage of people chanting and celebrating while returning to their areas.

The Gaza media office had said earlier that people could move to northern Gaza on foot, not via vehicles, through the coastal street as of 7am.

It added that people could also move to northern Gaza from central and southern Gaza via vehicles not on foot through Salaheddin Street, eastern Gaza, as of 9am.

Meanwhile, thousands of displaced Palestinians began to return to northern Gaza by vehicles on Monday through the Netzarim Corridor, which separates the territory's southern part from the north, witnesses said.

"Vehicles carrying displaced people and their belongings began to pass through the Netzarim Corridor via Salah al-Din Street, after undergoing a security inspection," an eyewitness



Thousands of people moved on foot toward northern Gaza through the coastal Al-Rashid street

told Anadolu.

Vehicles were scheduled to pass through the Netzarim Corridor at 9am local time (0700GMT) but their passage was delayed due to the late arrival of a technical team responsible for inspections, according to an Anadolu reporter.

Vehicles go through an X-ray device at the crossing before being allowed into northern Gaza under the ceasefire agreement.

According to the Israeli outlet Walla on Thursday, two American firms and an Egyptian com-

pany are managing this mechanism to facilitate the return of displaced Palestinians to northern Gaza while maintaining security.

The return of Palestinians came hours after Qatar mediated an agreement between Hamas and Israel under which the Palestinian group agreed to release female Israeli captive Arbel Yehud and two others by Friday.

The first six-week phase of the ceasefire agreement took effect on January 19, suspending Israel's genocidal war that has killed more than 47,000 Palestinians,

most of them women and children, and injured more than 111,000 since October 7, 2023.

Seven Israeli captives, including four soldiers, have so far been released in return for 290 Palestinian prisoners since the deal came into force.

The Israeli onslaught has left more than 11,000 people missing, with widespread destruction and a humanitarian crisis that has claimed the lives of many elderly people and children in one of the worst global humanitarian disasters ever.

Netanyahu to meet Trump

Meanwhile, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is scheduled to fly to Washington this weekend to meet US President Donald Trump, despite an arrest warrant issued against him by the International Criminal Court (ICC), Israeli media said on Monday. Netanyahu and former Defence Minister Yoav Gallant face arrest warrants issued by The Hague-based court in November last year for war crimes.

Anadolu Agency



France to lift or suspend certain sanctions on Syria

Brussels, Belgium - France announced on Monday that it would lift or suspend certain sanctions on Syria's energy, transportation, and financial sectors to support the country's economic stabilisation and reconstruction efforts.

"We have decided today to lift or suspend certain sanctions affecting the energy, transportation, or financial sectors that currently hinder the country's economic stabilisation and the initiation of the reconstruction process," said French foreign minister, Jean-Noel Barrot at the doorstep of EU Foreign Affairs Council meeting in Brussels.

"This suspension of sanctions must be accompanied by a political transition involving all Syrians," Barrot stated, highlighting the necessity for inclusive governance.

He also emphasised the importance of ensuring security in the region.

"Decisive measures must be taken, particularly an unrelenting fight against any resurgence of Daesh terrorism, along with the detection, control, and destruction of chemical weapon stockpiles held by the Assad regime," he added.

To bolster these efforts, France will host the third edition of the Aqaba Conference on February 13.

According to Barrot, the event will 'bring together Syria's international partners to provide this support and ensure the implementation of political transition measures and security guarantees'.

This is not only about Syria, but 'this also concerns the security of Europeans and French citizens', he added.

Germany to start deportations

Meanwhile, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz has announced plans to deport criminal offenders to Syria amid an inten-

sifying domestic debate on immigration before the February 23 parliamentary election.

Speaking on public broadcaster ARD late on Sunday, Scholz said Berlin is holding talks with the new Syrian government to promote an inclusive political process and stability in the country, which he described as prerequisites for potential deportations.

"Offenders should be returned to their country, and we want to enforce this whenever we have the opportunity," he said, responding to criticism from opposition parties following several recent attacks in

The decision is to lift or suspend certain sanctions affecting energy, transportation, or financial sectors that currently hinder Syria's economic stabilisation

Germany where the perpetrators were rejected asylum seekers or illegal immigrants.

"Will there be a time when, for example, criminals can be returned to Syria? Yes. And I hope that will be soon. And that's the most urgent concern. Will those who have not gained a foothold here perhaps eventually return to the countries they came from, and in this case Syria? I would say yes, but we have to wait to see if positive development actually materialise," he stated.

Scholz noted that his government has made significant legislative changes recently to streamline deportation procedures for rejected asylum seekers and undocumented migrants.

Anadolu Agency

Arab League rejects attempts to uproot Palestinian people 'from their land'

Cairo, Egypt - The Arab League said on Sunday that attempts to uproot the Palestinian people from their land, whether through resettlement, annexation or settlement expansion, 'have proven to fail in the past'.

"Circumventing these established principles and longstanding commitments, which have garnered Arab and international consensus, will only prolong the conflict and make peace even more unattainable," it added.

It reiterated that 'the just Palestinian cause is one of land and people, and attempts to uproot the Palestinian people from their land through relocation, annexation, or settlement expansion have consistently failed in the past'.

The organisation affirmed that such attempts are 'rejected and in violation of international



law'. It highlighted that 'forcibly displacing people from their land can only be described as ethnic cleansing'.

The statement said 'the current phase requires continuous

efforts from all parties to solidify and sustain the ceasefire as a precursor to immediately commencing the reconstruction of Gaza and addressing the wounds of its people, who have

endured 15 consecutive months of brutal warfare. The infrastructure of the (Gaza) Strip has suffered unprecedented destruction in the history of modern warfare'.

The Arab League called on 'all nations that believe in the two-state solution as a pathway to peace to work diligently and immediately to initiate a credible process to achieve this solution and implement it on the ground as soon as possible. This is the only way to ensure security and peace for Palestinians, Israelis, and all peoples of the region and the world'.

Describing Gaza as a 'demolition site', US President Donald Trump called on Saturday to 'just clean out' the Palestinian enclave and resettle Palestinians in Jordan and Egypt.

"I'd rather get involved with some of the Arab nations and build housing at a different location where they can maybe live in peace for a change," he told reporters aboard Air Force One.

Anadolu Agency

One Palestinian killed in Israeli drone strike in occupied West Bank

Ramallah, Palestine - A Palestinian was killed and another injured in an Israeli drone strike in the West Bank city of Tulkarem on Monday, the Health Ministry said.

A ministry statement said the casualties occurred in the attack that targeted the Nur Shams refugee camp in eastern Tulkarem. Witnesses said the drone hit a vehicle in the camp, leaving it in flames.

Meanwhile, the Israeli army on Monday continued its offensive in the West Bank city of Jenin and its refugee camp for the seventh day.

Witnesses said the Israeli army was still cordoning off the refugee camp from all directions, and clashes between Israeli forces and Palestinian fighters along with sounds of explosions were reported.

The Israeli army also contin-



According to initial estimates, the Israeli army completely demolished between 30 and 40 homes in Jenin, besides hundreds of others being partially damaged

ued to demolish homes in the camp, sources said.

Mohammad Jarrar, the mayor of Jenin, on Sunday said some

15,000 people were forced to flee their homes and areas in the camp due to Israeli attacks.

He added that according to

initial estimates, the Israeli army completely demolished between 30 and 40 homes in Jenin, besides hundreds of others being

partially damaged.

"The Israeli army is bulldozing and destroying streets and infrastructure, creating pathways

for its vehicles through the rubble of demolished Palestinian homes," he added.

Israeli forces launched the military operation on Tuesday, and has since killed at least 16

Smotrich from resigning, which could collapse his government.

Tensions have been running high across the occupied West Bank due to Israel's war on Gaza.

At least 876 Palestinians have

Meanwhile, the Israeli army on Monday continued its offensive in the West Bank city of Jenin and its refugee camp for the seventh day

people and injured 50 others, according to Palestinian figures.

The assault is said to be part of a political manoeuvre by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to appease far-right Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich, who opposed the Gaza ceasefire that went into effect on January 19.

