



PRINCE WILLIAM RECEIVES SAYYID THEYAZIN

Prince William of Wales received H H Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said in Windsor Castle on Friday. The meeting reviewed friendship and cooperation between the Sultanate of Oman and the United Kingdom, besides looking at means of promoting these in different areas to serve the joint interests. The two sides also discussed various aspects of mutual interest (ONA)

Hidden trade impacting Oman's economy badly

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Omani economy is grappling with the repercussions of expatriate workers violating labour laws, with the Ministry of Labour (MoL) pinpointing it as a root cause of the increasing hidden trade phenomenon.

Within the first half of 2023, 5,724 expatriates have been arrested for violation of labour laws, with 3,887 of them subsequently deported.

Hidden trade by unauthorised expatriates leads to commercial fraud, tax evasion, and evasion of standardised procedures.

It creates an unfair playing field, fostering distrust and harming the nation's economic progression, according to a senior MoL official.

Hussain bin Ali bin Baqir al Lawati, assistant general manager at the Directorate General of Labour Care for Administrative and Financial Affairs, in MoL, shared with Muscat Daily the scenario that confirms "labour law breaches result in various detrimental consequences ranging from hidden trade to negative societal impacts and hindrance to the country's economic growth".

"Many Omanis hesitate to



venture into businesses, fearing they won't be able to compete with expatriates," Lawati added, while voicing concerns over the effect of those violations on potential Omani entrepreneurs.

Addressing remedial measures, he stated that the ministry imposes stringent penalties on violators.

"We deport them and bar

Many Omanis hesitate to venture into businesses, fearing they won't be able to compete with expatriates

HUSSAIN AL LAWATI

them from re-entry. Moreover, establishments violating the law are suspended from recruiting non-Omani personnel."

Lawati also underlined the ministry's practice of "intensively coordinating with relevant authorities to ensure labour law adherence, and streamlining of the job market with reduction in the rate of violations".

The ministry is also toughening its monitoring practices with intensified inspection drives, and strict legal actions against offenders.

"Every report and grievance from citizens and employers are treated with utmost seriousness. We ensure timely wage transfers to banks and have bolstered the penalties for law breaches," he asserted.

Lawati added that the ministry expects the employers to supervise their employees rigorously, remit wages punctually to local banks, and to ensure expatriates work as per their permits.

He also urged citizens to steer clear of non-compliant expatriate workers, cautioning that engaging with them could invite legal consequences.

GERMANY'S PRESIDENT TO VISIT OMAN

Muscat - Frank-Walter Steinmeier, President of the Federal Republic of Germany, will arrive in Oman for a three-day visit from Monday.

This was announced in a statement issued by the Diwan of Royal Court on Saturday, reading as 'In reiteration of the Royal keenness attached by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to hold meetings with world leaders to discuss regional situations and finding ways that maintain global peace and harmony, President Dr Frank-Walter Steinmeier of the Federal Republic of Germany will pay an official visit to the Sultanate of Oman with effect from Monday till Wednesday. This visit will give an opportunity to discuss matters of common interest between the two friendly countries in a way that contributes to achieving their interests and aspirations, and consult on current regional issues.'

Qatar and Egypt optimist about Israel-Hamas ceasefire extension

Cairo, Egypt - Qatar's foreign ministry spokesperson Majed al Ansari has said that he hoped the truce deal between Israel and Hamas would be extended. Egypt also said it received 'positive signals' over possible extension of Gaza truce.

"We are hoping that this will help us build momentum so we can reach a more robust deal regarding a sustainable truce, however it's a long and difficult road ahead," Ansari told France 24, as Israel and Hamas prepared to release 42 prisoners and 14 hostages on the second day of the four-day ceasefire on Saturday.

"Hopefully by the end of four days, we'll have a second agreement that will help us to extend the pause that is in effect right now," he added.

Diaa Rashwan, the head of Egypt's State Information Service (SIS), said in a statement that the country was holding extensive talks with all parties to reach an agreement over extending the four-day truce, which "means



A man serves drinking water to people caught in war, in the Gaza Strip (UNRWA)

the release of more detainees in Gaza and Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails".

Israeli prison authorities said 42 prisoners - both male and female - would be freed under the terms of the agreement, which mandates exchanges at a ratio of three to one. An Israeli official source said 14 hostages would be released, according to AFP.

But the armed wing of Hamas

was not impressed. Hamas said on Saturday that it was postponing the release of a second group of hostages until Israel 'adheres to the terms of the (truce) agreement', which it said includes the entry of humanitarian aid into northern Gaza.

On Friday, 137 trucks of goods were allowed in Gaza, making it the biggest humanitarian convoy received since October 7.

In Khan Yunis in southern Gaza, people waited in a long queue outside a filling station, hoping to get some of the newly delivered fuel. The United Nations earlier said the truce enabled it to scale up the delivery of food, water, and medicine to the largest volume since the resumption of humanitarian aid convoys into Gaza on October 21.

Agencies

Indian charged with murder of Omani family to be extradited

New Delhi, India - A high court in India has upheld the decision of the federal government to extradite an Indian citizen, accused of killing five of a family in Oman.

The Delhi High Court on Friday upheld the Indian government's decision to send back Majibullah Mohammad Haneef, charged with the murder of an Omani family, including three children, to the sultanate.

According to Indian media reports, the court dismissed the petition of the accused challenging a trial court order recommending his extradition to Oman for facing trial on murder charges.

In July 2019, an Omani national, along with his wife and three minors, was found dead at home. According to reports, Haneef, the main accused, left Oman soon after and was arrested in his home country in September that year along with three other accomplices.

The offence has been termed as premeditated murder punishable under Article 302A of the

Penal Code of Oman.

Haneef's extradition was recommended by the trial court following an inquiry prompted by a request from the federal government.

The high court upheld the decision, citing murder as an extraditable offence under the Extradition Treaty between India and Oman, media reports stated.

Addressing concerns about a fair trial, India engaged with Oman, seeking assurances regarding Haneef's fair trial, free legal aid, and the services of an interpreter.

Oman assured India that Haneef would have a fair and just trial, legal representation, and an interpreter during the investigation and trial. Legal provisions in Oman related to the death penalty, commutation, and pardon were also clarified.

Justice Amit Bansal affirmed the trial court's observation in the inquiry report, stating that all requirements for extraditing Haneef were satisfied.

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Art exhibition Oman Vista is open at Art & Soul Gallery

Omani student's groundbreaking research gets top MENA prize

Our Correspondent
Muscat

A medical student from Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) has brought laurels to Oman by earning accolades at the recently held endocrinology conference in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region.

Jihad Said Khalfan al Wardi clinched the first prize at the American Association for Clinical Endocrinology (AACE) conference, held in Dubai, the UAE, from November 17 to 19.

In a conversation with Muscat



Jihad Said Khalfan al Wardi clinched the first prize at the American Association for Clinical Endocrinology (AACE) conference, in Dubai

Daily, Jihad acknowledged the contribution of her supervisor who encouraged her to take part in this distinguished event.

"I am grateful to my research supervisor, Dr Abdullah al Futaisi, and my family for their unwavering support," she said after receiving the award.

The conference is a renowned forum for experts in endocrinology, including leading practitioners, scientists, and researchers.

"My project stood out among over a hundred research projects to win the first prize," the winner noted.

Jihad's research, titled 'Study on the Development of Cancer in Hyperthyroid Patients Treated with Radioactive Iodine at Sultan Qaboos University Hospital', explores a critical health issue. "Treating hyperthyroidism with radioactive iodine is common, but it raises concerns about potential cancer risks. Given the lack of studies in Oman on this topic, we initiated this research to assess the cancer risk in patients undergoing radioactive iodine treatment."

Hyperthyroidism is a serious condition that is referred to over-

active thyroid gland producing excess thyroid hormone.

Jihad revealed that her study, involving more than 800 Omani patients across various governorates treated with single or double doses, found no link between radioactive iodine therapy and cancer development.

She is of the view that her research would contribute to global scientific knowledge, particularly in ensuring the safety of radiotherapy, and boost the confidence of Omani patients undergoing such treatments for hyperthyroidism.

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HOLIDAY SPURS LOCAL TOURISM

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The four-day National Day holiday proved to be a significant boon for local tourism, with major tourist hotspots across the country experiencing a surge in visitors.

Dakhliyah governorate particularly emerged as a popular destination, attracting a large number of tourists to its varied landmarks such as the historic Nizwa Fort, the Oman Across the Ages Museum in the wilayat of Manah, the picturesque Misfat al Arbiyen, Bahla Fort, and the captivating Hoota caves.

The Oman Across the Ages Museum notably received more than 23,700 visitors during the holiday.

Muzna bint Sulaiman al Hosaniyah, the museum's media administrator, spoke about the museum's preparedness for the influx of visitors, including extended visiting hours and increased staffing. Efforts were made to enhance the visitors' experience at the museum's exhibition hall and other facilities.

The museum is planning to streamline ticket booking through new electronic services, Muzna informed.

North Sharqiyah also witnessed an influx of tourists, with visitors enjoying the popular sand dunes and Wadi Bani Khalid. The region's desert areas, particularly in the wilayat of Bidiya, hosted a variety of activities such as Arabian horse race, camel Ardah race, and sand activities viz. group camping, sand biking, paragliding, sand skiing, and sports car races, alongside camel riding, and balloon riding experiences.

Wadi Bani Khalid attracted 12,774 visitors to its famed water ponds.

In addition to these destinations, pleasant winter temperatures in Muscat brought the city's parks and beaches to life with families and children enjoying the outdoors.

The city's parks were buzzing with activity, while the beaches saw people enjoying the evening breeze.

The holiday not only provided a much-needed break for residents but also significantly boosted Oman's local tourism industry.



Photos: V K Shafeer

FORESIGHT



SYED ADIL ABBAS

Abbas, an MBA graduate from Cardiff Metropolitan University (UK), is currently based in Muscat, and has over 20 years of international experience working with the public and private sectors in the Middle East, Far East, Africa and India

In a recent milestone, India's Chandrayaan-3 successfully touched down on the Moon's surface on August 23, 2023, making India the fourth country globally to achieve this feat and the first one to land near the Moon's challenging south pole. What makes this achievement even more remarkable is the exceptionally low budget of approximately RO29 million, equivalent to a mere 0.09% of Oman's GDP, setting a new standard for cost-effective space exploration.

At the heart of India's success lies the principle of *Jugaad*, a Hindi term encapsulating the ability to find innovative solutions with limited resources. This cost-conscious approach, evident in India's space endeavours, can serve as a guiding light for Oman as it embarks on its space exploration journey.

Key to India's triumph in Chandrayaan-3 was its commitment to simplicity and cost-effectiveness. The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) streamlined its mission by minimising prototypes without compromising objectives, utilising locally produced components, and reducing dependence on imports. Onboard equipment, including an altimeter, cameras and sensors, were all developed in-house at ISRO, showcasing the value of self-reliance.

A noteworthy aspect of India's approach was the strategic collaboration between the government and the private

sector through the Indian National Space Promotion and Authorisation Centre (IN-SPACe). ISRO's partnership with private entities allowed the leveraging of external expertise and resources, fostering innovation and significantly reducing the financial burden on the government. Oman could emulate this collaborative model, tapping into the potential of its private sector for its space aspirations.

India's emphasis on research and development played a pivotal role in Chandrayaan-3's success. Oman has an opportunity to replicate this by investing in its scientific community and educational institutions, cultivating a culture of innovation and space exploration expertise.

COST-EFFECTIVE SPACE ODYSSEY

International collaboration emerged as a crucial factor in Chandrayaan-3's triumph. Oman can strategically forge partnerships with established space-faring nations, sharing resources and expertise to enhance the success of its space programme. Such collaborations can facilitate knowledge exchange and contribute to Oman's emergence as a key player in space exploration.

Sustainability was a key consideration for India, evident in the incorporation of reusable technology in lunar exploration. Oman can adopt a similar eco-conscious

approach, exploring ways to minimise environmental impact and optimise resource utilisation in its missions.

Oman can take inspiration from ISRO's approach to diversify its income streams, including the sale of satellite data and services through its commercial arm, Antrix, thereby creating a substantial revenue stream. Moreover, ISRO boosts its income by launching satellites and payloads for partner countries.

Jugaad is not a substitute for more traditional approaches to innovation and has its limitations, especially in relation to international standards and security.

The concept must be seen as a complementary tool in the innovation toolkit, which can complement traditional innovation by optimising resource use, focusing on faster implementation, and inspiring creative and sustainable solutions with users at the centre.

