

TASKFORCE TO IMPLEMENT MUSCAT GREEN INITIATIVE

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Sayyid Saud bin Hilal al Busaidi, Governor of Muscat, held discussions with a delegation on Sunday to bolster Oman's commitment to carbon neutrality by 2050. The meeting concluded with a decision to establish a dedicated team to oversee execution of the Muscat Green Initiative, marking a significant development in the sultanate's journey towards a greener future.

The meeting was attended by key figures, including Dr Abdullah bin Ali al Amri, Chairman of Environment Authority; Dr Mansour bin Talib al Hinai, Chairman of Public Services

Regulatory Authority; and H E Dr Mohammed bin Ali al Mutawa, Undersecretary for Urban Planning in the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning. Experts from the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, and Muscat Municipality also presented their insights.

Focused on the Muscat Green Initiative, the meeting aimed to fortify nature conservation, biodiversity preservation and expansion of green spaces within Muscat governorate. Such efforts are expected to significantly improve air quality and public health, and mitigate climate change impacts.

Discussions also covered the

selection of viable sites for tree plantation across Muscat's wilayats and addressed potential challenges, including the development of an efficient irrigation network.

The formation of a specialised team drawn from relevant authorities - tasked with

TOWARDS CARBON NEUTRALITY

implementation of the Muscat Green Initiative and strategic site selection for tree plantation in the governorate - was announced.

The tree plantation activity

falls under the broader national ambition to plant 10mn indigenous trees, overseen by the Environment Authority, aimed at heightening environmental awareness, combating desertification and increasing green cover.

Additionally, the meeting delved into the National Programme for Carbon Neutrality in Muscat governorate and witnessed a detailed presentation on the programme's objectives and national significance.

The programme was launched in January 2023 and is a collaboration between the Ministry of Energy and Minerals and the Environment Authority. According to Dr Maryam bint Muhammad al Busaidi, head of

the programme, it seeks to expedite the implementation of eco-friendly initiatives and projects, addressing challenges in sectors such as oil and gas, industry, electricity generation and transportation, which significantly contribute to carbon emissions.

The discussions on Sunday underscored Oman's strategic efforts to achieve zero neutrality, monitoring key performance indicators and implementation mechanism of the National Programme for Carbon Neutrality.

The meeting underscores Muscat governorate's dedication to fulfilling Oman Vision 2040 and transitioning towards an emission-free, sustainable economy.



EU to launch military operation in Red Sea

Brussels, Belgium - The foreign ministers of European Union have approved a naval mission to protect international shipping in the Red Sea.

President of European Commission Ursula von der Leyen welcomed Monday's decision. "Europe will ensure freedom of navigation in the Red Sea, working alongside our international partners. Beyond crisis response, it's a step towards a stronger European presence at sea to protect our European interests," she posted on 'X'.

The EU-led mission, called As-

pides - the ancient Greek word for shield - will involve sending three European warships and airborne early warning systems to the Red Sea, the Gulf of Aden and surrounding waters.

The measures come in response to increased attacks by Yemen's Houthis, who have been launching missile and drone attacks in the vital shipping corridor.

The Iran-backed Houthis stepped up attacks on vessels in the region after Israel's war in Gaza against Hamas.

Agencies

Indonesia imposes tax on foreign tourists

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman Embassy in Jakarta has informed Omanis wishing to visit Indonesia that a tax will be imposed on foreign tourists.

A statement issued by Oman Embassy in Jakarta said, "The Embassy would like to inform Omani citizens wishing to visit the Republic of Indonesia that the Bali

Provincial Government will impose a tax on foreign tourists to the tune of 150,000 rupees, equivalent to US\$10.'

Holders of diplomatic and official visas, transport vehicle crew members, holders of temporary residence cards or permanent residence cards, reunification visa holders, student visa holders and golden visa holders will be exempt from the tax, it stated.



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Oman and Japan embark on new ventures



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Voltamp JV to manufacture power transformers in Saudi

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Oman, Japan ties historical, growing

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman and Japan's long-standing relations in culture, business and knowledge are now in the fifth decade. The two countries share a bond that is cordial, economically beneficial and culturally vibrant. In recent times, Japan and Oman have strengthened relations through diplomatic dialogue and collaborations in various fields, including energy, infrastructure, sports, food and art.

In an exclusive interview with *Muscat Daily*, H E Jota Yamamoto, Ambassador of Japan to Oman, shared insights on the bilateral ties and future plans, including the much talked about Osaka Expo 2025. Excerpts -

As the Ambassador of Japan to Oman, what is your immediate focus in 2024?

I focus on making Japan's presence and images more recognised and familiar in Oman. Many Omanis will travel to Japan for the upcoming Expo 2025 Osaka and this expo will provide us - even beforehand - the potential to develop tourism and expand business ties. I am always thankful to the many people dedicated to the friendly relations between our two countries. It is my great honour that on behalf of His Majesty the Emperor of Japan, I will soon deliver decorations on Dr Rawya al Busaidiya, former Minister of Higher Education, and Harib al Kitani, former CEO of Oman LNG, in recognition of their long-standing contributions towards bilateral ties.

How many visas were issued to Omanis travelling to Japan last year? What are the main purposes of visit?