Reports suggest Netanyahu promised the attack to prevent

been killed and more than 6,700 injured by Israeli forces in the occupied territory, according to the Palestinian Health Ministry.

In July, the International Court of Justice declared Israel's longstanding occupation of Palestinian territories illegal, calling for the evacuation of all settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem.

Anadolu Agency

INDIA

Uttarakhand becomes first state to implement a Uniform Civil Code

The UCC applies to the entire area of the state and is also effective on the residents of the state living outside

Dehradun, Uttarakhand - Uttarakhand became the first state in India to implement a Uniform Civil Code (UCC) on Monday. Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami launched the UCC portal and rules, which according to the government, aims to 'simplify and standardise personal laws related to marriage, divorce, succession, and inheritance'. An official order from the Uttarakhand government said the UCC shall come into force on Monday. As per the state government, Uttarakhand Uniform Civil Code Act, 2024, 'is aimed at establishing a streamlined



This file photo shows Chairman of the UCC Rules and Implementation Committee, Shatrughan Singh with other Committee members submitting the final draft of the UCC to Uttarakhand Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami, at the secretariat in Dehradun on October 18, 2024 (ANI)

framework for the creation and cancellation of wills and supplementary documents, known as codicils, under testamentary succession'. The UCC applies to the entire

area of the state of Uttarakhand and is also effective on the residents of the state living outside Uttarakhand, except Scheduled Tribes and protected authority-empowered persons and communities. Under this, marriage can be solemnised only between those parties, none of whom has a living spouse, both are mentally capable of giving legal permission, the man

should have completed at least 21 years of age and the woman 18 years of age and they should not be in the ambit of prohibited relationships. Marriage rituals can be performed in any form under religious customs or legal provisions, but it is mandatory to register marriages within 60 days. Marriages solemnised before

March 26, 2010, or outside the state of Uttarakhand, where both the parties have been living together since then and fulfil all the legal eligibility criteria, can (although it is not mandatory) get registered within six months, said the official statement. Similarly, the work of acceptance and acknowledgement of marriage registration is also required to be completed promptly. After receiving the application, the sub-registrar has to make an appropriate decision within 15 days. According to the statement, if no decision is taken on the application related to marriage registration within the prescribed period of 15 days, then that application is automatically forwarded to the registrar; whereas, in case of acknowledgement, the application will be considered automatically accepted after the same period. Along with this, a transparent appeal process is also available if the registration application is rejected. There is a provision of penalty for giving false information for registration under the Act. ANI

In boost to ties, China's top diplomat hosts Indian official

Beijing, China - Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri held a meeting with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi in Beijing on Monday. Wang Yi noted that India and China have implemented the important consensus reached by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chinese President Xi Jinping during their meeting held in Russia's Kazan last year. Wang Yi said that India and China have held positive interactions at all levels and accelerated the process of improving bilateral ties. He called for exploring more substantive measures and commitment to mutual understanding, support and achievement instead of mutual suspicion and alienation. The statement released by Chinese Foreign Ministry reads: "The two sides should seize the



Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri with Chinese FM Wang Yi in Beijing

opportunity, meet each other halfway, explore more substantive measures, and commit to mutual understanding, mutual support, and mutual achievement, rather than mutual suspicion, mutual alienation, and mutual consumption. "The improvement and development of China-India relations is fully in line with the fundamental interests of the two countries and their peoples, is conducive to safeguarding the legitimate rights and interests of the global South countries." During the meeting, Misri expressed India's willingness to celebrate the 75th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations with China and will fully support China's work as the chair of the SCO. ANI

JPC passes Waqf (Amendment) Bill

New Delhi - The Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) has approved 14 amendments to the Waqf Amendment Bill, despite strong objections from the Opposition parties. JPC chairperson Jagdambika Pal stated that the amendments were accepted based on a majority vote, with 16 members supporting the changes and 10 opposing them. "44 amendments were discussed clause by clause. After detailed discussions over 6 months, we sought amendments from all members. 14 amendments have been accepted by the committee based on a majority. Opposition too had suggested amendments. We moved every one of those amendments and it was put to vote," the JPC chairperson said. The Waqf Amendment bill aims to overhaul the Waqf Act of 1995, which governs the management of Waqf proper-



This file photo shows Indian Secular Front supporters holding a mass protest on the occasion of ISF foundation day against the Wakf Amendment Bill and other issues, in Kolkata on January 21 (ANI)

ties in India. The bill has been a subject of controversy, with opposition parties alleging that it undermines the rights of Muslims and the federal structure of India. Meanwhile, the Opposition party members criticised the JPC's decision, alleging that they were not allowed to speak during the meeting and that the amendments were pushed through without proper discussion. The final draft report of the JPC is expected to be released on January 29. Congress MP Naseer Hussain claimed that most of the stakeholders who took part in the JPC meetings have opposed the bill. ANI

Bangladesh seeks removal of Wazed from WHO

Dhaka, Bangladesh - Bangladesh's interim government has started preparations to take action to remove Saima Wazed, the daughter of former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, from her position as the World Health Organization (WHO) Regional Director for South-East Asia. Saima Wazed, based in Delhi, is a psychologist by training and has worked extensively on neurodevelopmental disorders. She was confirmed as the WHO Regional Director on January 23, 2024, by the WHO Executive Board in Geneva. However, the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) of Bangladesh is investigating her for alleged corruption charges. An official stated, "ACC has taken necessary steps to remove Saima Wazed from WHO. All preparations have been finalised to send letters to the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of For-



Saima Wazed is the daughter of former PM Sheikh Hasina

eign Affairs to take measures to remove her." In August last year, a student-led movement ousted Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina after weeks of protests that resulted in over 600 deaths. Hasina, 76, fled to India, and an interim govern-

ment led by Nobel Laureate Muhammad Yunus was formed. But, according to a lawyer in Dhaka, 'if someone elected after a country's nomination to a United Nations body, he or she remains in position in his or her individual capacity when the country's government falls'. The political turmoil in Bangladesh has also spilled over to international politics. Recently, UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer faced another setback with the resignation of anti-corruption minister Tulip Siddiq. Siddiq, 42, the niece of Sheikh Hasina, was implicated in an embezzlement

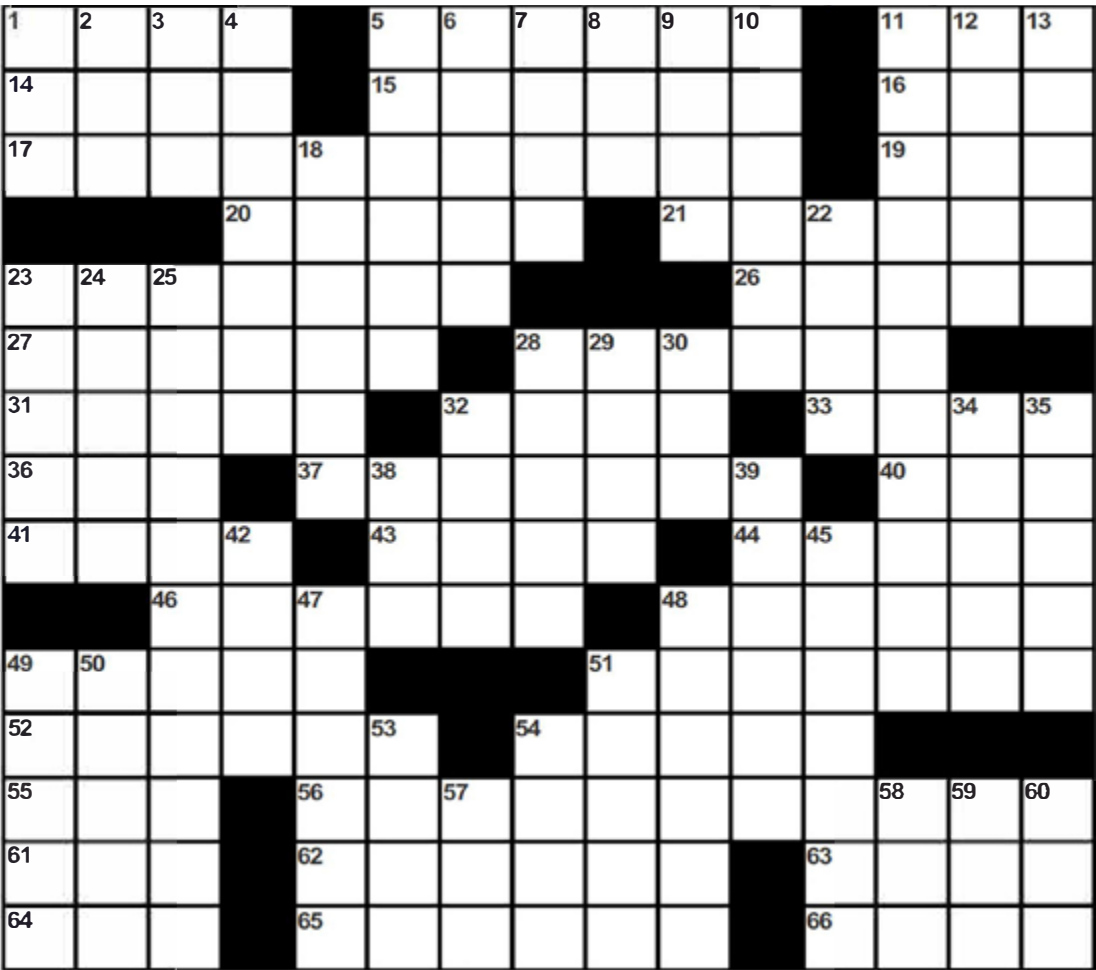
for the Government, I have resigned as City Minister." She also explained that her family connections were disclosed, and she recused herself from matters related to Bangladesh to avoid any perception of conflict of interest. Hasina, who fled Bangladesh last year, has been living in India since August 5. The fallout from