India's success story offers valuable insights for Oman's nascent space programme, exemplified by the successful launch of the Aman-1 satellite on November 11, 2023.

By studying and implementing the best practices from India's Chandrayaan mission, Oman has the potential to carve its niche in the field of space exploration and inspire a new era of scientific achievement bringing the Sultanate a step closer to realising the goals outlined in Oman Vision 2040.

Revenues of star hotels rise to RO168mn, post 27.8% jump

Muscat - Revenues of star hotels in Oman showed a significant jump during the ten months of 2023 compared to the same period last year.

The revenues of 3- to 5-star hotels in Oman jumped 27.8% to RO168.328mn till October this year when compared to the figures achieved in the same period last year, the latest data released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) stated.

The average occupancy rate in these hotels was 53.7% in October, an increase of 9.9% compared to October 2022.

The data showed that 2.9mn people visited Oman until the end of September 2023 and 6.2mn departed from Oman during the same period.

According to Fitch Solutions Company's BMI's analysis, Oman will touch the 3.5mn mark for international tourists visiting the sultanate till the end of this year. This is a sharp 20.8% increase from 2022.

Going by the current trend, the average annual tourist inflow for the period of 2023 to 2027 is expected to grow by 7.4%.

This growth is attributed to both leisure and commercial tourism, boosted by high oil prices that stimulate domestic investments.

The report suggests that the Middle East will be the primary source of tourists for Oman in 2023, with 1.5mn visitors expected from the region.

According to the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), Oman was among the top 20 best performing destinations in the world for tourist arrivals between January and July 2023.

The sultanate ranked 18th in the world (% change against 2019) for the first seven months of 2023.

"According to data from UNWTO, Oman is among the best performing countries in terms of the number of tourists during the first half of this year. Existing and upcoming promotion plans promise record results," H E Salim bin Mohammed al Mahrouqi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism, recently posted on 'X'.

Frankincense season in Dhofar from Dec 2

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MHT) has announced a special event to mark the frankincense season in Dhofar governorate from December 2.

The eight-day long event will open in the Land of Frankincense sites in Al Baleed Archaeological Park, Samhram Archaeological Park, and Wadi Doka Nature Reserve, the ministry said.

The programme will include a presentation on how frankincense products and extracts were manufactured in the ancient times. The event will also throw light on its export in the



ancient times by caravans through Dhofar.

According to MHT, the event will promote the historical features of the sites in the Land of Frankincense and their roles in facilitating cultural and commercial exchanges with various civil-

isations of the world in the past, besides highlighting the importance of the Land of Frankincense in attracting tourists from different parts of the world.

The Land of Frankincense is the Unesco World Heritage site. According to the ministry statistics, 27,962 people visited Al Baleed Archaeological Park and the Museum of Frankincense Land; 12,916 visited the Samahram archaeological site; and 2,296 went to the Ubar archaeological site in Shisr in 2021.

The Al Baleed Archaeological Park, Samahram, Shisr and Wadi Doka are included in the World Heritage List under the name Land of Frankincense sites.

N Batinah sees RO14mn development drive

Our Correspondent
Muscat

North Batinah governorate is set to invest around RO14mn over the next three years in a series of urban renewal and development projects.

These projects have been taken up to further improve its city life through developments of waterfronts, parks and gardens; besides improvements of the entrances to various wilayats, beautification of wadi banks and establishment of sports pathways and tourism infrastructure.

The initiative also involves investments in truck stops, officials from the governorate said.

Efforts are underway to identify current and future investment opportunities in different sectors such as industrial, logistics, real estate, tourism, and entertainment.

North Batinah's strategic location along the Sea of Oman and its significant population make it a key area in Oman's overall development process.

Mohammed bin Suleiman al Kindi, Governor of North Batinah, said, "In line with Oman Vision 2040, we aim to transform the governorate into a hub for economic prosperity and sustainable development."

He emphasised the importance of collaborative efforts to achieve economic growth while preserving the natural environment and societal values, in alignment with the vision of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik.



We aim to transform the governorate into a hub for economic prosperity and sustainable development

MUHAMMAD AL KINDI

Kindi also highlighted North Batinah's potential as an international trade centre and its role in fostering value-added economic activities, using its natural resources.

Sohar city, in particular, is poised to play a crucial role in enhancing trade and accessing global markets, while Suwaiq is set to become a regional economic centre for the food and agricultural products industry, he informed.

Several development projects are already underway in North Batinah. In Shinas, the city centre is being redeveloped, and a coastal tourism project has been planned, focusing on environmental tourism around mangrove trees.

Liwa's Al Tayeb city project in-



volves constructing a 5km park for a sustainable lifestyle with various activities.

In Sohar, projects are focused on ecological development and enhancing commercial efficiency in the market area.

Saham Public Park is also being redeveloped to cater to diverse societal needs.

The governorate is also focusing on social responsibility projects, with the Jusoor Foundation signing agreements worth RO3.26mn for the establishment of a dialysis unit, parks, and a common market for fish, vegetables, and fruits.

In the education sector, North Batinah is going to get six new schools at a total investment of RO11.3mn.

These under-construction schools are coming up with modern facilities suitable for the new-generation education.

The health sector is not left behind in this mission, with the Suwaiq Hospital project nearing completion and the expansion of the Sohar Reference Hospital, increasing its capacity significantly. Developments in the ports of Shinas and Al Suwaiq are bolstering trade movement in the region.

A strategic railway network project linking Oman and the United Arab Emirates is also underway, expected to be completed by 2027.

This project will facilitate safe and efficient transport of passengers and goods, further enhancing North Batinah's position as a pivotal area in Oman's developmental landscape.

North Sharqiyah to set up model grape farm

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources is set to revolutionise agricultural practices in North Sharqiyah by establishing a huge model farm for grape cultivation.

Eng Salim bin Saud al Kindi, Director General of Agricultural and Water Resources in North Sharqiyah governorate, announced the ministry's plan to create a 100-acre (over 40 hectares) model farm dedicated to grapes. This initiative, funded by the Oman India Fertiliser Company (OMIFCO) and the Agricultural Development Fund at a cost of RO200,000, aims to



It seeks to diminish the reliance on agricultural imports and contribute to the national income

ENG SALIM AL KINDI

diversify crop production and bolster support for local farmers.

The project is designed not only to create job opportunities for farmers and rural workers but also to amplify investments in grape cultivation, thereby enhancing food security.

"It seeks to diminish the reliance on agricultural imports and

contribute to the national income. Specialised farmers will manage these fields, employing modern cultivation and production techniques," said Kindi.

Detailing the project's phases, Kindi mentioned that the initial stage involves drilling an exploratory well to assess water availability, preparing the site,

and conducting soil analyses.

The site will be announced on the Tatwair platform for selecting project beneficiaries.

The subsequent phase will include setting up of farm infrastructure such as fencing, electricity supply, wells, water tanks, and irrigation systems.

The final stage will see the in-

stallation of grape trellis systems, selection and propagation of grape varieties, and providing on-the-job training in agriculture, and grape handling.

Kindi also highlighted that the ministry plans to develop a marketing guidance programme to enhance grape production and packaging. "This will include provision of containers and cartons for marketing and organisation of a grape festival, in collaboration with the Office of the Governor of North Sharqiyah."

This initiative is a strategic step towards strengthening the governorate's agricultural sector, showcasing the potential for sustainable and lucrative crop cultivation.



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ASMED to hold summit to boost entrepreneurial ecosystem, startups

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises Development (ASMED) is organising a national level summit on investments and startup ventures at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre, in Muscat from December 4.

The Investment and Startup Summit is part of the Rising Omani Startups Programme, an initiative designed to bolster the growth of Omani startups. This gathering marks a significant effort to cultivate a startup culture in Oman, particularly in the realms of innovation and technology, the organisers asserted.

"We are expecting over 2,000 participants and 50 startup owners to attend the event," ASMED said in a statement.

A key focus of the summit is to create financing opportunities for startups in the sultanate. Additionally, the event will serve as a platform to identify the chal-

lenges and opportunities that entrepreneurs encounter in general, ASMED added.

ASMED's attempt is to foster collaboration and knowledge sharing among participants, showcasing the achievements of promising Omani startups.

The summit will engage in discussions about investments in startups and is expected to witness signing of several agreements.

Apart from discussions and deliberations, the summit will also have exhibitions and workshops for startups, decision-makers, and other stakeholders.

The event targets a diverse audience, including university and college students, experts, academics, representatives from government and private entities, investors, and entrepreneurs.

This initiative reflects Oman's commitment to enhancing its entrepreneurial landscape and supporting the growth and development of small and medium enterprises in the region.

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RO37mn animal feed factory to be established at Khazaen

Our Correspondent
Muscat

In line with Oman's efforts to enhance the country's food security, Omani Bioproducts Company is planning to establish a factory for the production of animal feed and aquatic organisms at the Khazaen Economic City.

The animal feed factory will be established in three phases with an estimated investment cost of RO37mn, according to an Oman News Agency report.

The tender for the construction of the factory was issued in June, and it is expected that the construction work for the project will be awarded before the end of 2023. Nine local companies are bidding for the construction tender.

The project aims to benefit from agricultural and biological by-products, transform them into specialised value-added products, and recycle date by-products, which include date kernels, pulp, and palm fronds.

The animal feed factory project at the Khazaen Economic City will produce about 100,000 tonnes annually of alternative grass feed made from agricultural residues enriched with dates, and about 300,000 tonnes annually of marine animal



An artistic impression of the proposed animal feed production facility in Khazaen Econoic City (ONA)

Animal feed factory will produce about 100,000 tonnes annually of alternative grass feed made from agricultural residues enriched with dates, and about 300,000 tonnes annually of marine animal feed for shrimp and cage-cultured fish

feed for shrimp and cage-cultured fish.

The project will use locally available raw materials to cover the needs of newly established food security projects in the field of red meat, dairy products, aquaculture, and marine agricul-

ture, in addition to serving the export market.

Haitham al Saadi, Vice Chairman of the Board of Directors of Omani Bioproducts Company, said that the project comes within the framework of the company's endeavour to contribute to

achieving the goals of the Oman Vision 2040 by employing the concepts of the circular and bio-economy and taking advantage of the raw materials available in the local environment and using them to produce a group of products such as animal feed, aquatic organisms, and their raw materials in an economical, sustainable, and environmentally friendly manner.

Omani Bioproducts Company was established in partnership between the Nakheel Oman Development Company and Omani Mills Group, which are affiliated with the Oman Food Investment Holding Company. It is a model of

joint work between companies owned by the Oman Investment Authority.

Nakheel is currently developing a state-of-the-art industrial complex in Nizwa which will be able to handle 30,000 tonnes of Omani finest dates in phase one, making it one of the largest dates processing facilities in the world.

Nakheel has adopted a circular economy business model that is committed to sustainable development through utilising the products and by-products of the date palm tree. The company identified the opportunity to establish an animal feed mill facility.



Oman LNG signs 9-year gas supply deal with BP

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman LNG recently announced the signing of a sale and purchase agreement (SPA) to deliver a total of 1mn metric tonnes per annum (MTPA) of LNG to global energy giant BP.

The agreement strengthens the robust relationship between Oman LNG and BP, with which Oman LNG has previously signed sale and purchase agreements to supply reliable energy from the sultanate.

Spanning over nine years, the agreement between Oman LNG and BP is free-on-board (FOB) and starts in 2026, Oman LNG said in a statement to Oman News Agency.

Hamed al Naamany, CEO of Oman LNG said, "The sale and purchase agreement with BP un-

locks new opportunities to leverage Oman's presence in the global energy trade. The expected revenues will not only support the national economy but also support other the energy transition, pragmatically."

Oman LNG noted that such agreements sustain Oman's position as a reliable supplier of clean energy worldwide while contributing to the sultanate's GDP. The company added that it is in a shape shifting position that sustains energy systems, fosters growth, and secures its position as a reliable energy supplier.

The agreement's terms are strengthened by Oman LNG's worldwide reputation as a reliable and trusted LNG supplier, where it intends that LNG contributes to global energy security and adds value to the local economy.



Oil prices rise last week on positive demand outlook

Muscat - Oil prices increased last week, backed by an optimistic global demand outlook and an economic recovery in the world's biggest oil importer, China.

International benchmark Brent crude traded at \$81.65 per barrel in London on Friday, rising by about 1.3% relative to the closing price of \$80.61 a barrel on Friday last week.