Except during the challenging times of COVID-



19, nearly 1,000 Omanis travelled to Japan every year. However, the number increased last year. People from Oman normally travel for tourism. Business trips account for 20% of the total visits, for sectors such as automobiles, exports, crude oil and energy. Some also go to Japan to study and there is indeed a growing number of students who are interested in pursuing an academic career in Japan mainly in engineering and natural sciences.

The Embassy of Japan is currently working on introducing short-stay visa waiver for Omani cit-

izens. Once we have the waiver, there will be a welcome impact on Omani travel trends.

Does the Embassy or Government of Japan have any new projects in Oman for 2024?

My first priority is to enhance Japan-Oman defence cooperation and exchanges. Last year, a long-awaited bilateral defence dialogue was held for the first time, and we will keep the momentum this year. Further, as the sultanate is heading to achieve Oman Vision 2040,

Japanese cooperation is now set to come into play full swing. The Embassy is supporting those businesses in line with the vision. We are also looking forward to several upcoming projects in Duqm and Dhofar where we plan to work on green steel market, among many others.

Is there any plan to have a Japanese school in Muscat?

As of now, we have 120 Japanese living in Oman, including children. Japanese children here in Muscat go to either international schools or local schools. But they also have an opportunity to receive Japanese-style education.

Japanese language courses are available for local residents in Muscat. The Oman-Japan Friendship Association resumed the courses last year after a nearly four-year gap. The courses are taught by native professional Japanese teachers.

Can you elaborate on new investments and business exchange between the two countries?

Investments in many businesses are currently being considered, including cooperation in crude oil, LNG, power generation and desalination. Now Japanese companies are also focusing on clean energy, like green hydrogen and its derivatives, ammonia, green steel and so on. The Government of Japan has also been an active supporter of the Green Hydrogen Strategy of Oman.

Tourism is another example. This year, there are plans to kick-start the popular Japanese brand Okura Hotel and Resorts in Oman, which will be the first in the Gulf region. There are also plans to have investments in tourist spots such as the springs in Rustaq. Agriculture and fisheries will be promising sectors for cooperation too.

Some projects already have tangible results, like Dana Eggs from Gulf International Poultry Farm in Ibri, which won Oman's Most Trusted Brand Award in 2023.

How do people-to-people relations between the two countries fare?

We have always had a great relationship between people of the two countries. Yamada Miki, former State Minister of Environment, came to attend a symposium recently. Also, there have been delegations including government ones in diplomatic, defence, economic, academic and archaeology, among many other fields. We always aim to expand and have a diversified human connection. On the cultural front, we are witnessing an enhanced engagement. In 2022, theatre performers, the music band of the Ground Self-Defence Force and calligraphers came to fascinate people in Oman.

Recently, we also had a sushi exhibition that attracted people from all walks of life, regardless of age.

Interactions among athletes - both amateurs and professionals - have promoted sports exchange through competitions including football, table tennis and field hockey.

H E Dr Khalfan al Shuaili, Minister of Housing and Urban Planning, and Rear Admiral Ali Abdullah al Shidi made a trip recently to Japan and promote people-to-people contact. A high-ranking delegation is preparing for Expo 2025 Osaka and we look forward to more Omanis visiting Japan. There is also great mutual respect between the Imperial Family of Japan and the Royal Family of Oman. Warm contacts between the two will keep boosting our long-standing bilateral ties that are over 52 years old.

NCSI conducts opinion poll on children's use of social media

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) has launched an opinion poll aimed at establishing a national framework for addressing social media usage among children.

Continuing till February 20, the survey aims to identify the most commonly used apps by children, gauge the extent to which families monitor their usage of these platforms, assess



their impact on children's behaviour, determine the areas where social media apps are most utilised, and establish appropriate age guidelines for their usage.

The survey will aid in the de-

velopment of national plans and programmes to regulate children's social media usage, contribute to raising awareness among families about the importance of monitoring their children's online activities, and provide valuable data to policymakers regarding children's on-line behaviour.

The survey sample consists of approximately 2,500 male and female citizens aged 18 and older from various governorates of diverse educational backgrounds.

Tender floated for dam in Liwa, 60% of Wadi Khous Dam complete

Our Correspondent
Muscat

In efforts to enhance investments in the agricultural sector, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources (MAFWR) is inviting local companies to construct a dam in North Batinah.

An official at MAFWR said, "The ministry has floated a tender to construct a protection dam in Wadi al Zahimi in the wilayat of Liwa, North Batinah."

By bolstering the nation's water reserves, MAFWR aims to further support farmers seeking to be self-sufficient. This initiative is part of the ministry's broader strategy, which has already seen the development of several dams across the sultanate.

According to MAFWR, the country grapples with a deficit of 316mn m³ of water annually. The



increasing strain on the available 1,318mn m³ of renewable water - with the agricultural sector accounting for around 83% of the nation's yearly water needs - underscores the urgency of such projects.

Oman has constructed 181 dams of which 63 are underground feeders, 115 surface storage facilities and three protective dams, all aimed at improving

water security.

60% of Wadi Khous Dam complete

MAFWR has also announced that construction work of the Wadi Khous Dam in Fida in the wilayat of Dhank, Dhahirah, is on schedule with 60% of the project complete.

The project, a collaborative effort between civil bodies and the community and costing an estimated RO125,000, is being carefully supervised by MAFWR.

Project supervisor Saif bin Ali al Zaidi highlighted the adherence to ministry specifications throughout the construction process. "Specialists have been conducting direct field follow-ups to ensure the work aligns with the highest quality standards," he stated.