these events has significantly affected the political landscape in Bangladesh and has drawn international attention. Despite the investigations and political instability, Wazed remains in her position, as the case continues. ANI

South Korea poised to post rise in birth rate

Seoul, South Korea - South Korea is set to report its first increase in birth rates in nine years, with a 3% rise in the number of newborns in 2024, according to official data. Between January and November last year, 220,094 births were recorded, marking a 3% year-on-year increase, the Yonhap news agency reported on Monday, citing Statistics Korea. This contrasts sharply with a 7.7% drop in 2023, the eighth consecutive year of declining birth rates. The rise was driven by significant growth in metropolitan areas, with the capital Seoul and Gyeonggi province recording double-digit increases last year. However, growth was more modest in regions such as North Chungcheong province and the southern island of Jeju, which saw increases of 3.1% and 6% in November, respectively. Officials attribute these regional variations to the concentration of newlyweds and young adults in their 20s and 30s living in urban centres. South Korea formally joined the ranks of 'super-aged' nations in late 2023, with 20% of its population aged 65 or older, with women accounting for the majority of this demographic. The nation continues to face challenges linked to an aging population and declining birth rates as many young adults delay or forgo marriage and parenthood. Anadolu Agency

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 deception
28) More or less
31) Belittle
32)F rollic and gambol
33) Say the Lord's Prayer
36)F ollow or tail
37) Links hits
40) Valuable rock
41) Old Testament twin
43)F odder for a mudder
44) Development develop- ments
46) Gold quantities

- 48) Part of USMC
49) Complex unit
51)F ormer 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)N ot including some- thing
12) Gun an engine

- 13) "The gift that_ on giv- ing"
18) Fixes a shoelace
22) Straddling
23)T ranscript item
24)T imber wolves
25) In a difficult situation
28) Match game?
29)T housand_ 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)T ype 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.

NOTE PAD



YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE



ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

Passion and romance are on the agenda, and you're certainly ready for them. You've been dealing with someone else's problems for what seems like weeks, if not months, and it's definitely time for some fun. If you're at an event but would rather spend time alone with your sweetie, don't feel bad about ducking out early. Quality time is important to any relationship. Take it.



LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

If you've been thinking about quitting your job and moving on for some time, today's events may seem like the straw that breaks the camel's back. If you've already formulated a battle plan, go ahead and put it into action. If you haven't, don't charge off into the sunset without knowing where you'll end up. Call a close friend and ask for some solid, objective advice.



SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

You're always game to meet someone new and unusual as long as they're interesting, and more importantly, fun. The Universe has decided to afford you with all that and more now, so prepare for some wonderful diversions. Different and interesting people are due to come your way to enrich your life. Better take your vitamins. You're going to need to keep up in any way you can.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

01. Who wrote "The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy"?

- A. Arthur C Clarke
B. Terry Pratchett
C. Isaac Asimov
D. Douglas Adams

02. What have George Etheridge, William Wycherley, Thomas Shadwell, Thomas Otway Colby Ciber and William Congreve in common?

- A. They composed what is termed "early music"
B. They discovered moons in the solar system
C. They formulated the modern atomic table
D. They wrote Restoration Comedies

03. Which two bodies of water does the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait connect?

- A. The Black Sea and the Aegean Sea
B. The Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman
C. The Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden
D. The Mediterranean Sea and the Atlantic Ocean

Answers: 1.D 2.D 3.C



TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

Someone isn't happy with one of your habits. Your first clues are the frequent lectures on self-discipline, willpower, and just saying no. You'd think they would know you well enough to understand that these tactics don't work well on you, and if they keep it up you'll only be more determined to have your way. Try to find a balance between the wisdom of what they're saying and your need for independence.



VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

Sometimes there's nothing you can do about a situation. Get past what you can't change or your fixation on it will eat you alive. While it isn't like you to give up, you also know when you can't win, and this is one of those times. Later, a usually unreliable associate could surprise you with a dependable insight. Be sure to write it down or no one will believe you. Tonight, your impulses could trap you in a tight spot. Use the secret exit to escape if necessary.



CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

Understanding almost always leads to compassion, especially when it comes to a loved one. It's not just a matter of trying to see things from their point of view. Instead, you need to drop all rigid notions of who's right and who's wrong and see their emotional, mental, and spiritual needs. If you try to understand someone deeply, you may find that your anger with them has disappeared.



GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

Whatever emerges from your lips on a daily basis is always surprising, but it's hard to shock those who know and love you. Today's announcement may come as somewhat of an eyebrow raiser to those who aren't quite so familiar with you or your startling astrological style. Keep that in mind, and try to be gentle. It wouldn't hurt to go easy on anyone who's just now getting to know you. Might make it easier, in fact.



LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

You begin to understand an underlying pattern today. It's even easier to excel when you understand why it's happening. Your abilities and desires come together in a perfect match. Your friends and coworkers look on with a mixture of awe and envy. When you're on fire like this, no one needs to fan the flames of your success. This is the perfect time to get your ideas out of your head and into the right hands



AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

Every now and then, life has a funny way of putting us in a position we're not happy about, such as being forced to make a decision we'd rather have absolutely no part of. That may be what you're up against now, especially if you've been keeping a rather uncomfortable secret for an uncomfortably long time. What you've got to decide now is what will make you feel best about the situation.



CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

You have the right to use all of your skills, not just your intelligence, when working toward a goal. Today is the day to pull out your secret weapon, which is your charm. Flash that smile and tell people just how wonderful you think they are. Folks enjoy being recognized for their unique contributions. You know how to boost someone's ego appropriately, without flirtation or manipulation.



SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

When you least expect it, the world as you know it will go all topsy-turvy. It won't be an ending or overly unpleasant, but you could wake up realizing that you're definitely not in Kansas any more. This time out, even though you're not ordinarily fond of change, it won't bother you, mostly because you've been planning this for a while now. Go ahead and put those plans in motion. It's time



PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

You've never been a big fan of the spotlight, but when you're forced into it, whether it's for a second or an afternoon, you rise to the occasion like a champ. That's because you know how to do exactly what needs to be done, no matter what that happens to be. When someone dear to you puts you center stage to thank or reward you, accept the attention graciously.