West Texas Intermediate (WTI), the US benchmark, traded at \$76.73 a barrel at the same time on Friday, with an increase of around 1.10% from last Friday's session that closed at \$75.89 per barrel.

Both benchmarks traded high on Monday, with buoyant oil prices ahead of the much-expected OPEC+ meeting over expectations that the group will continue its current output cuts through January.

Market players expect OPEC's largest producer, Saudi Arabia, to extend its production cuts of 1mn barrels per day (bpd) for at least another month.

Positive economic activity in the world's second-largest oil consumer, China, also aided price rises during the week. Recent data revealed that the Chinese economy has recovered

from the wounds of the COVID pandemic.

The OPEC group also said in its latest monthly report that global demand is expected to increase in 2024 with solid economic growth in China, resulting in greater demand and further oil consumption.

Prices declined mid-week with uncertainties over a delay to the OPEC+ meeting. Major oil producers at the meeting are expected to decide whether to continue, reduce, or increase the current output cuts, accelerating market volatility.

The group announced late Wednesday that the meeting slated for Sunday will be postponed to Thursday, November 30. Prices continued to fall through Thursday, with data indicating a demand decline in the US, the world's largest oil consumer.

US crude oil inventories increased by around 8.7mn barrels last week, according to the US Energy Information Administration late on Wednesday, against the market expectation of a 1.46mn-barrel inventory build.

Overall, supply uncertainty in the market limited price increases week on week.

Agencies

Saudi's decision at OPEC+ meeting will set direction for oil prices: Experts

Istanbul, Turkey - If Saudi Arabia imposes another output cap during the OPEC+ meeting later this week, it will have an immediate impact on prices while also significantly reducing the kingdom's overall market share, according to sector experts.

The producers of the 23-member OPEC+ group, led by Saudi Arabia and Russia, will convene for a full ministerial conference on November 30 in Vienna to review market conditions and decide on their production policy for the year ahead.

During the meeting, Saudi Arabia is expected to be confronted with the most frequently asked question: whether the kingdom will continue the additional production cut of 1mn barrels per day (bpd), which it has been voluntarily implementing since July.

Balanced market in 2024

While OPEC+ producing countries assert that they set output limits to establish market equilibrium, supply curbs also seek to maintain oil prices at a predetermined baseline, protecting these



nations' oil-related revenue.

Oil prices plummeted to their lowest levels in four months last week due to sluggish demand and persistent oversupply fears. WTI crude oil prices fell to \$72.11, while Brent crude oil prices fell to \$76.60 a barrel.

According to the International Energy Agency's latest oil market report, global oil demand is expected to reach an average of 101.5mn bpd in the first quarter of next year. Over the same pe-

riod, global oil supply is predicted to reach 102.8mn bpd on average, based on the current OPEC+ agreement. This represents a surplus of approximately 1.3mn bpd despite production cuts.

The report estimates that demand for the entire year 2024 will be 102.9mn bpd, and supply will hit 103.4mn bpd. It also predicts that excess supply will gradually decrease in the second and third quarters and that supply will lag slightly behind de-

mand in the last quarter. Thus, an average daily surplus of 500,000 barrels is anticipated for the upcoming year.

According to OPEC's monthly oil market report released earlier in November, global oil demand is estimated to be 103.6mn bpd in the first quarter of next year. The same report estimated that global oil supply for October amounts to 101.6mn bpd.

According to independent research company Rystad Energy,

if Saudi voluntary cuts are not extended into 2024, an increase in supply in the first quarter of next year is expected with balanced markets.

In the second quarter of 2024, though, a looming market supply surplus of over 600,000 bpd will be in sight.

The agency reported that the markets would be fairly balanced next year compared to the significant supply deficit of 1.2mn bpd in 2023.

Rystad Energy's Senior Vice President Jorge Leon said the markets will be eagerly awaiting the OPEC+ meeting on Sunday in anticipation of what Saudi Arabia decides over its voluntary crude oil production cuts of 1 million bpd in place since July.

"Regardless of the path they take, Saudi Arabia's decision on the production cuts will ultimately shape the short-term future of global oil prices," Leon said, stressing that the kingdom is also balancing the desire to keep prices high by limiting supply with the knowledge that suppressed supply will lead to a further drop in overall market share.

Anadolu Agency

MENA tourism likely to take hit from Gaza war: S&P

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The human tragedy unfolding in Gaza and Israel could have widespread implications for the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. An escalation could open up additional fronts in the region, S&P Global Ratings said.

In a report titled 'MENA Tourism Likely To Take A Hit From Israel-Hamas War', S&P Global Ratings said that, when

looking solely at the impact on tourism, it believes Lebanon, Egypt, and Jordan are most exposed, due to their geographic proximity and the potential for some aspects of the conflict to expand across their borders.

'Our view stems from the results of our scenario analysis, in which we tested the financial impact of a 10%, 30%, or 70% loss in tourism receipts on each country. Last year, tourism contributed 26% of Lebanon's

current account receipts. For Jordan and Egypt, the figure was 21% and 12%, and for Israel, 3%,' S&P noted.

According to S&P, tourism is just one sector facing risks. Likely impacts of the war include physical destruction, an outflow of portfolio and non-resident deposits, and a reduction in foreign direct investment.

'Further deepening of the humanitarian crisis in Gaza or a serious escalation in the West

Bank could lead to a new wave of refugee flows that would burden economies in the region. As we saw in Jordan (and Lebanon following the Syrian refugee crisis), this could undermine fiscal and credit metrics. A prolonged conflict may lead to a significant loss of GDP and foreign exchange receipts across MENA,' the rating agency said.

The tourism sector is a big employer and an important source of foreign currency in

many MENA countries.

According to the UN World Tourism Organization, the region received 20% more tourists in the first seven months of this year than in the same period in 2019.

This makes MENA the only region, where tourism has returned to and exceeded pre-pandemic levels, supporting economic growth and the economies' current account positions. The consequences of war put this progress at risk.

AI to become \$500bn industry by 2027

London, UK - In just three years, the global AI industry has more than doubled, reaching a \$240bn value and a quarter of a billion users worldwide.

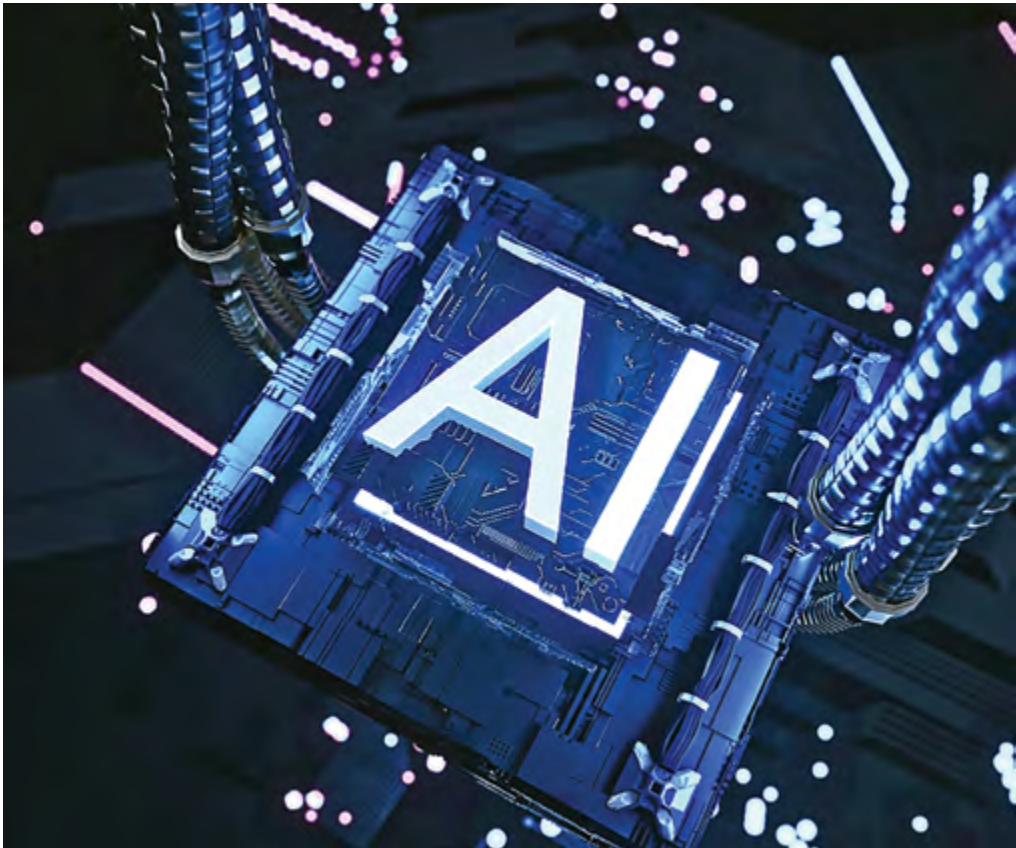
From healthcare and retail to manufacturing, stock trading, and social media, companies continue adopting AI solutions to improve their efficiency, decision-making, and user experience and gain a competitive edge. At the same time, a surge in investments in AI technologies and startups by both private and public sectors shows the interest in the industry remains strong.

According to data presented by AltIndex.com, the global AI market is set to continue growing by a compounded annual growth rate (CAGR) of 17% in the next four years and hit more than \$500bn in value by 2027.

Generative AI

A decade ago, it was hard to imagine companies and consumers worldwide using generative artificial intelligence daily to automate tasks, write documents, do market research, or even basic coding.

However, the rise of large lan-



guage models and generative AI is just a showcase of this still-developing market's enormous potential. According to PwC's 2023 Global Artificial Intelligence

Study, AI could contribute \$15.7tn to the global economy by 2030.

At the same time, the Statista survey shows most of that value

With roughly 60mn people embracing AI solutions and tools per year, the entire market is set to reach more than half a billion users by 2027

vey, the global AI industry has grown by a massive 80% year-over-year and hit a \$241bn value in 2023. With businesses and users worldwide embracing AI technologies and solutions, this figure is expected to more than double to \$511.3bn by 2027.

Machine learning, the largest segment of the AI market, will grow by 122% in this period and hit a \$355bn value, up from \$158bn this year. Its subset, generative AI, is expected to make one-quarter of the total market value in 2027, up from 18% this year.

The natural language processing (NLP) segment, the sec-

ond-largest revenue stream in the AI industry, will grow by 94% in four years and hit a \$45.7bn value. Autonomous and sensor technology, computer vision, and AI robotics follow, with \$42.5bn, \$38.2bn, and \$30.2bn valuations by 2027, respectively.

The surging demand for automation and optimisation across industries, increasing use of AI in consumer-facing applications, and growing investments in AI research and development are expected to continue driving market growth, helping it reach more users than ever.

According to Statista, around 254mn people have used AI tools in 2023, 2.5 times more than just three years ago. With roughly 60mn people embracing AI solutions and tools per year, the entire market is set to reach more than half a billion users by 2027.

One-third of all users, or 181mn, will come from the United States, the world's largest AI market, followed by 52mn Chinese, who are also expected to embrace AI tools by 2027.

Germany's GDP shrinks in Q3

Berline, Germany - Germany's gross domestic product contracted 0.1% quarter-on-quarter in the July-September period as initially estimated, according to second reading released on Friday.

The third quarter figure followed a 0.1% growth in the second quarter and stagnation in the first quarter, the Federal Statistical Office (Destatis) said in a statement.

The household final consumption expenditure decreased 0.3% from the previous quarter due to persistent inflation and increasing borrowing costs.

Foreign trade fell in the third quarter with total exports of goods and services going down 0.8% from the previous three-month period and imports declined by 1.3%.

Economic performance dropped markedly by 1.3% in industry, excluding construction, in the same period.

On an annual basis, Europe's economy shrank 0.4% in the third quarter of 2023, revised downwards flash reading of 0.3%.

Agencies

US inflation expectations revised up in November

Washington, US - Inflation expectations in the US were revised up in November, according to the University of Michigan's consumer survey final results released last week.

Year-ahead inflation expectations increased to 4.5% in November, recording the highest reading since April 2023, and revised up from the 4.4% level in the preliminary results released two weeks ago.

The figure showed gains from October's 4.2% level and September's 3.2% reading.

Long-run inflation expectations also rose, from 3.0% last month to 3.2% this month, and marked the highest reading since 2011.

"These expectations have risen in spite of the fact that consumers have taken note of the continued slowdown in inflation; consumers appear worried that the softening of inflation could reverse in the months and years ahead," said Surveys of Consumers Director Joanne Hsu.