The dam site in a mountainous area was selected after thorough testing to ensure feasibility

and effectiveness in meeting its intended objectives.

Zaidi pointed out the communities that will benefit directly from the dam upon its completion. These include the inhabitants of Wadi Fada, Wadi Khous (the project's location), the town of Dot and areas in the centre of Dhank.

The dam is 60m long, 14m wide and 8m tall, with capacity to hold 150,000m³ of water. The dam will form a 1.3km lake.

"The dam will play a crucial role in replenishing aflaj and groundwater reservoirs, significantly improving irrigation for farms and orchards in the valley," Zaidi explained.

The objectives of building the Wadi Khous Dam project are to bolster water resources and support agricultural activities in the region, ensuring sustainable development and prosperity for its communities.



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Tender Conditions:

- Interested Bidders shall send an Expression of Interest (EOI) to tenders@duqmquarries.om. The last date to receive the Expression of Interest (EOI) is 26th Feb 2024 at 04:00 p.m. The bidders shall mention the Tender Name and Tender Number in the Expression of Interest (EOI).
- Proposals shall be submitted in two separate envelopes (Technical and Commercial) sealed with red wax and addressed to the Honorable Audit Committee Chairman at Duqm Quarries Company. The Number and Name of the Tender shall be written on the outside, provided that the name of the bidder or what he refers to is not written on the envelope.
- A bank guarantee or certified check from one of the banks operating in the Sultanate shall be attached to the bid, at a value of 1% of the value of the bid, and it shall be valid for 90 days. Bids that do not meet the guarantee will not be considered.
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General Arab Insurance Federation meet proposes coverage of natural disasters

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The 34th Conference of General Arab Insurance Federation (GAIF), which commenced on Monday in Muscat, recommended that the insurance sector in the region works on coverage to mitigate natural calamities.

Addressing the opening day of the three-day conference, Chakib Abouzaid, Secretary-General of GAIF, said the calamities that struck the Arab region in 2023 exposed the lack of insurance coverage. "If we exclude one or two cases, all Arab countries remain exposed to natural catastrophes without the minimum

The calamities that struck the Arab region in 2023 exposed the lack of insurance coverage, calling for a radical change

CHAKIB ABOUZAID

insurance coverage," he said.

"Financial inclusion and sustainability are no longer an intellectual luxury, but rather a necessity and a national duty and social responsibility for us. This



calls for a radical change and ensuring that we provide healthcare coverage for everyone, develop agricultural insurance, enhance microinsurance, work on creating coverage to mitigate natural

catastrophes, and ensure decent retirement pension through insurance and savings."

Hosted by Oman Insurance Association in collaboration with GAIF under the auspices of H H Dr Kamil bin Fahd bin Mahmoud al Said, Secretary-General of Secretariat-General of the Council of Ministers, the conference is seeing participation of over 2,200 industry professionals.

The theme of this year's conference - 'For a more sustainable and comprehensive Arab insurance industry: Engaging in the artificial intelligence revolution' - underscores the sector's ambition to integrate advanced technological innovations.

Highlighting the significant growth opportunities within Arab economies for the insurance sector, Ahmed al Maamari, Executive Vice-President of Capital Market Authority, pointed out the current underutilisation of the sector in contributing to the gross domestic product of regional countries, attributing this to a substantial protection gap from risks such as climate change, natural disasters and health issues.

Maamari emphasised that the existing gap indicates vast opportunities for the sector's expansion alongside the economic developments in the region, which necessitate enhanced insurance services.

Mustafa Ahmed Salman, Chairman of Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry's Finance and Insurance Committee, drew attention to the need of strengthening ties and cooperation within the Arab insurance markets. He noted the promising outlook of Oman's insurance market, highlighting its rapid growth and significant contribution to the nation's GDP, which stood at 1.23% in 2022. Growth in insurance premiums grew 13% year-on-year, with the capital of insurance increasing 8.46% from 2021.

The conference shed light on the Arab insurance sector's growth, which has kept pace with eco-

nomic developments in the region. According to the Arab Monetary Fund, the total value of the insurance market in Arab countries exceeded US\$40.9bn at the end of 2021, marking a growth of 1.8% from the previous year.

However, the insurance premium to GDP ratio in these countries remains low at 1.9%, indicating the need for continued development efforts in the sector.

"This edition of the conference continues the dialogue on fostering cooperation and empowering the insurance sector to support broader developmental goals, with particular focus on embracing digital transformation and AI," Salman added.

Ain al Kasfa hot spring project complete

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Development of the popular Ain al Kasfa tourist site in Rustaq, South Batinah, known for its natural hot springs, is complete.

An announcement to this effect was made by Dr Yahya Suleiman al Nadabi, Wali of Rustaq.

Costing RO400,000, the development includes 14 diverse projects to enhance the site's appeal to tourists and provide amenities.

The site includes swimming pools, restaurants and cafes, expanded parking facilities and a heritage market, among other attractions. "These upgrades are



poised to make Ain al Kasfa hot springs, renowned for their therapeutic sulphur content, even more appealing to tourists," Nadabi said.

He informed that the Governor's Office of South Batinah and the Ministry of Heritage and

Tourism collaborated extensively on the project.