KIDS COLOURING



BOGGLER

E	A	U	J
R	G	S	S
U	E	R	U
E	T	P	H

Each game will present you with a matrix filled with letters. The objective is to form words by linking adjacent letters - to the left, right, on top, bottom, or diagonal to each other. The Boggles Classic game uses a 4 x 4 matrix. Words are valued at one point for each letter in excess of two letters. A three letter word is worth one point, a four letter word is worth two points, and so on. Valid words must be at least three letters long.

SOLUTION

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

DO YOU SUDOKU?

LEVEL EASY: Fill in the grid so that every row, every column and every 3x3 box contains the digits 1 to 9 and only one instance of each number

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

WORD BUILDER



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

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

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER

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

RED DEVILS ENJOY RUB OF THE GREEN

Martinez’s deflected goal helps Manchester United beat Fulham

London, England - A deflected late strike from Lisandro Martinez earned Manchester United a much-needed 1-0 victory at Fulham in the Premier League on Sunday.

Looking for just their fourth league win since coach Ruben Amorim succeeded Erik ten Hag in November, United created very few openings in a poor first half at Craven Cottage.

The visitors did improve after the break and got the bit of good fortune they needed to grab victory, with Argentine defender Martinez’s long-range shot taking a huge deflection before finding the net in the 78th minute.

A timely goal-line clearance from young United substitute Toby Collyer late on helped see the visitors home, with the victory moving Amorim’s side up to 12th in the standings, four points behind 10th-placed Fulham.

“I think I was lucky, but an important win,” Martinez told TNT Sports. “I am happy with the way we won the game. It doesn’t matter who scores - the most important is the three points.

“It means a lot. Not only to the fans, but for us because we have suffered a lot. It is a hard win, at this club the pressure is hard, but



Manchester United’s Lisandro Martinez celebrates after scoring against Fulham on Sunday

It is a hard win, at this club the pressure is hard, but we are here. We know how difficult it is. Even a game like today we have to win and be humble after winning

LISANDRO MARTINEZ

we are here. We know how difficult it is. Even a game like today we have to win and be humble after winning.”

It has not gone well for Amorim in England thus far. Coming into Sunday’s contest,

United had lost six of their previous nine league matches.

In such poor form, the visitors looked short of ideas in a disappointing first half. Emile Smith Rowe has the best opportunity of the opening period for the hosts,

but he could not get his shot away. United skipper Bruno Fernandes’ clever free-kick almost handed the visitors a lead early in the second half, but they needed that slice of fortune to see their first and only shot on target in the match find the net.

Collyer’s intervention to prevent Joachim Andersen’s header finding the net was pivotal, with Fulham substitute Rodrigo Muniz wasting two golden chances to equalise in the final stages.

Amad Diallo did have the ball in the net in stoppage time as the

Ivorian thought he had sealed the three points, but he was adjudged to be offside following a VAR review.

An eighth successive league victory at Fulham meant United have now won four of their last five matches in all competitions.

“One shot on target from Man Utd - a lucky deflection,” Fulham coach Marco Silva said.

“We were the team that dominated more. We had two or three good moments to score but I don’t remember one dangerous moment from Man Utd.”

I’d pick goalkeeper coach than players who don’t give their maximum, says Amorim

London, England - Manchester United manager Ruben Amorim defended his decision to again omit forward Marcus Rashford from his squad for Sunday’s 1-0 win over Fulham, insisting he would rather put a goalkeeper coach on the bench than a player not giving their all.

Rashford has not featured for United since mid-December, after he admitted that he was ready for a new challenge in his career, with the England international not in the team’s travelling party for Sunday’s narrow Premier League victory.

Amorim has always been adamant he will not allow anything less than full application from his players, even if the club are struggling to find form under the Portuguese coach.

“It’s always the same reason,” Amorim told reporters when asked about Rashford’s latest omission. “The reasons is the training, the way I see what a footballer should do.

“In training, in life and it’s every day, every detail. So if things don’t change, I will not change. It’s the same situation

for every player. If you do the maximum, if you do the right things, we can use every player.”

“You can see it today on the bench - we miss a little bit of pace to go, to change the game, to move some pieces but I prefer like that. I will put (goalkeeper coach Jorge) Vital before I put a player that does not give the maximum every day. I will not change in that.”



Ruben Amorim

On the eve of his 40th birthday, Amorim joked that he feels 10 years older after a difficult first two months at the club.

United were fortunate to emerge from their trip to Craven Cottage with three points.

Lisandro Martinez’s late deflected winner was the visitors’ only shot on target in a poor contest.

The victory was only the fourth time Amorim has tasted league success since taking over from Erik ten Hag in November, with the 20-time top flight champions still struggling in mid-table.

“It’s not 40... I’m 50!” Amorim told the BBC when asked if the Fulham win was the perfect birthday present.



Leicester City’s Jamie Vardy celebrates his goal against Tottenham

‘Vardy is a leader by example’, says Van Nistelrooy

London, England - Leicester City’s veteran striker Jamie Vardy earned high praise from manager Ruud van Nistelrooy after his goal paved the way for a crucial 2-1 victory at Tottenham Hotspur on Sunday.

The 38-year-old Vardy equalised just after halftime from close range and four minutes later Bilal El Khannouss scored what turned out to be the winner.

Van Nistelrooy described the win - after seven successive league defeats - as massive as his side climbed out of the relegation zone into 17th place.

“He is a leader by example,” Van Nistelrooy said of Vardy who has scored seven goals and has three assists in the league this

season. “He is still producing.

“The respect from the team and the staff at this club for him is huge. He is also delivering.”

Leicester trailed to a 33rd-minute header by Richarlison, but produced a great response to fight back after halftime.

“The performance was excellent, the shape and the way the players were defending together,” Dutchman Van Nistelrooy, who enjoyed only his second league win in charge, said. “We went behind but the way the team reacted to going 1-0 down, they took the ball and started to play. At halftime they were calm and the way they came out of the dressing room was tremendous.”

Emerson goal helps West Ham draw with Aston Villa

Birmingham, England - Aston Villa missed a chance to close in on the Premier League’s top four on Sunday in a 1-1 draw at home to West Ham United whose Brazilian left back Emerson rescued a point after Jacob Ramsey had got the hosts off to a dream start.

Villa, who want to earn a second year in the Champions League, opened the scoring when Ramsey played a neat one-two with Ollie Watkins in the eighth minute before placing an angled shot past West Ham goalkeeper Alphonse Areola.

Villa should have scored again, with Youri Tielemans shooting just wide and Watkins narrowly missing a header. But the visitors grew into the game and deservedly equalised when Emerson headed home an Edson Alvarez cross in the 70th minute.

The Londoners were the better side in the second half, with Carlos Soler seeing a shot cleared off the line by Ezri Konsa and Danny Ings driving just wide. In a frantic end, their manager Graham Potter was jumping for joy when Lucas Paqueta squeezed the ball home in added



West Ham United’s Emerson scores against Aston Villa

time - but he was ruled offside.

The result left Villa eighth on 37 points after 23 games - four points behind the fourth position that would grant them another spot in Europe’s elite competition. West Ham are 13th on 27 points, a comfortable 11 points above the relegation zone.

Villa manager Unai Emery will be disappointed his team did not

bury the game early on, after they looked to blow West Ham away in the first 10 minutes, having a goal disallowed shortly after Ramsey’s opener.

But in truth they were hanging on at the end, with Potter’s side looking more confident of a winner on a cold and blustery day in a raucous atmosphere at Villa Park in Birmingham.

“I think the result is fair,” Emery said.

“We were winning 1-0, we started very well, then they (West Ham) were feeling better and better,” he said. “To keep the result in 90 minutes without one goal more is always difficult. They created not very clear chances, maybe one or two.”

In a match littered with fouls

I think the result is fair. We were winning 1-0, we started very well, then they (West Ham) were feeling better and better.

UNAI EMERY

and flare-ups between players, both sides had 14 shots, including four on target each, though the visitors edged possession with 56%.

“In the first 10-15 minutes, we suffered a bit, but after we started to play with confidence,” said West Ham goalscorer Emerson. “In the second half, we showed our character, we fought to the end and we deserved to win because we created a lot.”