The index of consumer senti-



ment declined 2.5 percentage points to 61.3 in November, from 63.8 in October, according to the final readings.

The market expectation for the index was to come in at 60.4.

"While this marks the fourth consecutive month of declines, November's reading reflects a balance of factors, some of which improved while others worsened," said Hsu.

"More-favorable current assessments and expectations of personal finances were offset by a notable deterioration in ex-

pected business conditions. In particular, long-run business conditions plunged by 15% to its lowest since July 2022," she added.

The index of current economic conditions fell 2.3 percentage points to 68.3 in November, from 70.6 in October, according to the final survey results.

The index of consumer expectations decreased 2.5 points to 56.8 from 59.3 during that period.

Anadolu Agency

Asian Development Bank to invest \$100bn to maximise climate impact

Manila, Philippines - Setting the scene for a low-carbon and climate-resilient Asia and the Pacific, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) plans to invest \$100bn of its own funds and work with the public and private sector to maximise its climate impact.

With the region on the front-line of the growing climate crisis, ADB's Climate Change Action Plan 2023-2030 aims to help decarbonize transport and energy, employ climate-smart planning to boost resilience, and work with partners to develop climate-critical outcomes.

Setting out ADB's ambitious climate targets, the plan lays out action on how ADB plans to catalyze climate finance and incentivise innovation to help shepherd Asia and the Pacific towards a low-carbon, climate-resilient future.

Asian cities currently produce 75% of regional carbon emissions. By 2030, more than 55% of the population of Asia and the Pacific will live in urban areas,



ADB approved capital management reform that unlocks \$100bn in new funding capacity over next decade in response to evolving challenges in Asia, including climate change

driving up demand for urban services.

If urban areas continue along the same growth trajectory, Asian cities could contribute more than half of the rise in global GHG emissions over the

next 20 years. At the same time, Asia is home to 99 of the world's 100 cities most threatened by environmental and climate risks.

ADB works with cities and towns in Asia and the Pacific to bring transformative change by

promoting resilient, low-carbon urban development and the application of circular economy approaches.

ADB approved capital management reform that unlocks \$100bn in new funding capacity over the next decade in response to evolving challenges in the region, including climate change.

In 2019-2022, actual cumulative climate finance commitments from ADB resources amounted to \$21bn. Refined climate finance projections by region and sector will be developed in 2024, reflecting the \$100bn climate finance ambition for 2019-2030

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has initiated a major reform to become the climate bank of Asia and the Pacific. The reform is matched with an increased ambition to provide \$100bn of its own funds, across public and private sector operations, to climate finance from 2019 to 2030.

WAM

California startup to 'sponge' carbon dioxide from atmosphere

Brisbane, US - Scrubbing carbon dioxide from the air is imperative if humanity is to limit global warming, experts say, and a California startup says it can do just that, using limestone as a carbon-sucking sponge.

San Francisco-based Heirloom Carbon has become a hot name in the nascent capture technology sector, even sealing a deal with Microsoft to help the Windows-maker meet its zero-carbon ambitions.

Governments are embracing similar innovations to meet their climate goals as CO2 emissions remain too high to mitigate the greenhouse effect that causes the devastation of climate change.

Capturing CO2 directly out of the atmosphere is the "time machine" that will take us back to cleaner air, according to Heirloom cofounder and CEO Shashank Samala.

"If you actually want to reverse climate change and go back to where things were, carbon removal is the closest thing we have actually removing legacy emissions from the air," he said.

Carbon capture will be a central topic of discussions at the COP28 climate talks, which take place in Dubai from November 30 to December 12.

Many see it as a necessity to get closer to a zero-emission world while others fear it is being hailed as an easy ticket to avoid making the sacrifices needed to slow climate change.

The UN Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), which steers the COP meetings, considers the deployment of carbon capture and storage systems to be unavoidable if we are to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels.

Heirloom has set itself the goal of ridding the atmosphere of one billion tonnes of CO2 per year by 2035 - without incentivising companies to keep burning fossil fuels.

That will help put a dent in the between the 10bn and 20bn tonnes of carbon that the US National Academy of Sciences says has to be eliminated every year between now and the end of the century.

"Heirloom uses limestone



Employees work inside the warehouse at the headquarters of Heirloom Carbon in Brisbane, California (AFP)

which is a naturally occurring mineral and we give it superpowers and we turn it into a sponge that can suck up CO2 from the atmosphere," said cofounder and head of research Noah McQueen.

"We then wring out that sponge and we permanently store that CO2 underground," he added.

Cofounder Samala remembers the cyclones, droughts and crushing heatwaves of his child-

hood in India all too well. "I remember my mom putting a wet towel on a fan and using that as our air conditioner," he said.

"Climate change has unfair impacts on vulnerable people." Samala briefly worked at the

fin-tech company Square after his US engineering studies and then founded an electronics company. "But the calling for climate was always there," he said, with year after year of California wildfires and disappearing coral reefs pushing him toward a career change.

Going through the 2018 IPCC report, Samala narrowed in on carbon capture, a field then in dire need of innovation and investment.

Direct Air Capture (DAC) techniques, such as those developed by Heirloom and Swiss pioneer Climeworks, differ from systems where carbon is captured at source (CCS), such as factory chimneys.

Heirloom opted for limestone because it's available in large quantities, and says there's no shortage of storage space.

"In the United States alone, there's enough to store all of the emissions that we've emitted since the industrial revolution," said McQueen.

Will Knapp, cofounder of the CCS startup Cocoon, believes it is much easier to capture CO2 di-

rectly from places it is emitted, such as factories or steel plants, than from the general atmosphere.

Metal-making furnaces can blast out CO2 concentrations of 10 to 30 percent, while the concentration of CO2 in the air we breathe is at just 0.4 percent, according to Knapp.

Capturing it from the general atmosphere would be "like finding a needle in a haystack," he said.

"There's no silver bullet to solving climate change, (but) we don't need miracles, we just need bullets," he added.

Heirloom's Samala holds his company to strict commitments, such as not reselling the CO2 to businesses that would ultimately return it to the atmosphere.

He also condemns "greenwashing," where some industries, particularly the oil and gas lobby, use vague promises of carbon removal "as a way to distract us."

"For us to go against the status quo is incredibly difficult, but that is what we need to do," Samala said.

AFP

Aster Royal Hospital successfully attends to unique cardiac emergency

In an extraordinary display of medical expertise, a multi-disciplinary team at Aster Royal Al Raffah Hospital, successfully intervened and saved a 43-year-old man from an out-of-hospital cardiac arrest without any brain damage.

The patient had been experiencing chest pain since morning and within minutes of collapsing, was rushed to the hospital. Upon arrival, the patient had no pulse or breathing. The emergency department team initiated high-quality Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (CPR) for a full 15 minutes until signs of life returned. Once stabilised, the patient was connected to a ventilator for breathing support, a press release said.

Further investigations revealed a massive heart attack, and preparations were made for emergency procedures. However, an unexpected life-threatening irregular heart rhythm occurred, requiring immediate defibrillation and medication to regularise the heart rhythm.

After stabilising, the patient

underwent an emergency coronary angiogram, revealing multiple critical artery lesions. Under the leadership of Dr Meher Ali and the cardiology team, an emergency procedure successfully placed three stents to address the blockages and restore blood flow. Post-procedure, the patient faced challenges, including pulmonary edema and acute kidney injury. The nephrology team, along with the ICU staff, provided specialised care. After 48 hours of ventilation, the patient improved remarkably, showing no neurological deficits.

Cardiovascular diseases are known to be the leading cause of death globally, with 17.9 million lives lost globally each year due to the condition. Among these fatalities, 85% resulted from heart attacks and strokes. Commenting on the case, Dr Dilip Abdul Khadar - Medical Director (Medical Services), Aster Royal Al Raffah Hospital said, "Every revived heartbeat in this case echoes our commitment to immediate and comprehensive cardiac care. At Aster Royal Al



Raffah Hospital, we embrace the transformative power of swift intervention and collaborative efforts in cardiology. In this remarkable case, our team's unwavering dedication ensured that critical moments were met

with precision, from the out-of-hospital resuscitation to the emergency PCI and ongoing ICU care. This success story reflects our steadfast pursuit of excellence, providing not just treatment, but the highest standard of

care for a resilient cardiac future."

Dr Meher Ali, senior consultant - Cardiology, Aster Royal Al Raffah Hospital said "Cases of out-of-hospital cardiac arrest often leads to a grim prognosis

and is at high risk for brain damage due to delayed arrival at the hospital and the initiation of CPR. However, in this exceptional case, the prompt transfer of the patient by his friends, coupled with collaborative medical inter-

vention, including CPR and emergency PCI by the Emergency Department and cardiology team, followed by outstanding care in the Intensive Care Unit, played a pivotal role in ensuring this patient's remarkable recovery. It underscores the critical importance of swift action and collaborative care in achieving positive outcomes, even in dire situations."

The team led by Dr Meher Ali, included Dr Sharique Ahmed (Specialist Cardiologist), Dr Rajagopal (Specialist Anaesthesiologist), Dr Arsha Alias (ED Physician), Dr Lekha Gopal (Head-Dept of Anaesthesiology), Dr Mohammed Farooq Ahmed (Specialist Nephrologist), the ED nurses, ICU nurses, and duty doctors.

This successful intervention exemplifies the Aster Royal Al Raffah hospital's commitment to pioneering medical practices and delivering unparalleled care in critical cardiac emergencies. The hospital remains dedicated to ensuring that every heartbeat receives the expertise it deserves.

Bank Muscat launches 'Shukran' prepaid card with Landmark Group

Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the sultanate, has partnered with Landmark Group and Visa to launch the Bank Muscat Shukran co-branded Visa Prepaid Card.

The Bank Muscat Shukran Visa Prepaid card is a contactless payment method in the form of a reloadable card designed for everyday use. The prepaid card is linked to the cardholder's Shukran membership for accrual and redemption of Shukran points in stores and online, a press release said.

Customers will earn 1 Shukran Point for every RO1 spent at Landmark Stores and 1 Shukran Point for every RO2 spent outside Landmark Group chain of stores. The total points accumulated through the prepaid card spends is added to the Shukran points gained from their Shukran membership. Points can be redeemed across Landmark Group stores in Oman, the GCC, Egypt and online on more than 15 brands across Fashion, Home,



Electronics, Hospitality and Leisure, at Landmark Group stores such as Centrepoint, Babyshop, Splash, SHOEMART, Lifestyle, Max, Shoexpress, Home Centre, Home Box, Emax.

Application and management of the prepaid card is made simple and convenient through the Bank Muscat Mobile Banking app and Internet Banking services. Customers can also link the card to their existing Shukran membership. For those who do not have an existing Shukran

membership, it will be autogenerated within the card application. Customers can use online services to top up the card, view available balance, etc.

Abdulnassir al Raisi, general manager for Personal Banking, Bank Muscat, said, "We are delighted to partner with Landmark Group and Visa which reflects the bank's commitment to enhance cooperation with reputed partners in the market aiming to offer distinctive banking experiences. Bank Muscat is a pioneer

and innovator in providing electronic and digital banking channels to meet the financial requirements of its customers. This Shukran Visa Prepaid card will be an immense benefit for our family of customers."

Saikat Mishra, territory head, Oman, Landmark Group, said, "The Shukran co-branded Visa Prepaid card is a first-of-its-kind initiative in Oman. It offers the convenience of contactless shopping and benefits of earning Shukran points on purchases."

Chinese ambassador visits Pakistan School Muscat

Ambassador of China to the Sultanate of Oman, H E Li Lingbing, had an estimable visit to Pakistan School Muscat on November 19 on the occasion of Oman National Day.

H E Lingbing inaugurated new furniture at the school, imported from China, and said such cooperation reinforces the bonds between Pakistan and China, as well as Pakistan and Oman.

The ambassador and the Pakistan School Board members, along with senior officers from China and Pakistan embassy, discussed avenues for future cooperation, including mutual collaboration between the government of China and Pakistan Schools in Oman, the introduction of the Chinese language, and special education in the Pakistan Schools system.

Moreover, she expressed her delight when briefed about the Smart Board system, the teaching of specially-abled children, and the overall standard of education and other initiatives in the Pakistan School system.



Chairman Ameer Hamza thanked the Ambassador in connecting the school to the most competitively priced companies in South China that specialised in customised furniture for schools.

During her visit, she explored different areas, with a particular focus on the Centre for Special Education. She expressed admiration for the dedication and hard work of the management and teachers in providing excellent education to the students. She pledged to seek the assistance of

the Chinese government to expand and construct additional facilities for the Centre for Special Education.