"With its improved services and facilities ensuring an enjoyable experience, the project will attract a large number of visitors, further bolstering the site's status as a prime tourist destination

and promoting economic growth."

In June 2023, Falha Investment Company signed four memoranda of understanding (MoUs) to advance the development of Ain al Kasfa.

The agreements were signed with Le Furo Tokyo Company, renowned for its expertise in extracting minerals from hot springs; specialist constructors New Golden Solutions from Iran; Kalout Company and Al Bahja Group.

Falha Investment Company aims to introduce world-class hot spring facilities in Oman, and the collaboration with Le Furo Tokyo will enable it to set up a mineral extraction centre in Ain

al Kasfa.

New Golden Solutions undertook the task of designing and developing the Ain al Kasfa project, ensuring its alignment with sustainable principles and harmonious integration with the surrounding natural environment in the wilayat.

For marketing, an MoU was signed with Kalout Company, a global marketer of hot springs that attracts tourists seeking the therapeutic benefits of such natural springs.

The MoU with Al Bahja Group focused on maximising the local value of the governorate through optimal utilisation of the heritage and antiquities present in the area.

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Indian expats appeal for NEET exam centre restoration in Oman

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Indian expatriate community in Oman, spearheaded by the Kairali Oman group, has raised concerns with H E Amit Narang, Indian Ambassador to Oman, regarding discontinuation of the NEET examination centre in Oman and other GCC countries.

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

A centre was established at Indian School Muscat in 2022, a significant achievement that followed years of persistent requests from Indian parents residing in Oman.

The establishment of the NEET centre was a culmination of numerous memorandums submitted to members of the Indian Parliament and concerted efforts by community groups representing the Indian diaspora worldwide.

Rajya Sabha members Elamanam Kareem and John Brittas highlighted the issue in the In-

Sudden discontinuation of the NEET examination centres in the Gulf region has left many expatriate families facing financial strain, exacerbated by the rising cost of travel

dian Parliament, which led to the opening of examination centres in Muscat and other GCC countries.

Sudden discontinuation of the NEET examination centres in the Gulf region has left many expatriate families facing financial strain, exacerbated by the rising cost of travel. With online registration for NEET already underway, the abrupt decision has caused considerable distress among students in Oman preparing for the exams.

A delegation of parents and members of Kairali Oman met H E Narang to express their concerns and urge the immediate reinstatement of the NEET exam centre in Oman.

'Al Zeeg' wins award for Best Social Documentary in India

Muscat - The Omani documentary *Al Zeeg* was awarded Best Social Documentary at the Asian Talents International Film Festival held in Aurangabad, India, from February 15 to 18.

The festival saw participation of over 700 films from around the world, showcasing a diverse array of cinematic talent.

Earlier, *Al Zeeg* won Best Documentary Award at the Mumbai International Film Festival in November 2023, underscoring

the film's exceptional quality and its resonance with audiences and critics alike.

Directed by Salah al Hadrami and produced by Oman Film Society, *Al Zeeg* delves into the centuries-old tradition of sugarcane cultivation in Oman. It is a compelling narrative of the challenges faced in producing sugarcane syrup and explores the broader human, economic and social implications of this agricultural activity.

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PRE/24/039	Construction of Water Stagnation Solution at Al Amirat	09/03/2024	31/03/2024
PRE/24/040	Roads Paving at A' Seeb	09/03/2024	31/03/2024
PRE/24/047	Supply & Installation of Street Lights with Control Panel at Muscat Governorate	09/03/2024	31/03/2024
PRE/24/048	Consultancy Services for Carrying out Road Safety Audit on Al-Jabal Street	09/03/2024	31/03/2024
PRE/24/050	Consultancy Services for Advertising & Commercial Signs	09/03/2024	31/03/2024

1- Bidders shall submit their offers electronically.

2- Clarification and Support:

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*Rates as on February 19
Source: xe.com

BRIEFS

China signs 40 currency swap agreements

The People's Bank of China (PBOC), the country's central bank, has signed bilateral currency swap agreements with more than 40 foreign central banks or monetary authorities, according to a PBOC report.

At present, 31 bilateral currency swap agreements are in force, with a total scale of about 4.16tn yuan (about \$586bn), the report said.

Bilateral currency swaps between central banks are financing arrangements in which one country's central bank can exchange its own currency for another.

The swap funds can be used to support bilateral trade and investment activities, helping save exchange costs and reduce exchange rate risks.

Voltamp Energy forms JV for manufacturing power transformers in Saudi

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman-based Voltamp Energy Company, the largest power and distribution transformer manufacturer in the GCC region, has signed a joint venture (JV) agreement with Saudi-based Al Sharif Holding Group to establish a new company for manufacturing high-voltage power transformers in Saudi Arabia.

Voltamp Energy's new JV plant in Saudi Arabia will be established with an investment of RO9.5mn and will manufacture high-voltage 132kV class power transformers, according to a disclosure submitted to the Muscat Stock Exchange by Voltamp Energy on Monday.

Al Sharif Holding is a well-known Saudi group and a market leader in energy solutions with operations spreading all over the Middle East, Asia, Africa, and Europe.

Voltamp Energy said that the construction work for the transformer manufacturing facility began immediately after signing



Voltamp Energy's new manufacturing plant in Saudi Arabia will be established with an investment of RO9.5mn and will manufacture high-voltage 132kV class power transformers

the joint venture agreement. Production is expected to begin at the beginning of 2026, the company added.