Watkins’ pass for Ramsey was his 100th Premier League goal involvement: 69 goals and 31 assists. The goal drew ecstatic chants of “He’s one of our own” for academy product Ramsey.



Michael Oliver

Police investigating threats against referee Oliver

London, England - Police are investigating threats and abuse against referee Michael Oliver after his decision to show a red card to Arsenal’s Myles Lewis-Skelly during last Saturday’s win at Wolverhampton Wanderers, referees’ body, the PGMOL, said.

Lewis-Skelly was sent off for tripping Matt Doherty, on the edge of the Wolves box, leaving

Arsenal coach Mikel Arteta “fuming” over the decision, which was upheld by the VAR. The red card was Arsenal’s fourth of the season.

“We are appalled by the threats and abuse directed at Michael Oliver following the Wolverhampton Wanderers v Arsenal fixture,” the PGMOL said. “No official should be subject to any form of abuse, let

alone the abhorrent attacks aimed at Michael and his family over the past 24 hours.

“The police are aware, and a number of investigations have commenced. We are supporting Michael, and all those affected, and are determined to tackle this unacceptable behaviour.”

The Premier League said in a statement the red card was “checked and confirmed by VAR

who deemed Lewis-Skelly’s challenge to have been serious foul play.” The defender will be suspended for three games.

Television pundits, however, reacted with surprise at referee Oliver’s decision and former Premier League referee Mike Dean said a yellow card would have been sufficient.



Simone Inzaghi

No fear, just a lot of respect for Napoli and Atalanta, says Inter’s Inzaghi

Lecce, Italy - Inter Milan manager Simone Inzaghi said his side have nothing to fear as rivals Napoli and Atalanta turn up the heat in an increasingly tight Serie A title race after a dominant 4-0 win over Lecce on Sunday.

After Napoli extended their advantage at the summit with a 2-1 victory over Juventus on Saturday, the pressure was right back on second-placed Inter but they responded in style.

Napoli are now top with 53 points, three ahead of Inter while Atalanta are third with 46.

“There is no fear, just a lot of respect for two very good teams, who have fine coaches and play good football. I said in July that this would be an open title race and this is what is happening,” Inzaghi told Sky Sport Italia.

“Napoli and Atalanta are doing something extraordinary, as are Inter.”

Last season’s champions Inter had few problems sweeping aside Lecce, with the result sealed early in the second half and Inzaghi substituting a number of key players just after the hour mark.

“We had a great approach to the game and I congratulated the team for that, but it was not easy, as we returned home on Wednesday at dawn,” Inzaghi said referring to their midweek win at Sparta Prague in the Champions League.

Inzaghi had plenty to celebrate after the victory, their eighth straight away league win, with the Inter coach setting a Serie A record for the fewest matches to reach 200 wins.

“There is a lot of daily work in training behind these records and I am very fortunate to have worked for clubs like Lazio and Inter who gave me carte blanche, with players who were prepared to follow me,” he said.

FERMIN TO THE FORE



Fermin Lopez, with a brace and two assists, was the star of the show for Barcelona in their win against Valencia

Barca maul Valencia to end four-match winless run in LaLiga

Barcelona, Spain - Barcelona snapped their four-match winless streak in LaLiga with an emphatic 7-1 victory over Valencia on Sunday, with Fermin Lopez scoring an impressive double and adding two assists.

Barcelona sit third in the standings with 42 points, three behind second-placed Atletico Madrid and seven adrift of leaders Real Madrid.

Relegation-threatened Valencia are 19th with 16 points after their first defeat in five matches in all competitions.

Frenkie de Jong opened the scoring after three minutes with a right-footed shot from the centre of the box that found the bottom left corner after Lamine Yamal’s precise cross.

The Dutch midfielder continued to impress and played a key role in Barca doubling the lead. His pass allowed Alejandro Balde to set up Ferran Torres, who steered the ball into the net.

Raphinha added a third before the 15-minute mark, taking advantage of a mistake by Giorgi Mamardashvili. The Valencia goalkeeper was caught in no-man’s land as he raced out to close down the Brazilian, who calmly slid the ball home.

Lopez put the icing on the cake in a frenetic first half, adding a fourth on 24 minutes and a fifth before the break with a powerful long-range shot from the right.

“We were coming from a bad dynamic in LaLiga and we needed this win. I needed a game like this.

I’ve had a lot of injuries and it was important to gain confidence,” Lopez told DAZN.

Hugo Duro grabbed a consolation for Valencia after the break with a shot from close range.

But Barcelona continued to dominate and substitute Robert Lewandowski added a sixth before an unfortunate own goal from Cesar Tarrega wrapped up the scoring for Hansi Flick’s side.

Barcelona, who came into the game on the back of an impressive 5-4 win at Benfica that earned them a spot in the Cham-

We were coming from a bad dynamic in LaLiga and we needed this win. I needed a game like this. I’ve had a lot of injuries and it was important to gain confidence

FERMIN LOPEZ

pions League’s last 16, face Atalanta in their final league-phase match of Europe’s top-tier club competition on Wednesday.

Rayo rally to beat Girona

Angola forward Randy Nteka came off the bench to score two goals in three minutes that cancelled out Bryan Gil’s opener and gave Rayo Vallecano a last-gasp 2-1 win over Girona.

Following a slow, dour first half, the game came alive when former Tottenham attacking midfielder Gil’s header put visitors Girona ahead in the 58th

minute. Ivan Martin lifted a cross from the right wing that went untouched through the crowded box before finding Gil lurking behind the defence. Gil nodded in a close-range header that went under Rayo goalkeeper Augusto Batalla.

Roared on by a sold-out crowd at Vallecas, Rayo went all out on the attack but were frustrated by Girona goalkeeper Paulo Gazzaniga who made fine saves to deny efforts by Adrian Embarba and Isi Palazon, with Jorge de Frutos wasting two golden opportunities from close range.

Rayo finally scored the equaliser following a spell of pressure in the 80th minute when substitute Nteka fired

home a rebound.

After he missed an absolute sitter from close range, Nteka redeemed himself three minutes later when he struck a first-touch effort from inside the box that gave the home side the win.

As Girona went in search of an equaliser, Rayo had goalkeeper Batalla to thank as he made a string of stunning saves in added time to deny strikes by David Lopez and Cristhian Stuani.

Rayo rose to seventh in the standings on 29 points, one below sixth-placed Mallorca and the European qualification places. Girona are ninth with 28 points.

We are not in church, says Conceicao after confrontation with Calabria

Milan, Italy - The drama did not end with the final whistle at the San Siro after AC Milan snatched a late win over Parma on Sunday, but manager Sergio Conceicao brushed off his heated clash with Davide Calabria, blaming adrenaline and passion.

Two added time goals earned the home side a 3-2 win, and as the Milan bench raced to celebrate, Conceicao and his defender Calabria, who had earlier been replaced, needed to be separated by teammates and staff.

Conceicao was clearly upset at something and tried to approach Calabria but was held back before the situation got out of hand.

“I live the matches and in terms of how I live them and how I feel them there is a lot of passion and desire to win,” Conceicao said.

“In the end, there was a little extra adrenaline, I was talking



Sergio Conceicao

about a game situation with Davide and in my opinion, there was one too many words spoken.”

For the manager, the squad is like a family, where he deals with this type of situation in the same way.

“The players know that they are all important to me, like a

family. If I’m at a restaurant and my son does something I don’t like, I’ll tell him, there’s no hypocrisy,” Conceicao said.

“It wasn’t nice to see, but in football it’s okay. We are not in church.”

This has been a difficult season for Calabria. Against Parma

the defender, who has spent his whole career at Milan, was making just his fourth league start of the campaign, and he has also lost the captaincy to keeper Mike Maignan.

Brazil’s Emerson Royal has taken over the right-back role since his signing from Tottenham Hotspur in August and Calabria now has more competition with the arrival of Kyle Walker on loan from Manchester City on Friday.

“It is not a positive year like others have been,” Calabria told broadcaster DAZN.

“There are situations that are not simple, even private and personal ones that nobody is aware of. I don’t even want to talk about it too much.

“I want to end this season in the best possible way for the good of the team which is the thing I care about the most, even more than myself sometimes.”