Additionally, the ambassador extended her support for providing scholarships to students from Pakistan Schools in Oman in the future.

The Pakistan School Board also thanked Ambassador Imran Ali for facilitating cooperation with the Chinese government to uplift the Pakistan Schools in Oman.

Fireworks to return to Ras Al Khaimah

A magnificent firework display is set to return once again to Ras Al Khaimah and welcome 2024 with a bang this New Year's Eve.

Confirmed by Ras Al Khaimah Tourism Development Authority (RAKTDA), and the Organising Committee of the Emirate's New Year's Eve celebration, the dazzling performance will wow visitors of all ages, as fireworks light up the sky with an eye-popping show and electrifying beats, a press release said.

Stretching 4.5km of waterfront between Al Marjan Island and Al Hamra Village, the display is set to be a jaw-dropping event as Ras Al Khaimah continues its legacy of organising breathtaking New Year's Eve celebrations including breaking Guinness World Records for five consecutive years. This year, the fireworks show will offer dazzling new choreography elements and techniques that have never been done before and aims to smash

new records. Residents and visitors can also expect two spectacular events from which to watch the fireworks. A public event with free access will offer DJ entertainment, dedicated kids' activities, food trucks and a section for bachelors and families. A private ticketed event under the theme 'Soundfest' will have an international artist selection, kids area and a variety of F&B.

Leading up to the celebrations on December 31, residents and tourists can enjoy the season with a host of festive family fun celebrations, from tree lighting ceremonies, Christmas events to NYE gala dinners happening across the Emirate's collection of hotels, including the two Ritz-Carlton properties, the all-inclusive Rixos Bab Al Bahr, Intercontinental Mina Al Arab Resort, Movenpick Resort Al Marjan Island, Hilton Ras Al Khaimah Beach Resort, etc.

Ooredoo revamps Shahry data plans

Ooredoo knows that the Internet will never go out of style. Ooredoo also knows that many of you are often 'on the go' and don't always have access to WiFi. So, the stuff of your wildest digital dreams is here - Customers on Shahry Data Only plans can now benefit from a permanent data boost.

Starting from just RO5 per month, Shahry Data Only plans give customers even greater value and flexibility. Ooredoo customers on a Shahry Data Only 10 plan will receive 20 GB of data instead of 12 GB for RO9, while those opting for a Shahry Data Only 20 plan can enjoy 60 GB of data instead of 50 GB for RO19. Plus, there's now a brand new Shahry Data Only plan.

MoE discusses results of measurement study

The Ministry of Education, represented by the Department of Studies and Statistical Data, in cooperation with the Arabic Language Learning Evaluation Department, implemented on Tuesday a training workshop discussing the results of the international study to measure reading skills PIRLS 2021.

The workshop targeted specialists in the Arabic language, and the first field teachers, supervisors, curriculum and evaluation specialists, and training experts, in addition to first-cycle school administrations and administrative supervisors, a press release said.

The training workshop included a number of papers, where Fathia al Maawli, director of Studies and Statistical Data Department, presented a paper on the general results of the Sultanate of Oman in this study, and the most important indicators that the study showed compared to previous sessions.

The second paper was titled



'Ways to provide students of the first cycle with reading comprehension skills according to the International Study for Measuring Reading Skills, PIRLS2021' and was presented by Dr Mahfouz al Shayadi, a senior learning assessment specialist. The third

paper discussed the school environment and its impact on student achievement in the International Study for Measuring Reading Skills, PIRLS2021, presented by Mansour al Faliti, an international studies specialist. During the course of the

workshop, the experiences of two schools that achieved outstanding results in the study were reviewed - namely, Rawdat Al Albab School (1-4) from North Batinah Governorate, and Al Irada School (1-4) from North Sharqiyah Governorate.

Call for permanent cease-fire in Gaza

The humanitarian pause to war between Israel and Hamas has been welcomed throughout the world

Ankara, Turkey - While the com- promise that will provide a hu- manitarian pause to the war between Israel and Hamas has been welcomed throughout the world, a number of countries led by Turkey, said the real need is a permanent cease-fire.

The agreement to suspend the war took effect on Friday, but there is still a lot of concern that the process will continue in such a way that attacks will resume and thousands more will die.

The US, which has given un- limited support to Israel since the beginning, and European coun- tries, which have shown strong support, have changed their tone in rhetoric due to internal and ex- ternal public pressure.

The Turkish Foreign Ministry said: "The agreement between the parties to declare a four-day humanitarian pause in the con- flict in Gaza, where Israeli forces have been attacking for more than six weeks, is a positive de- velopment to prevent more bloodshed."

"We expect full compliance with the agreement, which in- cludes the release of some of the hostages and detainees and the increase in the amount of hu- manitarian aid allowed to enter Gaza," it said.

"We hope that the humanitar- ian pause will help permanently end the current conflict as soon as possible and initiate a process towards a just and lasting peace based on a two-state solution. We also appreciate Qatar's ef- forts to reach this agreement."

Palestine's Permanent Repre- sentative to the UN, Riyad Mansur, assessed that thanks to the compromise, hundreds of Palestinian children will not die and said: "We should not allow

this to be just a break before the massacre begins again."

He stressed that Israel's ef- forts to forcibly displace Pales- tinians are unacceptable, noting that Israel offers the Palestinian people 'either leave this land or leave this world'.

"Reconciliation is a step in the right direction, but much more needs to be done," UN Secre- tary-General Antonio Guterres said in a statement, adding that the UN will make every effort to implement deal and have a posi- tive effect on the humanitarian situation in Gaza.

Russia's Permanent Repre- sentative to the UN Vasily

I reiterate once again that permanent peace requires a two-state solution that will allow Israelis and Palestinians to live safely, prosperously within internationally recognised borders

PENNY WONG

Nebenzya reiterated a demand for a cease-fire, noting that res- olution 2712 adopted by the UNSC (Security Council) on Gaza was insufficient. Arguing that human- itarian breaks in the conflict ig- nore Israel's obligations under international humanitarian law, Nebenzya pointed out that there is no mechanism to monitor the practices.

"No humanitarian interven- tion can provide a solution to this



A Palestinian woman waits to cross into Gaza from the Egyptian side of the Rafah crossing, on Friday (Xinhua)

unacceptable situation. A hu- manitarian ceasefire is urgently needed," he said.

The Saudi Arabian Foreign Ministry said in a statement that it was pleased with the deal and the prisoner swap, calling for a comprehensive cease-fire.

China's Permanent Represen- tative to the UN, Cang Cun, noted that the international com- munity should urgently take nec- essary steps to prevent the

spread of conflict and ensure lasting peace.

Noting that UNSC resolution 2712 is an important step, Cang pointed out the need to imple- ment it urgently and ensure a permanent cease-fire.

Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Secretary General Qasim Mohammed al-Budeawi also praised the efforts of Qatar, Egypt and the US, which con- tributed to the humanitarian de-

livery of the conflict in Gaza and the prisoner swap, expressed hope that the deal would con- tribute to the provision of hu- manitarian aid supplies and fuel to Gaza, as well as be the begin- ning of a permanent cease-fire.

The Lebanese Foreign Min- istry stressed that the agreement is important in terms of 'open- ing the door to reaching a complete and permanent ceasefire in the Gaza Strip'.

Qatari Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Mo- hammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani shared his hopes that the deal would open the door to 'se- rious negotiations for a compre- hensive peace process'.

The Jordanian Foreign Min- istry mentioned that it was pleased with the compromise, pointing out that the reconcilia- tion is important in terms of being a step that will lead to a

complete cessation of the 'vio- lent war' in Gaza, preventing the targeting and forced displace- ment of Palestinians.

Australian Foreign Minister Penny Wong said her country wants to see the next steps to- ward a sustainable cease-fire. "I reiterate once again that perma- nent peace requires a two-state solution that will allow Israelis and Palestinians to live safely and prosperously within interna- tionally recognised borders."

The Bahraini Foreign Ministry also expressed satisfaction with the deal and called on the inter- national community to redouble diplomatic efforts to achieve a permanent cease-fire, release hostages and detainees, provide sustainable humanitarian as- sistance and rebuild the damaged areas in the Gaza Strip.

The Indonesian Foreign Min- istry indicated that the reconcilia- tion was welcomed, adding that it will use the humanitarian pause to track down three citi- zens who work at the Indonesian Hospital in Gaza and have not been so far contacted directly.

Colombian President Gustavo Petro pointed out that reconcilia- tion can be the beginning of peace, noting that Bogota will continue to send humanitarian aid to Gaza.

Israel has so far killed more than 14,000 Palestinians, mostly children and women, as it con- tinues its relentless attacks on the Gaza Strip. Around 6,000 peo- ple are unaccounted for, with more than 4,000 of them women and children. They are either buried under the rubble of demolished buildings or their bodies are lying on the streets without being identified.

Anadolu Agency

Aid deliveries cross into Gaza north

Gaza City, Palestine - Three aid trucks arrived on Friday in the northern Gaza Strip in the first aid deliveries to the north of the Palestinian territory since the outbreak of the conflict on Octo- ber 7, according to a local source.

"Three trucks loaded with hu- manitarian aid arrived in Gaza City and northern Gaza on Friday noon," said the source.

The deliveries came as part of a four-day humanitarian pause that includes a prisoner swap and the entry of aid into Gaza.

Gaza's border authority said 150 aid trucks were allowed into the enclave on Friday through the Rafah crossing with Egypt.

The Israeli army said it allowed the entry of eight trucks of gaso- line through the Rafah terminal as part of a humanitarian pause agreement.

The pause deal allows the entry of 200 aid trucks and four fuel tankers daily to all areas of the Gaza Strip, according to the Palestinian resistance group,



Hamas.

Under a 16-year Israeli block- ade on Gaza, 500 trucks of goods, including 45 fuel trucks used to enter Gaza daily. But that all stopped since the outbreak of fighting on October 7, leaving Gaza with a severe shortage of basic commodities, including badly needed fuel for hospitals.

Israel and Hamas swapped 24 Israelis and foreigners for 39 Palestinians from Israeli jails on Friday, on the first day of the hu- manitarian pause.

Under the Israel-Hamas deal, hostages will be released in batches during the four days.

Israel launched a massive mi- litary campaign against the Gaza

Strip following a cross-border at- tack by Hamas last month. Israel has killed at least 14,854 Pales- tinians, including 6,150 children and over 4,000 women, accord- ing to health authorities in the en-clave.

The official Israeli death toll stands at 1,200.

Anadolu Agency

Australian men urged to end domestic violence

Canberra, Australia - Aus- tralia's Prime Minister Anthony Albanese has called for Aus- tralian males to step up to end violence against women and children.

In a statement released on the International Day for Elimination of Violence Against Women on Saturday, Albanese declared urgent action was needed to address Australia's domestic violence rate.

According to the Australian Institute of Criminology's Na- tional Homicide Monitoring Programme (NHMP), 60 per cent of adult female victims of homicide in Australia are killed by a current or former intimate partner.

In 2020-21, one woman was killed by a current or former partner every 14 days in Aus- tralia, according to the latest NHMP data.

"Changing the attitudes that entrench inequality and dis-



Australia's Prime Minister Anthony Albanese (AFP)

crimination, and objectify women and disregard consent, is everyone's responsibility," Al- banese said. "Men in particular have to step up. And male lead- ers have an opportunity to champion change and create the conditions that prevent violence, abuse, discrimination and harassment."

The government on Saturday committed to establishing a new system to provide quar- terly updates on intimate part- ner homicides.

Xinhua

EU pledges €10mn to support Afghanistan

Kabul, Afghanistan - In order to support the health- care system and combat in- fectious diseases in Afghanistan at a time when the country is facing an eco- nomic crisis under the Tal- iban, the European Union has pledged €10mn to the World Health Organization (WHO) to aid the country, Pajhwok News reported.

The funding will improve preparedness and response systems for future disease outbreaks as well as health and nutrition emergencies, according to a statement issued by the EU office in Kabul on Thursday.

The long-lasting cooper- ation between the EU and WHO has contributed to stronger and more resilient health care in Afghanistan, it said.

The increased financing is intended to improve health care in all 34 provinces, benefiting al- most two million people. The additional funding ex- pands on the previous EU- WHO collaboration in response to the COVID-19 pandemic by integrating and improving diagnostic and infectious disease management and response in Afghanistan, the EU stated, according to Pajh- wok News.