"This is a strategic initiative aimed at expanding and strengthening the base of commercial operations, which will lead to the opening of a wide range of benefits for the group and achieving business growth and sustainability," Voltamp Energy said.

"Any developments or other

information about this project will be disclosed in the future," the company added.

In another disclosure on Monday, Voltamp Energy also announced that it has completed the successful qualification of power transformers with Dubai Electricity and Water Authority (DEWA) for the power transformers up to 132kV.

"The qualification process [for DEWA] represents a milestone in the demand for

Voltamp's distinguished products in manufacturing transformers and various technical products and opens a large business potential to cater to the ever-growing demand for electricity in the region," the company added.

Voltamp Energy is a prominent Omani company operating in the power sector, specialising in the manufacturing of power transmission and distribution products..

Qatar to boost petrochemical capacity to 14mn tonnes by 2026

Doha, Qatar – Qatar started the construction of a petrochemical complex that is set to drive the Gulf country's annual petrochemical production capacity to about 14mn tonnes by the end of 2026, QatarEnergy said Monday.

In his address at the launch ceremony, Qatari Energy Minister and CEO of state-owned QatarEnergy, Saad Sherida al-Kaabi, said the \$6bn Ras Laffan Petrochemical Complex at a site located 80km north of Doha in Qatar is the largest investment in the history of QatarEnergy in the country's petrochemicals sector.

Emir of Qatar Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al Thani laid the foundation stone for the Ras Laffan Petrochemical Complex, one of the largest in the world.

"There is no doubt that this is an important landmark in QatarEnergy's downstream expansion strategy, as it will reinforce our integrated position as a global energy player and generate significant eco-



Saad Sherida al-Kaabi

nomics benefits for the country," Kaabi said.

Qatar's ethylene production capacity will expand by more than 40% thanks to the complex, which has an ethylene cracker with a 2.1mn tonnes annual capacity – the largest in the Middle East and among the biggest in the world.

The complex also includes two polyethylene trains with a combined annual output of 1.7mn tonnes of High-Density Polyethylene (HDPE) polymer products, raising Qatar's overall production by about 50%, the statement said.

Anadolu Agency

Oil prices drop amid concerns over US economic downturn

Muscat – Oil prices declined on Monday as protracted concerns over the US economy and likely delays in the Federal Reserve's (Fed) interest rate cut negatively impacted market sentiment over oil demand growth in the world's largest oil-consuming country.

The international benchmark crude Brent traded at \$82.93 per barrel, a 0.65% decrease from the closing price of \$83.47 a barrel in the previous trading session on Friday.

The US benchmark, West Texas Intermediate (WTI), traded at the same time at \$77.89 per barrel, down 0.72% from Friday's close of \$78.46 per

barrel.

Oil prices faced a downturn at the start of the week, driven by concerns that the Fed might postpone lowering its interest rates following indicators of recent macroeconomic data and contrary to previous expectations.

Recent figures from the US Commerce Department have compounded these concerns, with January's retail sales data revealing a significant drop. Sales fell by 0.8% to \$700.3bn, marking a more considerable decline than the forecasted 0.2%.

This downturn in consumer spending is seen as a potential indicator of a broader economic

slowdown, which could influence the Fed's monetary policy decisions.

Investors are awaiting the minutes of the Fed's latest Federal Open Market Committee (FOMC) meeting, set to be released on Wednesday, for any hints regarding the central bank's future actions.

Further adding to concerns over the country's economy and oil demand trajectory, the Energy Information Administration (EIA) last week reported an unexpected surge in crude oil inventories. Surpassing analyst predictions of an 8.5mn barrel rise, the data suggests a potential oversupply in the market that could continue to exert downward pressure on oil prices.

Agencies

Sohar International joins Estidamah to set up Omani Business Growth Fund

Muscat – Sohar International Bank has joined hands with the National Program for Fiscal Sustainability and Financial Sector Development (Estidamah) and the British Embassy to initiate the establishment of the Omani Business Growth Fund.

The collaboration aims to strengthen the financial sector, enhance competitiveness, and expand access to tailored financing options in line with global best practices. The overarching goal of this initiative is to stimulate market growth and foster economic diversification, supporting Oman's long-term vision for sustainable development and economic prosperity.

The official signing ceremony, held within the framework of the 10th meeting of the Omani-



British Strategic Group, symbolises the unwavering commitment of both local and international stakeholders towards the prosperity of Oman.

H E Nasser bin Khamis al Jashmi, President of the Tax Authority, led the Omani delegation, while Lord Gerry Grimstone headed the British delegation. Furthermore, the presence of H E Dr Khamees bin Saif al Jabri, President of Oman Vision 2040

Implementation Follow-Up Unit, underscores the importance of this initiative in advancing the nation's long-term objectives.

H E Mahmood bin Abdullah bin Ahmed al-Owaini, Secretary General of the Ministry of Finance, alongside Dr Liane Saunders, the designated Ambassador of the UK to Oman, and Khalil Salim al Hedaifi, Chief Government and Private Banking Officer, have officially endorsed

the letter of intent for the establishment of the Omani Business Growth Fund.