Inter Milan’s Lautaro Martinez celebrates his goal against Lecce

Inter thrash Lecce to keep pace at top

Lecce, Italy - Inter Milan delivered a commanding performance as they cruised to a 4-0 victory at Lecce on Sunday to stay on the heels of Serie A leaders Napoli.

The result kept Inter second in the standings with 50 points, three behind Napoli and with a game in hand. Lecce sit fourth from bottom with 20 points.

With Napoli having opened up a six point lead following their 2-1 home win against Juventus on Saturday, Inter were determined to close the gap again and started aggressively.

Six minutes in, Marcus Thuram evaded a defender with a slick step-over before passing to Davide Frattesi, who volleyed into the net for Inter’s first goal.

After Inter had two goals disallowed for offside in quick succession, manager Simone Inzaghi was left visibly frustrated and was shown a yellow card for stepping outside

his technical area while voicing his displeasure.

Lautaro Martinez made it 2-0 for Inter six minutes before the break, firing a left-footed strike from the edge of the box that soared into the top corner.

Inter continued to dominate following the interval, with Denzel Dumfries battling his way into a tight position near the goal and slotting the ball into the far bottom corner to make it 3-0.

The nightmare deepened for Lecce just three minutes later, as goalkeeper Wladimiro Falcone, rushing out to intercept a through ball, tripped Frattesi’s legs in the process. Mehdi Taremi converted the resulting penalty with ease to make it 4-0 in the 61st minute.

With the win all but secured, Inzaghi made several substitutions as he opted to take off a number of key players.

Argentinos Juniors hold Boca Juniors to goalless draw

Buenos Aires, Argentina - Boca Juniors were held to a 0-0 draw at home by Argentinos Juniors in a disappointing opening to their Argentine Primera Division campaign on Sunday.

A Boca side, heavily reinforced with new signings, fell short of their fans’ expectations as the visitors dominated the early exchanges at the Bombonera stadium, almost grabbing the lead in the first minute as Tomas Molina’s header struck the crossbar.

Argentinos kept pressing and Boca goalkeeper Leandro Brey denied Jose Herrera’s long-range attempt in the 15th minute, while the hosts’ best first-half chance



Carlos Palacios of Boca Juniors in action against Argentinos Juniors

We knew it would be a difficult game but we know that at home we have to win every game, we know what this shirt means

CARLOS PALACIOS

came five minutes later when Brian Aguirre’s shot was deflected away from goal.

Boca improved after the break as Edinson Cavani put the ball in the net in the 55th minute only to have his effort disallowed for off-

side, before Frank Fabra wasted a chance by firing over the bar.

“We knew it would be a difficult game but we know that at home we have to win every game, we know what this shirt means and we can’t lose points at home,” said newly-signed Boca winger Carlos Palacios.

“At times I think we were better, we had more clear chances in the second half, we’re starting to understand each other better, we’ve put together a good group and we want to fight for everything.”

Fernando Gago’s side will look to earn their first win in the Apertura competition on Wednesday at Union.



Jasprit Bumrah topped the wicket-taking charts in Test cricket last year with 71 scalps from 13 matches

A CUT ABOVE THE REST

Indian fast bowler Bumrah named ICC Men’s Test Cricketer of the Year

Dubai, UAE - Jasprit Bumrah was named the ICC Men’s Test Cricketer of the Year for 2024 after the India pace spearhead produced his best annual haul in the red-ball format, the sport’s governing body said on Monday.

The 31-year-old seam-bowling genius topped the wicket-taking charts in Test cricket last year with 71 from 13 matches, 19 more than second-placed Gus Atkinson of England (in 11 games), having returned from a back injury in late 2023.

Bumrah’s incredible 2024 haul began during India’s memorable Test win in Cape Town against South Africa, where the

Across Test history, none of the 17 bowlers to have taken 70+ wickets in a calendar year did so at an average as low as Bumrah’s

ICC

pace spearhead was on target with eight wickets across the two innings as India pinned down the Proteas by eight wickets.

Bumrah then went on to bag 19 wickets during the five-Test marathon at home against England, as the hosts prevailed with a 4-1 margin.

However, the seasoned pacer delivered his magnum opus in

the high-stakes Border-Gavaskar Series in Australia, where he finished with an incredible 32 wickets from five Tests and was named Player of the Series.

It was during the series Down Under that Bumrah crossed the 200 Test wickets milestone, becoming the 12th Indian bowler to do so.

The 31-year-old set a unique

record while achieving the feat, becoming the only bowler in Test history with a minimum of 200 dismissals to have an average less than 20 (19.4).

“His (Bumrah) average across the year was a ridiculous 14.92, and he ended 2024 with an annual strike rate of just 30.1,” ICC said in a statement.

“Across Test history, none of the 17 bowlers to have taken 70+ wickets in a calendar year did so at an average as low as Bumrah’s.”

Bumrah beat England duo Harry Brook and Joe Root as well as Kamindu Mendis of Sri Lanka to win the prestigious award. The last Indian cricketer

to win it was batter Virat Kohli in 2018.

“I am deeply honoured to receive the ICC Men’s Test Cricketer of the Year award. Test cricket has always been a format I hold close to my heart, and to be recognised on this platform is truly special,” Bumrah said.

“This award is not just a reflection of my individual efforts but also of the unwavering support of my teammates, coaches, and fans who continue to believe and inspire me every day.

“Representing India is a privilege I deeply cherish, and knowing my efforts bring smiles to people around the world makes this journey even more special.”

West Indies beat Pakistan in second Test as series ends in draw

Multan, Pakistan - West Indies secured their first Test win in Pakistan since 1990 after beating the hosts by 120 runs in the second match in Multan on Monday to ensure the series ended in a 1-1 draw.

Pakistan needed 178 to win and sweep the two-match series after being reduced to 76-4 at stumps on the second day but lost two quick wickets when Saud Shakeel (13) and Kashif Ali (1) were removed cheaply by Kevin Sinclair and Jomel Warrican.

Mohammad Rizwan gave the hosts a fighting chance, scoring 25 runs off 62 deliveries, before the wicket-keeper-batter was sent packing in the 42nd over by Warrican, who did the bulk of the damage with the ball with five wickets in the second innings.

Reduced to 122-8, Pakistan’s chase fizzled out when Gudakesh Motie removed Noman Ali and Warrican

struck again to take out Sajid Khan.

“Just the variation of pace and hitting the same length over and over,” said Warrican, who was named Player of the Match and the Player of the Series. “Consistency is the key to everything I do.”



Jomel Warrican

We haven't played in Pakistan for a number of years, but we haven't won here in a while, so to come here and do it as a young group is incredible

KRAIGG BRATHWAITE

The hosts won the first Test, also in Multan, by 127 runs.

“We haven’t played in Pakistan for a number of years, but we haven’t won here in a while, so to come here and do it as a young group is incredible,” West Indies captain Kraigg Brathwaite said.

“On this pitch, there’s a ball with your name on it around the corner. We did that with the bat in the second innings, and it was good to see. It was a good experience.

“When you get on better pitches, you can have a similar mindset and it will help you in the long run.”

‘Novak will return’ to Melbourne Park, says Australian Open director Tiley

Melbourne, Australia - Australian Open tournament director Craig Tiley said he is confident Novak Djokovic will return to the season-opening Grand Slam next year after injury ended the 37-year-old’s latest challenge in the semi-finals at Melbourne Park.

Djokovic was jeered by some sections of the crowd when he retired due to a hamstring injury after losing the opening set to Alexander Zverev on Friday.

The Serb, who has won 10 titles at Melbourne Park and is



Novak Djokovic

chasing a record 25th Grand Slam crown, sustained the injury in his quarter-final win over Carlos Alcaraz.

“There was some talk about Novak (not coming back here) – Novak will return,” Tiley told Australian media on Monday.

“He leaves today and he’s with his family, his team left on Friday.

“We’ll see Novak back and I look forward to catching up with him in the next couple of weeks.”

Djokovic took aim at his critics the day after his exit from the

tournament, posting photos of an MRI scan of the injury on social media and Tiley was certain the Serb had done everything possible to be ready for the semi-final.