Since the Taliban seized power in Afghanistan, the country's economic situa- tion has deteriorated.

ANI

Release of hostages by Hamas 'start of a process': Joe Biden

Washington, DC, US - Term- ing the release of the initial batch of hostages as a part of a four-day truce between Israel and Hamas, the 'start of a process,' President Joe Biden said the United States expects 'dozens of hostages' will be returned to their families over the next few days.

"Today's release is the start of a process. We expect more hostages to be released tomor- row and more of the day after and more the day after that. Over the next few days, we expect that dozens of hostages will be returned to their families. We

also remember all those who are still being held and renew our commitment to work for their re- lease as well," Biden said in his remarks on Friday.

Biden further said that every- one should be appreciative of the families who have been 'reunited with loved ones'.

"Two American women and one four-year-old child Abigail, who remain among those miss- ing. We will not stop until we get these hostages brought home and an answer to their where- abouts. I remain in personal con- tact with the leaders of Qatar,



This file photo shows US President Joe Biden addressing the nation on the conflict between Israel and Gaza from the Oval Office on October 19 (AFP)

Egypt and Israel to make sure this stays on track and every as- pect to the deal is implemented," Biden said.

The US President further said that the hostages who were re- leased on day one of the cease- fire from Gaza have a long journey of healing ahead of them.

He said: "All these hostages have been through a terrible or- deal and this is the beginning of a long journey of healing for them...Today has been a product of a lot of hard work and weeks of personal engagement. From the moment Hamas kidnapped

these people, I, along with my team, have worked around the clock to secure the release we saw...I've consistently pressed for a pause in the fighting for two reasons to accelerate and ex- pand humanitarian assistance going into Gaza and to facilitate the lease of hostages.

"Over the past several weeks, I've spoken repeatedly with the Emir of Qatar, Egypt's President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi and Prime Minister Netanyahu of Israel, to help secure this deal and I want to thank all three leaders."

ANI

Manual drilling to begin at collapsed Indian tunnel

Uttarkashi, India - Uttarakhand Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami on Saturday said a plasma cutter is being flown in from Hyderabad to cut the auger machine that has got stuck in the debris of the Silkyara tunnel in Uttarkashi.

After visiting the site of the tunnel inside which 41 labourers have been trapped after it collapsed since November 12, Dhami said that the auger machine that was involved in drilling through the debris from the Silyara side is expected to be pulled out on Sunday morning after which manual drilling would begin.

He described the conditions as 'very difficult and challenging' and the way the machine which was drilling through the debris and placing pipes for the trapped workers to climb out had got stuck after reaching a certain point.

"Everyone knows that this rescue operation is being done under difficult and challenging circumstances. The machine got stuck after reaching so close...We are expecting that by tomorrow (Sunday) morning this machine will come out, and after that, the operation will move forward manually," the chief minster said.

"We are working on all the options. A plasma cutter machine has been ordered from Hyderabad to cut the auger machine," Dhami said.

The heavy duty US-made auger machine had got stuck after reaching a certain point, due to some metal object getting stuck inside it and the



Machines are being transported by the Border Roads Organization (BRO) team to enable vertical drilling on the Silkyara Tunnel, where the rescue operation is underway, in Uttarkashi on Saturday (ANI)

We are expecting that by tomorrow (Sunday) morning this machine will come out, and after that, the operation will move forward manually

PUSHKAR SINGH DHAMI

drilling operations had to be suspended on Friday evening.

Dhami said that he had spoken to the construction workers who were trapped inside the tunnel and their morale was high. "I have just spoken to the people inside, Gabbar Singh, Sabha Ahmed and Sharia Mishra. The morale of all of them are absolutely strong. They told me that they were

doing fine and were getting food on time. They asked me to take our time and safely take them out from the tunnel," Dhami said.

"So we are also praying to God that the rescue be completed as soon as possible. At the level of the Government of India, the State Government and all our agencies, all the people are making their full efforts.

We are making as many efforts as possible and the prime minister is getting progress reports every day. PM Modi is concerned about the situation and the condition of the workers. We are expecting and hoping that the operation is completed as soon as possible," Chief Minister Dhami said.

Meanwhile, a 12-member team of the Sutej Jal Vidyut Nigam (SJVN) is on standby mode to do vertical drilling on the tunnel.

A final decision on the vertical drilling option is likely to be taken by SJVN and the Oil and Natural Gas Corporation.

An SJVN official said: "We have given a proposal to the ad-

ministration to do vertical drilling in 5 to 6 days; our team has done the survey for drilling; and apart from this, their drilling machine has also reached the spot to do the drilling. We are just waiting for the order to come."

"The vertical drilling will be done from the top of the tunnel and about 85 to 90 metres will have to be drilled, which will take about five to six days. When the work of building the rescue tunnel gained momentum, the plan of doing vertical drilling was put on hold, but now, due to the hurdles we are facing, we have once again come into standby mode to see if the administration needs vertical drilling. We will start our work immediately after receiving the order," added the SJVN official

Manual drillers will work to cut through the remaining rubble that separates the rescuers from the workers and enable the insertion of the pipeline through the further few metres that are yet to be covered. The ongoing operation to rescue workers, who were trapped after a portion of the tunnel collapsed on November 12, entered its 14th day on Saturday.

Speaking to ANI, a senior official involved with the rescue operation said manual drilling could start soon. He added that the remaining debris, extending approximately up to six to nine metres, which stands between the rescuers and the trapped workers, will be removed through manual drilling.

ANI



Currently, Africa is represented by Mozambique, Gabon and Ghana as non-permanent members at the UN Security Council (Anadolu Agency)

African leaders renews push for UNSC seats

Kigali, Rwanda - African countries must sustain a common position in their demand for permanent seats on the UN Security Council, the president of Equatorial Guinea said on Friday.

Obiang Nguema Mbasogo said the continent has been pushing for the position since 2005 without significant progress toward achieving its legitimate aspirations.

There is a need for a 'renewed and revitalised action on the part of the African continent, in its demand to correct the historical injustice it has been suffering, as it is the only continent that does not have representation in the UN Security Council', Nguema said while addressing a summit of the African Union Committee of Ten (C-10) in Equatorial Guinea. The meeting in La Paz brought together heads of state and government as well as representatives of the UN and African Union agencies, seeking to cement a common position on UN Security Council reforms.

"It is essential that all African states remain vigilant, speaking with one voice so as not to let other countries and regions take advantage of Africa by forming

alliances to achieve their own interests in becoming permanent members of the United Nations Security Council," said Nguema.

He emphasised the need to accelerate reforms of the Security Council to ensure 'equitable representation of Africa through expanded membership'.

The African Union C-10 was set up in 2005, with the core mandate of presenting, advocating and canvassing support for the common African position on reform of the Security Council.

The UN General Assembly began Intergovernmental Negotiations on reforms of the Security Council during the 63rd session of the UN General Assembly in 2009.

The Security Council has five permanent members: the US, UK, France, China and Russia.

It also has non-permanent member positions, which are held on a rotational basis. Currently, Africa is represented by Mozambique, Gabon and Ghana.

Nguema encouraged his counterparts to sustain a push until the continent's aspirations in the Security Council are achieved.

Anadolu Agency

10 killed in fire at shopping mall in Karachi

Karachi, Pakistan - Ten persons were killed and 22 others injured in a fire at RJ Mall on Rashid Minhas Road in Karachi, Dawn reported, citing statements from hospital and police officials.

Karachi Mayor Barrister Murtaza Wahab took to X to confirm the news, saying: "Can so far confirm 10 casualties and 22 persons have been injured." He added that the fire had been extinguished, and the cooling process was in progress.

Police surgeon Summaiya Syed said that nine bodies had been brought to hospitals, with eight at Jinnah Postgraduate Medical Centre (UPMC) and one at Civil Hospital Karachi (CHK). Wahab mentioned that one more casualty was taken to Abbasi Shaheed Hospital. An 18-year-old is currently admitted at CHK, Dawn reported.

District East Deputy Commissioner (DC) Altaf Shaikh, overseeing the rescue operation, stated that 30 individuals, including the injured, had been rescued. He noted that the building had been cleared up to the fourth floor, with clearance of the fifth floor underway. The exact cause of the fire would be determined after a thorough investigation once the rescue operation was complete.

Sharea Faisal Station House Officer (SHO) Raja Tariq Mehmood described the affected building as a commercial high-rise housing shopping centers, call centers, and software houses.

According to a statement from the Fire and Rescue spokesperson, they were alerted to the incident at 6:30am.

ANI

US cop convicted of Floyd's murder stabbed in prison

Arizona, US - Derek Chauvin, the former Minneapolis police officer who was convicted in the 2020 killing of George Floyd, which had sparked the massive 'Black Lives Matter' protest, was stabbed at a federal prison in Arizona, New York Times reported citing two people familiar with the situation.

The Federal Bureau of Prisons confirmed that an inmate at the Tucson prison was stabbed at 12:30pm on Friday, though the agency's statement did not identify Chauvin, 47, by name.

No other inmates or prison staff were injured, and the situation was quickly contained, NYT reported citing people

familiar with the situation.

Emergency medical technicians 'initiated lifesaving measures' before transporting the inmate to a local hospital 'for further treatment and evaluation', bureau officials said in a statement.

No details were immediately available on his condition, but one of the people with knowledge of the incident said that Chauvin survived the attack.

Chauvin was serving a sentence of just over two decades in federal prison after he was convicted of state murder charges and a federal charge of violating the constitutional rights of Floyd.

ANI

PM'S SORTIE ON COMBAT AIRCRAFT



Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi flies in a twin-seater trainer LCA aircraft, Tejas, which was delivered to the Indian Air Force by the Hindustan Aeronautics Limited last month, on his visit to the manufacturing facility, in Bengaluru on Saturday (ANI)

Fukushima: China urges Japan to comply with supervision

Vienna, Austria - A Chinese envoy on Friday reiterated China's firm opposition to Japan's discharge of nuclear-contaminated wastewater from the crippled Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant into the ocean, urging Japan to fully comply with strict international supervision.

"Ignoring the doubts of the international community and the strong opposition from relevant countries, Japan has obstinately pushed forward the Fukushima wastewater discharge plan," Li Song, China's permanent representative to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), told a meeting of the IAEA board of governors.



This file photo shows fishery workers unloading seafood at Matsukawaura port in Soma, Fukushima prefecture on September 1 (AFP)

Japan's discharge plan is not the country's private matter, but a major nuclear safety issue affecting the global marine envi-

ronment, public health and international public interest, Li said, adding that China is firmly opposed to Japan's plan and urges

Japan to stop the wastewater discharge.

The Chinese envoy pointed out that the Fukushima wastewater discharge is an unprecedented artificial release of contaminated water from nuclear accidents into the ocean, and there are a lot of uncertainties about the cumulative effect caused by the release of large quantities of radionuclides into the sea.

"China has always firmly advocated and actively promoted the strengthening of international supervision over Japan's wastewater discharge plan to continually improve the long-term international supervision arrangements for the plan," Li said.

He urged the IAEA Secretariat to uphold an objective, impartial and scientific attitude, boost communication with member states and continually strengthen the international monitoring arrangements for Japan's plan.

He called on the IAEA member states and the agency's board of governors to contribute to improving the international supervision arrangements and conduct regular reviews of such arrangements as well as Japan's discharge plan.