In a press release, Khalil Salim al Hedaifi, Chief Government and Private Banking Officer at Sohar International, said, "This represents a significant milestone for Sohar International, reaffirming our unwavering commitment to driving Oman's economic development forward. These strategic alliances underscore our steadfast pledge to support local businesses and entrepreneurs, enabling Omani enterprises to flourish in both domestic and international markets, thus paving the way for boundless opportunities. Together, we aim to ignite unprecedented growth and cultivate lasting economic prosperity in the sultanate."

COMMENTARY

Smarter together: Singapore and Oman's path to smart city excellence

The Republic of Singapore and the Sultanate of Oman, both rich in distinct cultural and geographical identities, are united in their transformative journey to redefine urban living through their smart city initiatives. This collaboration, deeply rooted in shared historical ties and common visions for the future, is exemplified by the Sultan Haitham City project in Muscat, which is on track for completion by 2045.

One of the project's highlights will be Singapore Street, a reciprocal gesture to Muscat Street in Singapore's Kampong Glam, symbolising the profound bond and mutual respect between the two nations.

The unveiling of Singapore Street during His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq's state visit to Singapore, from December 13 to 15, 2023, stands as a testament to the robust bilateral ties between the countries. His endorsement of "excellent relations" and the pursuit of strategic partnerships, particularly within the green energy sector, harmonises with Singapore's progres-

sive environmental policies, indicating a shared vision that extends beyond traditional diplomatic engagement into substantial, actionable collaborations.

The historical and cultural connections between Singapore and Oman, having been cultivated over centuries initially through maritime trade, have blossomed into a broad spectrum of collaborative ventures today. The recent elevation of consulates-general to embassies, along with ongoing governmental and business exchanges, signals a strengthening commitment to a shared strategic vision. The Singapore-Oman Strategic Dialogue, launched in December 2022, marks a significant milestone in this growing partnership.

Culturally, Singapore and Oman share a commitment to the preservation and celebration of their heritage. The redesigned Muscat Street in Singapore, adorned with its elegant granite arches and Omani art, is more than an architectural feat; it serves as a cultural bridge, inviting residents and visitors to immerse themselves in a tapestry of Omani and Singaporean traditions.

Economically, the two countries showcase their readiness to learn from each other's successes and challenges. Oman's strategic position in the Middle East provides Singapore with access to new markets and insights. In contrast, Singapore's expertise in technology and urban planning offers Oman a model for their smart city developments. The



DR GRAHAM ONG-WEBB

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memorandums of understanding recently signed in culture, youth, and economic cooperation exemplify significant strides toward a symbiotic partnership.

Innovative measures are pivotal in amplifying the collaborative efforts between Singapore and Oman. Joint Innovation Hubs could act as incubators for

technological and entrepreneurial innovation, fostering collaboration on smart city solutions. Expanding cultural exchange programmes would deepen the understanding and appreciation of each nation's heritage and contemporary societal dynamics.

Educational partnerships in crucial future-city domains like technology,

environmental sciences, and urban planning could equip a skilled workforce for the smart city projects of tomorrow. Similarly, sustainable energy joint ventures, focusing on green hydrogen development, would affirm Oman's commitment to net-zero emissions and align with Singapore's environmental goals.

Smart tourism initiatives have the potential to blend technology with heritage, curating tourist experiences that are both enlightening and engaging. By employing modern technology, such as virtual reality and intelligent navigation systems, these projects could safeguard cultural legacies while enhancing the visitor experience.

Healthcare presents another area ripe for collaboration, with both nations facing the challenges of ageing populations and the rise of chronic diseases. Collaborative medical research can investigate public health issues and pharmaceutical advancements, utilising the combined expertise and state-of-the-art facilities of both countries.

Exchanges of medical professionals would enable the sharing of best practices in advanced medical treatments and healthcare management. Pooling collective knowledge in medical technology, Singapore and Oman can create partnerships that bring together research institutions and start-ups, focusing on areas like telemedicine, AI in diagnostics, and sophisticated health-

care management systems to elevate patient care.

Together, the development of smart healthcare facilities, drawing on Singapore's experience in efficient healthcare systems, coupled with Public Health Initiatives promoting preventive care and wellness, could be tailored to the unique needs of each country's populace.

In navigating the complexities of the 21st century, the partnership between Singapore and Oman stands as a beacon of international cooperation, illustrating how countries with diverse backgrounds can find commonality and pursue shared objectives. Fortified by historical ties, cultural respect, and mutual aspirations, this bond is more than a diplomatic success – it is a symbol of visionary and collaborative leadership on the world stage.

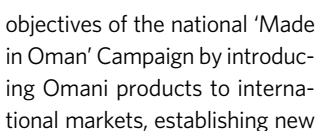
The views and opinions expressed in this column are solely those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of Muscat Daily or Apex Media Publication

Muscat - Oman, represented by the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn), has begun its participation in Gulfood 2024 - one of the world's premier food and hospitality expos.

Held from February 19 to 23 at Dubai World Trade Centre in the United Arab Emirates, Gulfood 2024 features an impressive lineup of over 5,500 exhibitors eyeing lucrative business opportunities, with deals expected to surpass \$12bn.

"The sultanate, represented by Madayn, is participating at Gulfood for the twelfth consecutive year to promote Omani products, explore new markets, and expand outreach. The event provides an excellent opportunity for Omani industries to showcase and promote their top-quality products to Gulfood attendees from across the globe," said Hamood al Balushi, Assistant Director General at Madayn.