“He had a good warm-up that morning and his team were confident that he’d be able to get out there and play,” Tiley said.

“I haven’t met a player that does as much pre-preparation and has as big a focus on it as Novak does, and he would do everything he possibly can to get

on the court.”

Jannik Sinner and Madison Keys won the men’s and women’s titles as record numbers attended the Australian Open’s latest edition, with more than 1.1 million spectators making their way to Melbourne Park.

However, crowd behaviour made headlines at times during the two-week event and Tiley said organisers would consider capping the number of fans admitted if necessary.

“The objective is, right from the beginning, is that the quality of the experience is the most important thing,” he said.

“Our customer satisfaction scores are higher than they were last year, and we’re going through all those numbers ... but so far the initial reports have been very positive.

“If ever there becomes a moment where we’re getting to a number that’s not satisfactory for that experience, we’ll make a change.”

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A KEYHOLE OPERATION WAS USED FOR THE FIRST TIME TO REMOVE A HEAD TUMOUR FROM THE EYE SOCKET OF A PATIENT IN THE UK

Tumour breakthrough

A nurse has become the first person in the UK to undergo an operation that saw a tumour removed through her eye socket using keyhole surgery.

Ruvimbo Kaviya, 40, from Leeds, had a meningioma removed from the space located beneath her brain and behind her eyes.

Many of these types of tumour would have previously been considered inoperable because of where they are situated in an area called the cavernous sinus.

Experts at the Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust practised the surgery several times in advance of Kaviya's operation with the help of 3D technology.

Previously, an operation to remove such a tumour in the same part of the head would require complex brain surgery, involving taking a large part of the skull away and risking complications.

Kaviya said the tumour had left her suffering from headaches which 'felt like an electric shock on my face', meaning she was at times unable to eat or brush her teeth.

The mother-of-three said, "It was very stressful and difficult. So, when they told me that they're going to do the surgery - they couldn't say that it was going to be perfect and there was risk



The team at Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust with Ruvimbo Kaviya

I agreed because the pain was just too much. I didn't even think about it being the first time, all I needed was for it to be removed

RUVIMBO KAVIYA

involved.

"It was the first time they were doing the procedure. I had no option but to agree because the pain was just too much - I didn't even think about it being the first time, all I needed was for it to be removed."

The operation, performed by a team at the Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust, is the first of its kind in the UK. It was carried out in February last year,

took just three hours, and Kaviya was up and walking later the same day.

Neurosurgeon Asim Sheikh said advancements in technology meant tumours like those suffered by Kaviya were now less risky to treat. He said, "It's a hard-to-reach area, and this allows a direct access without any compromise of pressure on the brain. So, it just reaches us in areas which were once thought to be inoperable, but now are accessible."

Biomedical engineer Lisa Ferrie, head of the 3D planning service at the trust, made a model of the patient's skull so the surgical team could rehearse the operation before they did it.

She said, "This technology enabled the team to study her anatomy in detail and prepare for the procedure with unparalleled accuracy. Seeing the model and knowing it contributed to this ground-breaking surgery is incredibly rewarding."

Kaviya was left with a tiny scar near her left eye, but was back at work caring for stroke patients three months after the surgery.

She said, "When I had the operation I thought I was possibly going to stay in the hospital for weeks or months, but I was home in days. I had double vision for about three months but everything else was OK."

Courtesy: bbc.com

Surgery to remove an orbital tumour is complex due to its delicate location and should only be performed by highly trained neurosurgical teams with experience in the procedure. The goals of the surgery are:

- To prevent a tumour from progressing
- To preserve vision, and preserve the eye
- To alleviate the symptoms of an orbital tumour and restore the patient to good health

In some cases, the only way to remove the tumour and protect the patient's life is to perform an enucleation, or removal of the eye. Fortunately, this can often be avoided when surgery to remove the tumour is performed by a highly skilled team that includes a neurosurgeon, a plastic surgeon, and an ophthalmic surgeon. When enucleation is required, a prosthetic eye can be attached to the muscles so that it moves in synch with the remaining eye, for good cosmetic results.

SURGERY FOR ORBITAL TUMOURS



Surgical approach to an orbital tumour

One of the difficulties in surgery for an orbital tumour is determining the approach, or the path the surgeon or surgeons will take to reach the tumor. (In major medical centers, the surgery is

often performed by both a neurosurgeon and ophthalmologic or oculoplastic surgeon working together.) Depending on the location and nature of the tumour, the surgeons may be able to approach from the side (laterally), or from above or below the eye

(with incisions along the eyebrow or eyelid).

Transorbital surgery (Through the eye socket)

Transorbital surgery is performed by oculoplastic surgeons and neurosurgeons working together. Transorbital surgery can address brain tumors that are behind the eyes or in the skull base near the sinuses. The surgeons work as a team and can go around the eye ball to gain access to the tumor. They may use an endoscope to help provide the best view of the tumor.

This procedure is typically performed through an incision in an eyelid crease, which heals very well. It can prevent the need for very long incisions behind the hairline that would be needed to reach the same place.

Tumour removal and skull reconstruction

Surgery to remove an orbital tumour may last between four and eight hours, depending on the size and complexity of the lesion. Reconstruction of the skull and/or orbit (eye socket) may be required as part of the treatment. Additionally, acquired defects caused by trauma or benign lesions such as Graves' disease and Paget's disease may also require reconstructive treatment. Although the patient's own body tissue is usually best in any reconstruction, advances in bone and surgical technology have yielded new and exciting materials that may serve as a substitute when needed. These advances include titanium plates and screws, hydroxyapatite cement, porous polyethylene, and resorbable fixation devices.

Recovery

Patients are usually hospitalised for two to seven days, and recovery time can be from two to six weeks.

Courtesy: weillcornell.com

LIFESTYLE CHANGES

Are you a biohacker?

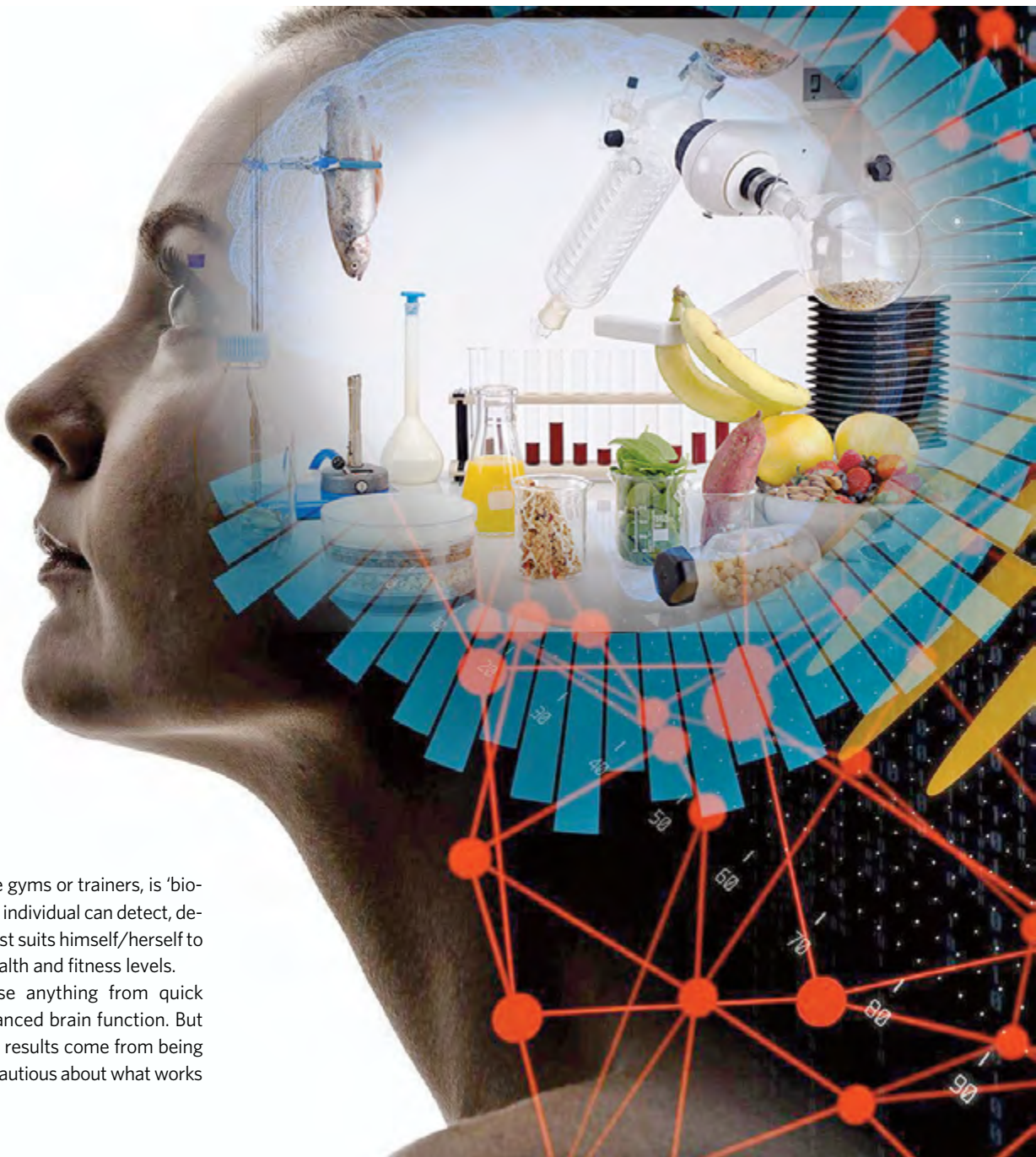
‘Biohacking’ can be described as do-it-yourself biology. It consists of making small, incremental diet or lifestyle changes to make small improvements in your overall health and well-being