Li stressed that Japan should hold comprehensive consultations with relevant countries, take seriously the concerns and opinions from all relevant parties, and actively support the continual improvement and strength-

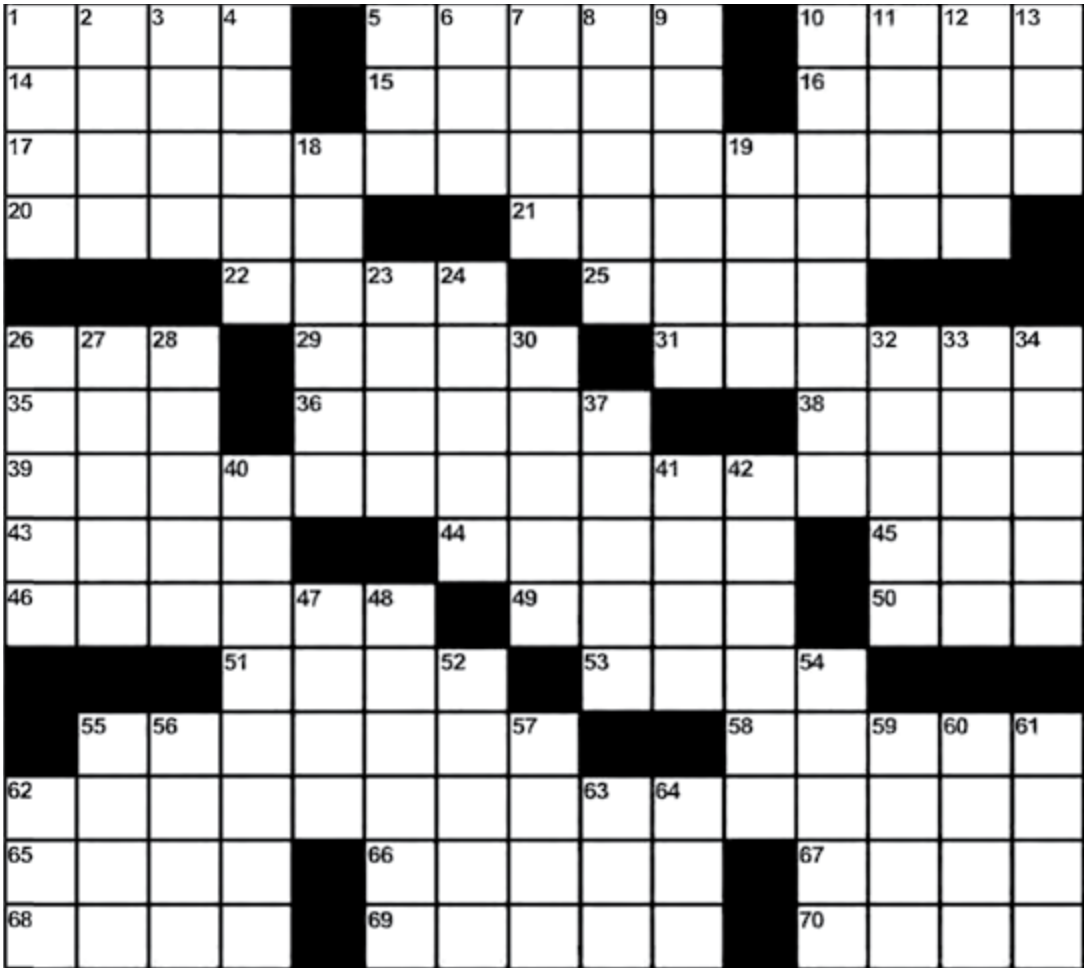
ening of international supervision arrangements.

China urges Japan to continue its discussions with the IAEA Secretariat and member states in a responsible and constructive manner and fully comply with strict international supervision, Li said.

To prevent Japan's wastewater discharge from causing long-term harm to the marine environment and public health, he said China is willing to work with all relevant parties to support the IAEA in playing a leading role over the Fukushima issue and actively join in efforts to strengthen independent, long-term and effective international supervision arrangements.

Xinhua

DAILY CROSSWORD



ACROSS

1) What you're filling in

5) Site of a Muslim pilgrimage

10) Had a sensation

14) One way to serve a steak

15) Hope for a nominee

16) "I had no..."

17) Like a neat, perfect arrangement

20) It's spotted in Westerns

21) Fish-eating birds

22) Rosemary or thyme

25) Use a bayonet

26) Hardly a gentleman

29) Was a blabbermouth

31) Quenches

35) Biochemistry abbr.

36) "Sacro" follower

38) "Damn Yankees" femme fatale

39) Extremely naive

43) Flexible mineral

44) Satan (with "the")

45) Astrological carnivore

46) Cheated at hide and seek

49) Scarf material

50) Auction merchandise, sometimes

51) Bird of old Rome

53) Soil type

55) Current measures

58) Baggy

62) Between a rock and a hard place

65) Relax on a couch

66) It gives one a leg up

67) Proceeds from a heist

68) "Trick" joint

69) Heavy British weight

70) Certain voiced votes

DOWN

1) Get a handle on

2) Member of Indian royalty

3) Modern Persia

4) Swimming pool measurement

5) Content starter

6) Ye anling's mother

7) Crime boss

8) Prefix with "cross"

9) Human aces

10) Bright meteor

11) Duane or Nelson

12) Directors Spike and Ang

13) Sailor, in slang

18) Kind of license

19) Face-to-face exam

23) Lady Macbeth or Hamlet

24) Hunter's hiding place

26) Finish a pie crust

27) "Tomorrow" musical

28) Do the running man

30) Oasis fruit

32) Bearlike marsupial

33) "... Gantry"

34) Wooden shoe

37) Raise trivial objections

40) Spongy tree gall

41) Tall fodder holder

42) Acid-neutralizing compound

47) "... happily... after"

48) Most desperate

52) Brief quarrel

54) Coffee order, sometimes

55) Soon, to a bard

56) Having X and Y chromosomes

57) He's "the Man" of baseball

59) "Works for me"

60) Pivot

61) Congers

62) Breed

63) Half of the tai chi symbol

64) "Adolescent" start

NOTE PAD

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE

 **ARIES** MARCH 21-APRIL 19

Someone you know fairly well is giving off a new vibe, and you wouldn't be out of bounds if you considered it romantic! If the idea of taking this relationship into a new realm appeals to you, then make sure you encourage the way things are going. But if you want things to stay the same between the two of you, you need to be blunt and nip this thing in the bud. Be compassionate, but be firm about your boundaries. Rejection is never nice, but you can't lead them on.

 **LEO** JULY 23-AUGUST 22

Everyone makes mistakes, and today you're ready to forgive someone who has wronged you. This magnanimous phase will continue throughout the day, enabling you to stay calm if someone steals your parking spot and smile if someone cuts you off in traffic. You have more pleasant things to think about than how to get back at someone who irritates you, and you know that life's too short to always be angry about how you're not getting what you deserve.

 **SAGITTARIUS** NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

Going off to explore isn't wise today. Save any risky business for a day when you really need a new experience to get your blood pumping. Doing something new just for the sake of doing something new is a waste of your time now. Plus, you don't need to do anything different in order to have a great day. You'll get a lot of comfort and joy out of your regular routine, and it will create a stress-free day, which has been rare lately. This is a good time for a quiet night in.

 **TAURUS** APRIL 20-MAY 20

Your confidence is at an all-time high right now, but don't be too righteous about how you know what is right and no one else does. People have long memories when it comes to people who like to preach, and the last thing you want is for someone to think that you think you know it all! You can achieve the perfect balance between being humble and being confident if you just remember to have a sense of humor. Laughing at yourself is a very healthy thing to do.

 **VIRGO** AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

Today, if you're feeling stressed, turn to your imagination for a lifeline. Just close your eyes, take a deep breath, and pretend that you're a leaf drifting along a quiet, lazy stream on a sunny day. Relax and just go with the flow. Don't worry about where you end up. Part of the stress you're feeling is caused by a need to control too much, but you can't know everything all the time. Trust the people around you more and give some of your control to them.

 **CAPRICORN** DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

There is a disconnect between what people are saying and what they're doing today. There's a bit of hypocrisy going on, but it might not be in your best interests to make a big deal about it. After all, when you point a finger at someone else, there are four more fingers pointing back at you. It's time to be loose about what you expect from people. No one is perfect, and everyone deserves a second chance in life from time to time. You'll need one someday yourself.

 **GEMINI** MAY 21-JUNE 21

Your ego may have been beaten up a bit lately, but it will survive. Spending too much time nursing your wounds is a mistake now. Give it the first aid it needs and then get moving. To help yourself shift back into the action of normal life, call up a friend and see what's going on. You need to be bold and invite yourself along if they don't ask you first. The best way to start feeling better about who you are is to surround yourself with people who love who you are.

 **LIBRA** SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

Ever since your ex came back on the scene, your heart has been in a state of confusion. You need to be careful today, because your idealistic heart is starting to override your logical brain. Be careful -- give yourself time to get used to them being back in your life, and do not try to build anything back up between you. If you see them again, you see them again. Don't try to steer this thing -- it is not going to go where you want it to go anyway.

 **AQUARIUS** JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

If you're working as a member of a group today, let caution be your guide. You're very community oriented and ready to collaborate with others, but that isn't the case with everyone. You need to acknowledge the fact that some people have some reservations, and they'll be tossing out obstacle after obstacle to keep the group from moving forward. If you're not in the mood to fight, let them have their way. Whether they're right or wrong, you won't suffer too much.

 **CANCER** JUNE 22-JULY 22

When you're making a list of all the good deeds that you're going to do today, be sure to toss in one or two selfish acts too! Take yourself to one of your favorite places or treat yourself to a favorite food. The people in your life will heartily approve. Because when you do something for yourself, you make yourself happy, and when you're happy, you're more likely to do something for someone else. It's simple logic, but it always holds true.

 **SCORPIO** OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

If you find yourself in a dead end of sorts now, you probably got there because you were led along by others. This is a powerful lesson. You need to be in control of where you go in your life. Your preferences and goals, not the wishes of others, should dictate what you do. It's time to reassert yourself, which is what one of your wisest friends has been telling you for a while. Call this friend and ask them for more advice. They know what they're talking about.

 **PISCES** FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

The Universe is about to unload some serious good luck on you, but you won't know you have it until it hits. Instead of running right out and buying a bunch of lottery tickets, just wait. Before the end of the day you could receive a golden opportunity, an unexpected gift, or a chance to do something you've always wanted to do. Your good fortune can get a real boost with a smile and flattering comment, so don't be shy about working your charm.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

01. The use of "lie" and "lay" has overlaps and current usage is developing to flatten it out. Before (and during) the transition which of these is the correct expression?

A. Lie him down
B. The lay of the land
C. He lay down
D. He was laying there

02. In Greek legend, Narcissus was famous for which of the following?

A. Falling in love with his reflection
B. Killing a monster
C. Killing his parents
D. Saving the world from a comet

03. Louis B Meyer is associated with what activity?

A. Race car design
B. Sharemarket investments
C. Film making
D. Men's fashion

Answers: 1. C 2. A 3. C

KIDS COLOURING



BOGGLER

E	L	T	I
T	B	I	S
H	E	S	R
E	E	D	B

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

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

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

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



Oscar Pistorius

Convicted Olympian Oscar Pistorius granted parole

Johannesburg, South Africa - Oscar Pistorius, once hailed as the Blade Runner, was back in the spotlight when he was told he would finally get to leave prison on January 5 next year, more than 10 years after the harrowing events of Valentine's Day in 2013.

Once a Paralympic icon, his life took a drastic turn when he fatally shot his girlfriend, Reeve Steenkamp, in his Pretoria home. This shocking act transformed his narrative from a tale of inspiring athletic prowess to that of a devastating murder.

Born without fibulas and propelled to fame through Paralympic victories, Pistorius defied physical limitations, capturing global attention for his triumphs.

His quest to compete against able-bodied athletes at the Beijing Olympics faced initial hurdles but culminated in a historic appearance at the 2012 London Games, breaking barriers as the first double amputee Olympian.

However, the zenith of his sporting career was tragically overshadowed by the fatal shooting of Steenkamp.

Despite Pistorius's claims of mistaking her for an intruder, the courts ultimately found him guilty of murder after a series of legal proceedings and appeals. Initially sentenced to five years for culpable homicide, subsequent appeals led to a heightened sentence of over 13 years.

HAPPY AUSSIE DE MINAUR!



Alex de Minaur in action against Emil Ruusuvuori

Australia beat Finland to march into Davis Cup final

Malaga, Spain - Alex de Minaur powered past Emil Ruusuvuori as Australia secured their spot in a second successive Davis Cup final with a 2-0 win against Finland.

Earlier, Alexei Popyrin had defeated Otto Virtanen 7-6(5) 6-2 victory to put the 28-time champions ahead.

Australia, who missed the opportunity to close in on 32-time champions United States after their defeat to Canada in the 2022 final, will face Serbia or Italy who meet in the second semi-final.

Reflecting on the team's accomplishment, De Minaur said: "Extremely proud moment but I could have not done it without these guys. What we have been able to accomplish in back-to-back years is special just to show we come together as a group and how important it is for us."

Popyrin, stepping in for the injured Thanasi Kokkinakis, shared his perspective on the intense

matches, saying, "It's nerves that I've never experienced before in my life, the nerves playing the first tie, the first rubber of a Davis Cup, winning my first live rubber of a Davis Cup. I just had to keep my head steady and really focus on my serve and try to capitalise on opportunities when they came."

De Minaur also highlighted the team's depth and strength, emphasizing, "No team really wants to play us. We're a solid squad. We've got a lot of depth in every position. If we get ourselves to a doubles, we've got an unbelievable pairing."