Balushi added, "Through its presence at Gulfood 2024, Madayn also aims to align with the



distribution channels, and tapping into diverse consumer segments on both regional and global fronts."

The sultanate's pavilion at Gulfood 2024 features Madayn, Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion,

Oman Chamber of Commerce
and Industry, Areej Vegetable
Oils and Derivatives, Oman
Foodstuff Factory (Al Mudhish),

Food World for Industry, Omani Euro Food Industries, Omani Gulf Food Company, A'Saffa Foods, Unique Food Solutions (Zaheb), Luban Foods (Delicio), and Ataya Trading and Industrial Company (Yamama).

Balushi noted that the participating companies will have the opportunity to display their prod-

to further expand their businesses internationally.

Gulfood 2024 sheds light on innovations in agri-tech, the increasing use of AI in food production, reducing food loss and waste, public-private partnerships, and investment in alternative proteins, which can all help reduce food deprivation and feed

Oman's pavilion at Gulfood 2024 features Madayn, Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and several private sector companies

ucts and the latest production technologies to visitors, as well as gain valuable insights into the products and services of their counterparts in the food and hospitality sector, including advancements in production and packaging technologies.

He also emphasised that the companies will actively seek out new agents, contracts, and deals.

the world through to 2050 and beyond.

At Gulfood 2024, international policymakers and F&B industry leaders will share their insights on global food systems, and how they can be transformed to feed an ever-growing global population, while simultaneously building resilience and mitigating the impacts of climate change.

Dhahran, Saudi Arabia – SpaceKnow, a New York-based technology company dedicated to transforming space data into actionable intelligence has announced the launch of SpaceGuardian in Saudi Arabia.

SpaceGuardian is the first approved company dedicated to satellite imagery and AI analysis to launch in Saudi Arabia.

Majid Alghaslan, Chairman and CEO of Front End Limited Company and Founder and Partner of SpaceGuardian, and Jerry Javornicky, CEO and Co-Founder of SpaceKnow entered into a joint venture (JV) agreement to launch SpaceGuardian in Saudi Arabia at the International Petroleum Technology Conference (IPTC) 2024 that took place in Dhahran.

The agreement marks a significant leap forward in leveraging satellite imagery and AI analysis to empower various sectors across the kingdom. SpaceGuardian specialises in applying machine learning AI on

satellite imagery to facilitate economic activities, energy and commodities analysis, environmental assessments, construction progress tracking, and more.

Speaking on the occasion, Majid Alghaslan, said, "The historic launch of SpaceGuardian marks a pivotal moment for the entire technological and industrial landscape of Saudi Arabia. As the inaugural company dedicated to satellite imagery and AI analysis, this partnership embraces innovation and progress that will propel Saudi Arabia into a new era of digital transformation."

Jerry Javornicky, CEO and Co-founder of SpaceKnow remarked, "Majid Alghaslan has a long history of bringing the most innovative companies into the Kingdom, so for us, collaborating with Majid was the ideal way to enter Saudi Arabia. We aim to revolutionise the AI-powered geospatial analytics market and to bring our technology to multiple sectors, starting with infras-

tructure monitoring, carbon sequestration, and security applications."

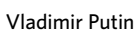
SpaceGuardian's innovative approach to satellite imagery analysis and AI integration offers a myriad of applications across diverse sectors. By harnessing machine learning algorithms, the company provides comprehensive insights into various facets of economic activities, energy commodities, defense, intelligence, environmental sustainability, construction, and real estate. This tailored approach facilitates informed decision-making processes for stakeholders in each sector.

"This strategic collaboration will not only accelerate the kingdom's economic growth and diversification efforts including driving innovation and fostering local talent, but also contribute to the development of the burgeoning space sector and support the establishment of a robust space agency in Saudi Arabia", Majid added.

Moscow, Russia – Russian President Vladimir Putin said starting the Nord Stream pipeline that remained intact would take one week, but Germany is showing no interest in this.

He made the comment in an interview with All-Russia State Television and Radio Broadcasting Company journalist Pavel Zarubin, according to a fragment that the journalist posted to Telegram.

"In the end, everything depends solely on the decision of the German government. Nord Stream-2: One pipeline remained intact despite the terrorist attack," the president said.



"Can we restart Nord Stream-2?
We can!"

"It would take a week. But they don't want to," Putin went on to say.

The president suggested that the West stopped buying Rus-

sian gas in the expectation the country would collapse faster than "irreversible" harm would be done to Western economies.

"But it's them that are effectively starting to have irreversible processes. The manufacturing industry is moving over to other countries, including the US, where more favourable conditions were created and energy resources are cheaper. That's because they need to liquefy it, then ship it across the ocean, then regasify it again. All this brings up the cost," Putin stated.

"We, thank God, are coping," he added.

TASS

شركة الفجر العالمية

AL FAJAR AL ALAMIA CO. SAOG

PO BOX 78, QURUM CITY CENTRE, PC 102, SULTANATE OF OMAN

Group's Unaudited Financial Results for the six months ended 31 December 2023

Chairman's Report

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I am pleased to present to you the report on the activities and unaudited financial results of the company for the 2nd quarter ended 31 December 2023.

1. Operating Results

The Group's total revenue for the six-month period ended 31 December 2023 declined by 16% to RO 4,520 million compared to the previous year's revenue of RO 5,388 million. The decline in revenue was mainly attributed to the UAE operations, which experienced a general slowdown. However, the revenue from the Oman operation during the reporting period was higher than its level in the corresponding period of the previous year.