While people around the world are seeking newer and easier ways of staying fit, albeit while following a high-pressure, modern lifestyle where there’s little or no room for fitness, the younger generation prefer quick, measurable solutions against painstaking sessions at the gym.

One such solution, sans intervention from

external entities like gyms or trainers, is ‘biohacking’ wherein an individual can detect, design and do what best suits himself/herself to enhance his/her health and fitness levels.

Biohacks promise anything from quick weight loss to enhanced brain function. But the best biohacking results come from being well-informed and cautious about what works best for your body.



THREE TYPES OF BIOHACKING

Biohacking comes in many forms. The three most popular types are nutrigenomics, DIY biology, and grinder

Nutrigenomics

Nutrigenomics focuses on how the food you eat interacts with your genes.

This popular, although controversial, type of biohacking is founded on the idea that your body’s total genetic expression can be mapped out and optimised by testing how different nutrients affect your health over time.

Nutrigenomics also looks at how different nutrients affect how you feel, think, and behave.

DIY biology

DIY biology (or DIY bio) is a type of biohacking spearheaded by people with education and experience in scientific fields.

These biohackers share tips and techniques to help non-experts conduct structured experiments on themselves outside of a controlled experimental environment, like labs or medical offices.

Grinder

Grinder is a biohacking subculture that sees every part of the human body as hackable.

In general, grinders seek to become ‘cyborgs’ by optimising their bodies with a combination of gadgets, chemical injections, implants, and anything else they can put into their body to make it work the way they want it to.

4 EASY WAYS OF BIOHACKING

HERE ARE SOME RELATIVELY SAFE BIOHACKS YOU CAN TRY AT HOME

Drink caffeine

Caffeine is well-known as a productivity booster. If you don’t use it already, start with an 8-ounce serving of black coffee, green tea, or caffeinated foods like dark chocolate.

Have your caffeine at the same time every day and keep a journal of how it makes you feel in the minutes or hours afterward. Try tweaking the dose until you find the amount that works best for your goal.

Elimination diet

An elimination diet is exactly what it sounds like. With an elimination diet, you’ll get rid of something from your diet and then slowly re-introduce it to see how it affects your body. This is a popular option if you think you’re allergic to a food or are concerned that a food may be causing inflammation, such as dairy, red meat, or processed sugar.

You can remove one or more foods from your diet completely or eliminate them, then wait about two weeks, and reintroduce the eliminated foods to evaluate pros and cons.

Blue light for a mood boost

Blue light from the sun can help you boost your mood or enhance your cognitive performance. Get a few extra hours of sunlight each day (about 3-6 hours, or whatever’s realistic for you), and see if you notice any changes. But keep in mind that sunlight contains the same blue light that’s emitted from phone and computer screens. Also, remember to wear sunscreen with an SPF of 15 or higher when out in the sun.

Intermittent fasting

Intermittent fasting is a type of dieting method that involves only eating between certain times, then fasting for an extended period until the next designated time to eat.

For example, you may only eat during an eight-hour period from noon to 8pm, then fast from 8pm until noon the next day. Fasting in this way has several proven benefits - lowering insulin levels, helping your cells repair any damaged tissue, protecting you from diseases like cancer, etc.

Courtesy: healthline.com

NUTRITION

Foods that lower cholesterol

The food you consumer can lower ‘bad’cholesterol levels in different ways, from dragging it out of your system to blocking absorption

Changing what food you eat can lower your cholesterol and improve the armada of fats floating through your bloodstream. Adding foods that lower LDL - the harmful cholesterol-carrying particle that contributes to artery-clogging atherosclerosis - is the best way to achieve a low cholesterol diet.

Different foods lower cholesterol in various ways. Some deliver soluble fiber, which binds cholesterol and its precursors in the digestive system and drags them out of the body before they get into circulation. Some give you polyunsaturated fats, which directly lower LDL. And some contain plant sterols and stanols, which block the body from absorbing cholesterol. Here are ten foods that help lower cholesterol levels:

Oats

1 An easy first step to lowering your cholesterol is having a bowl of oatmeal or cold oat-based cereal like Cheerios for breakfast. It gives you 1 to 2 grams of soluble fiber. Add a ba-

nana or some strawberries for another half-gram. Current nutrition guidelines recommend getting 20g to 35g of fibre a day, with at least 5g to 10g coming from soluble fibre.

Barley and grains

2 Like oats and oat bran, barley and other whole grains can help lower the risk of heart disease, mainly via the soluble fiber they deliver.

Beans

3 Beans are especially rich in soluble fiber. They also take a while for the body to digest, meaning you feel full for longer after a meal. That’s one reason beans are a useful food for folks trying to lose weight. With so many choices — from navy and kidney beans to lentils, garbanzos, black-eyed peas, and beyond — and so many ways to prepare them, beans are a very versatile food.

Eggplant and okra

4 These two low-calorie vegetables are good sources of soluble fibre.

Nuts

5 A bushel of studies shows that eating almonds, walnuts, peanuts, and other nuts is good for the heart. Eating 2 ounces of nuts a day can slightly lower LDL, on the order of 5%. Nuts have additional nutrients that protect the heart in other ways.

Vegetable oils

6 Using liquid vegetable oils such as canola, sunflower, safflower, and others in place of butter, lard, or shortening when cooking or at the table helps lower LDL.

Citrus fruits

7 Apples, grapes, strawberries, other citrus fruits are rich in pectin, a type of soluble fibre that lowers LDL.

Sterols and stanols

8 Sterols and stanols extracted from plants gum up the body’s ability to absorb cholesterol from food. Companies are fortifying foods ranging from margarine and granola bars to orange juice and chocolate with these. They’re also available as supplements.

Getting 2g of plant sterols or stanols a day can lower LDL cholesterol by about 10%.

Soy

9 Eating soybeans and foods made from them, like tofu and soy milk, was once touted as a powerful way to lower cholesterol. Analyses show that the effect is more modest — consuming 25g of soy protein a day (10 ounces of tofu or 2 1/2 cups of soy milk) can lower LDL by 5% to 6%.

Fatty fish

10 Eating fish two or three times a week can lower LDL in two ways - by replacing meat, which has LDL-boosting saturated fats, and by delivering LDL-lowering omega-3 fats. Omega-3s reduce triglycerides in the bloodstream and also protect the heart by helping prevent the onset of abnormal heart rhythms.

Courtesy: health.harvard.edu.com