Looking ahead to the final, the Australian team aims to bring their best, with De Minaur optimistic about their chances and pointing out, "I'm happy to be in another final and hopefully we can do one better."

The impressive victory by Australia ended Finland's quest for a maiden final in the elite men's team competition.



Giannis Antetokounmpo scored 30 points for Milwaukee Bucks

Antetokounmpo, Lopez, shine as Bucks beat Wizards

Boston, Massachusetts - Milwaukee Bucks secured victory against Washington Wizards in the in-season tournament with an outstanding offensive display from Brook Lopez, Giannis Antetokounmpo, and Damian Lillard, each scoring over 30 points.

This marked a historic event for Bucks, being their first game where three players hit the 30-point mark. Despite a formidable performance from Wizards, featuring four players reaching 20 points, Bucks emerged victorious with a final score of 131-128.

A last-second attempt by Washington to level the game with a 3-pointer failed, securing Milwaukee's win.

Houston Rockets' Jalen Green and Alperen Sengun led their team to an eighth consecutive home win against the Denver Nuggets (105-86) in a tight match. After a strong run from the Nuggets that brought them within nine points of the

Rockets, Houston rallied to maintain their lead. Sengun's remarkable display, with 21 points, 15 rebounds, and eight assists, complemented Green's 25-point contribution, securing a 14-point win for the Rockets against the Nuggets.

Devin Booker's season-high 40 points led the Phoenix Suns to 110-89 victory against the Memphis Grizzlies. Despite missing key players Kevin Durant and Bradley Beal, the Suns maintained their winning streak, securing their sixth consecutive victory.

New York Knicks mounted a remarkable comeback against the Miami Heat, outscoring them 29-11 in the final quarter for a 100-98 win. In other games, the Toronto Raptors defeated Chicago Bulls, the Indiana Pacers dominated the Detroit Pistons, the Sacramento Kings defeated the Minnesota Timberwolves, and the Golden State Warriors beat San Antonio Spurs.

Advantage Bagnaia as Vinales takes pole

Valencia, Spain - Maverick Vinales clinched pole position for the season-ending Grand Prix in Valencia, setting a lap record of 1:28.931.

Francesco Bagnaia will start second, positioning himself for a title showdown with Jorge Martin, who's four places behind him on the grid.

Vinales celebrated his first pole since 2021, highlighting the progress made in bike adjust-

ments: "We missed something during the rest of the season unfortunately. We're understanding the setting and the balance of the bike. In Qatar and over here, we've done a really good job."

Bagnaia, who encountered a rough start in practice on Friday and had to kick off qualifying in Q1, expressed delight with his improved performance: "It's fantastic, I'm very happy. Yesterday, we were a bit unlucky, we didn't



Maverick Vinales

have the time to try different settings, which we did today. This morning as soon as I started the session I felt better. I'm ready for this afternoon, for sure the objective was to be in the front row."

Zarco, securing a spot on the front row in his final race for Pramac Racing before his move to LCR Honda, emphasized the team's efforts: "I think we are doing a really good job in this last part of the season."

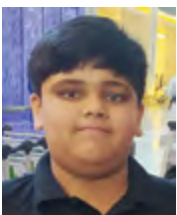
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Reds hot on City heels

Alexander-Arnold's goal helps Liverpool hold City

Manchester, United Kingdom - Trent Alexander-Arnold's 80th-minute goal earned Liverpool a 1-1 draw at leaders Manchester City after Erling Haaland broke yet another record.

It looked like Man City were heading four points clear at the top of the table thanks to Haaland's 50th Premier League goal, but Alexander-Arnold's superb

Jota accompanying Mohamed Salah in attack.

The first chance of the match came in the 11th minute, when Alisson's poor pass went straight to Phil Foden, whose strike at goal was weak and did not trouble the Liverpool goalkeeper.

Liverpool had the best chance of the opening exchanges, with Nunez's header from Salah's

Erling Haaland scored his historic 50th goal, reaching the milestone in his 48th appearance, smashing Andrew Cole's record. He has now scored against 20 of the 21 opponents he's faced in the competition.

strike means the Reds stay hot on City's heels, one point behind in second place, and stops City's 23-match winning home run in all competitions.

It also means that third-placed Arsenal can leapfrog both teams into first place with a win at Brentford in Saturday's late match.

Man City made one change to the team that drew 4-4 at Chelsea prior to the international break. Ederson was passed fit after pulling out of the Brazil squad, but Jack Grealish was absent due to illness. For Liverpool, Curtis Jones started in midfield, with Darwin Nunez and Diogo

cross being tipped away by Ederson.

But that was Liverpool's only shot on target of the first half as Man City asserted their dominance, which they made count in the 27th minute after another Alisson error.

Alisson's sloppy kick was controlled by Nathan Ake, who skipped between two challenges and played in Haaland to score his historic 50th goal, reaching the milestone in his 48th appearance, smashing Andrew Cole's record.

It was the Norwegian's first Premier League goal against Liverpool, meaning he has now



Liverpool's Trent Alexander-Arnold celebrates after scoring against Manchester City

scored against 20 of the 21 opponents he's faced in the competition, failing only against Brentford, whom City next face in February.

Man City came close to doubling their lead in the last minute of the first half in a moment involving a moment of brilliance by both goalkeepers.

Ederson's long pass led to an opportunity for Foden to smash a shot at goal, which Alisson dived to his left to push wide of a post.

In the second half, City continued to look the more likely team to score, with Julian Alvarez lifting a shot over the bar and Ruben Dias having a goal ruled out after Manuel Akanji had fouled Alisson.

Liverpool also lost Diogo Jota to an apparent injury, with the

Portuguese hobbling off before the hour mark.

But Jurgen Klopp's side refused to give up, and shortly after Nunez saw a shot saved at the near post, they equalised, and Alisson played a big part, making amends for his mistake that led

to City's goal. Alisson saved a close-range shot by Haaland and, less than 30 seconds later, Salah passed to Alexander-Arnold, who produced a fantastic low finish from the edge of the box for his first goal of the Premier League season.

PSG consolidate top spot with 5-2 victory against Monaco

Paris, France - Paris St Germain showcased their dominance in Ligue 1 with a stunning 5-2 victory over AS Monaco. The match witnessed an explosive performance from PSG, with five different goal scorers - Goncalo Ramos, Kylian Mbappe, Ousmane Dembele, Vitinha, and Randal Kolo Muani. Monaco answered with goals from Takumi Minamino and Folarin Balogun.

PSG coach Luis Enrique was delighted with the performance. "When two teams of this level play a match like today's, every fan enjoys a game with seven goals." He emphasised the significance of the team's post-international break mindset, acknowledging the difficulty for coaches in such situations: "It is difficult for coaches to prepare for a game like this, but it was worth it, and I am happy with the result."

The game started with an early lead for PSG, as Goncalo Ramos capitalised on a rebound opportunity.

Monaco swiftly responded, equalising through Takumi Minamino.

Despite the stumble, PSG regained the lead courtesy of



Ousmane Dembele celebrates after scoring against Monaco

Kylian Mbappe's penalty goal, marking his 14th successful strike in Ligue 1 this season.

Ousmane Dembele and Vitinha further extended PSG's lead, displaying the team's unwavering dominance on the field. However,

Monaco's Balogun managed to reduce the deficit with a well-placed goal following a clever through ball from Minamino. Randal Kolo Muani sealed the win for PSG with another goal in stoppage time.

Rodri: Man City must show we're the best in the world

Manchester, United Kingdom - "If you win, you'll become immortals."

That was the message Pep Guardiola delivered to Barcelona ahead of the FIFA Club World Cup UAE 2009 final. It's safe to assume, given the weight of those words and his tears at the accomplishing of that mission, that the Catalan coach will be stressing the tournament's significance once again to his Manchester City players.

Like Barca in '09, City will arrive at the Club World Cup with history beckoning. In the wake of winning the UEFA Champions League and European Supercup earlier this year, Guardiola spoke of "missing just one [trophy] to finish the circle, for this club to win all the titles we can have".

But if Pep is preparing another stirring speech to reinforce the Club World Cup's capacity to create legends, it seems he can spare himself the effort. As Rodri, the team's midfield general, explained to FIFA when asked what victory would mean to him, its significance is already crystal-clear.

"I'd be able to say that I have



Rodri

won everything, and that's the most unique and iconic thing in football I could achieve," he enthused.

"It is the first time in City's history we are playing in it. You always think the World Cup is the most important part of football, and this is the clubs' [version]. I think it is one of the most important trophies you can win in your career."

Lifting it will, of course, be easier said than done. Compatriots Chelsea, Liverpool and Man-

chester United have all come a cropper at the Club World Cup, and Rodri knows the same fate could befall City in a field of fellow continental champions. "Every year is becoming more difficult," he said. "We will never underestimate the other teams. They are strong sides, champions of their continents, so they deserve huge credit."

FIFA.com

Xavi: Single annual break can reduce injuries

Barcelona, Spain - Barcelona manager Xavi Hernandez advocated for a restructured football calendar, proposing a single international break annually as a potential remedy to alleviate travel strain and reduce player injuries.

Xavi's remarks followed recent setbacks, with goalkeeper Marc-Andre ter Stegen and midfielder Gavi suffering injuries during international duties.

Highlighting the challenges posed by a congested schedule, Xavi emphasised the toll it takes on players, pointing to the surge in injuries. He expressed his belief that FIFA is contemplating adjustments to the calendar to address these concerns. "I think FIFA are already considering it... one of the solutions would be nine months in the club and two months in the national team and from there a month of vacation," he explained.

Xavi underscored the adverse effects of frequent travels on players, citing instances where long journeys back from international duty resulted in insufficient rest. "For example, (Uruguay defender) Ronald Araujo or (Brazil forward) Raphinha (had) trips of 13, 14 hours."

"They came back yesterday, they have not rested," he said.

Kane extends Bayern scoring streak

Cologne, Germany - Harry Kane led Bayern Munich to a 1-0 victory over Cologne, and in the process extended his remarkable streak in the Bundesliga.

Kane's close-range tap-in in the first half secured the win, further solidifying his status as a standout performer and propelling Bayern to the top of the table, if only provisionally.

The England captain, who arrived at Bayern from Tottenham

Hotspur in a record-breaking 100 million euros move this season, continues to rewrite Bundesliga history. His goal against Cologne marked his 18th league goal in just 12 games, setting a new league record. Additionally, Kane became the first English player to achieve such a milestone in a single Bundesliga season, highlighting his exceptional impact on the German football scene.

Reflecting on the match, Kane

expressed satisfaction with the team's performance, acknowledging the quality displayed by Bayern. "It was a really good game for us today. Some people look at the result and might have expected a little more. But it was a fantastic game from everyone," Kane said. "We could have scored three goals in the first half alone."

Despite Cologne's attempts, especially with long balls in the

second half, Kane praised Bayern's defensive resilience. "The result was the most important thing. They (Cologne) played a few long balls in the second half, but we defended those too. It never looked dangerous, which is a good sign," he added, highlighting the team's solidity at the back.

Bayern dominated the game from the onset, creating numerous scoring opportunities.



Harry Kane celebrates his goal against Cologne



Hubert Vaz

Artistic presentations of images of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik as well as the late Sultan Qaboos bin Said, glimpses of varied cultural facets of Oman, symbols of Oman's heritage, exclusive private photographs of Royal visitations, and thought-provoking multi media installations currently adorn the Art & Soul Gallery, in Water Front mall, Shatti Qurm.

The third edition of Oman Vista, which opened on November 16, presents a unique journey into the past and present of Oman. Showcasing a dynamic blend of traditional influences and contemporary expressions, this exhibition invites art enthusiasts and cultural connoisseurs to experience the depth and diversity of creativity in Oman.

The curated collection spans various mediums, offering a comprehensive snapshot of the nation's artistic landscape. The exhibition, featuring the works of Omani and international artists in the sultanate, serves as a platform for cultural exchange, fostering a deeper understanding of the nation's creative spirit.

Art lovers, enthusiasts, and the general public have been thronging the gallery over the past week to explore this unique exhibition which offers an

interesting engagement with viewers who might be long-time residents/ citizens or visitors on a lightning visit to Muscat, providing a panoramic view of the pulse of Oman.

The gallery has curated a mixed bag by the participating artists which offers a kaleidoscope of sorts that conveys a varied aspects of the sultanate and its people, from royal grandeur to traditional fanfare. Some of the installations add an interesting dimension to the display, especially 'Evolving

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