The financial results of the parent company for the first half of the current fiscal year demonstrate the stability and positivity of operations in Oman. The company made an operating profit of RO 0.212 million, a significant improvement from the operating loss of RO 0.610 million during the same period last year. The Group's consolidated operating loss also decreased from RO 2.165 million to RO 1.066 million for the same period. Although the consolidated results still show an operational loss, the performance has shown positive progress each quarter. We firmly believe that the worst is behind us.

The Group recorded a consolidated loss after interest and tax of RO 1.974 million for the six months ended 31 December 2023 against the net loss of RO 2.933 million in the same period of the previous year.

2. Operations

The Group's revenue decreased by 16% YoY due to lower revenue from the UAE compared to the previous year. Although the Group's revenue in Oman started to reach the break-even point with the arrangement of explosives raw materials, the total revenue is still below the previous year due to lower revenue contribution from the UAE.

Oman's drilling and blasting industry is expanding due to numerous infrastructure projects expected to commence in the first half of 2024. The Group aims to enhance its capabilities to meet the growing demand.

Currently, the company is relocating the 500TPH Metso Crusher from Aswad Quarry to Awam Minerals, with completion expected in Q1 2024. This will undoubtedly help the Group achieve its monthly production goal of 150K tons or more, up from the current 70K-80K tons per month. This will contribute to revenue growth at the Group level and support cash flow commitments.

The D&B industry in the United Arab Emirates is facing serious challenges due to delays in the start of infrastructure projects that were signed earlier. To remain competitive in the market, the organization is now strengthening its resources.

The explosives production facility in Siji – Fujairah is in the final stages toward completion and is expected to be completed in the first half of 2024. This will undoubtedly strengthen the Group's position in the UAE market for drilling, blasting, and explosives.

3. Health, Safety and the Environment

Your Company is operated in a safe and efficient manner in strict compliance with the highest safety standards and in accordance with the prevailing Royal Oman Police and UAE authorities Explosives Rules and Regulations.

No accidents or environmental incidents were reported during the period ended 31 December 2023.

Your Company was in compliance with the Code of Corporate Governance and other applicable rules and regulations during the 6 months ended 31 December 2023.

4. Future Outlook

As mentioned earlier, we are pleased to inform you that the ANFO production facility and raw materials depots are expected to be completed by June 2024. These facilities will serve to supply the Drilling and Blasting sector in the UAE, which we believe will significantly enhance the Group's overall profitability. The completion of this project will be a significant milestone in the company life and will definitely reposition your D&B division in the UAE at the lead again.

Based on current and upcoming projects, we anticipate increased revenue growth in the drilling and blasting divisions in both the Sultanate of Oman and the United Arab Emirates. Moreover, as there is an increasing demand from export markets, we are well-positioned to handle the rising demand from the mining industry.

We expect that the demand and price of gypsum will increase in the upcoming months, enabling the company to generate higher margins and cash flow.

5. Acknowledgements

The Members of the Board wish to record their gratitude to His Majesty Sultan Haithem bin Tariq bin Taimur and the Government of Oman for the successful efforts made to improve development and prosperity within the Country.

The Directors also wish to thank the Royal Oman Police, other Government bodies, our valued customers and Banker for their cooperation and support.

Haythem Mahmood Abd Al-Nabi Macki
Chairman

Consolidated Statement of Comprehensive Income

	GROUP		PARENT	
	31.12.2023 RO.	31.12.2022 RO.	31.12.2023 RO.	31.12.2022 RO.
Revenue	4,520,044	5,387,753	2,045,354	1,526,307
Cost of Sales	(4,787,961)	(6,562,088)	(1,625,146)	(1,815,997)
Gross Profit/(Loss)	(267,917)	(1,174,335)	420,208	(289,690)
Other Income	106,950	64,329	158,268	56,372
Administration & General expenses	(751,638)	(822,614)	(221,524)	(263,179)
Sales & Distribution expenses	(153,823)	(232,885)	(144,205)	(114,367)
Operating Profit/(Loss)	(1,066,428)	(2,165,505)	212,747	(610,864)
Finance charges	(944,756)	(995,829)	(434,074)	(558,464)
Profit/(Loss) from Operations	(2,011,184)	(3,161,334)	(221,327)	(1,169,328)
Share of loss from Investment in an associate	(36,431)	-	(36,431)	-
Profit/(Loss) before taxation	(2,047,615)	(3,161,334)	(257,758)	(1,169,328)
Taxation	73,844	228,122	22,427	175,302
Profit/(Loss) and total comprehensive income	(1,973,771)	(2,933,212)	(235,331)	(994,026)

Consolidated Statement of Financial Position

	GROUP		PARENT	
	As at 31.12.2023 RO.	As at 31.12.2022 RO.	As at 31.12.2023 RO.	As at 31.12.2022 RO.
Fixed Assets	10,739,685	11,059,122	487,407	596,285
Intangible Assets	3,895,620	3,888,316	-	114
Goodwill	22,228,249	22,228,249	579,717	579,717
Investment in Subsidiary	-	-	36,972,953	36,996,677
Investment in associates	735,242	829,047	735,242	829,047
Right of Use of Assets	342,271	780,450	74,695	91,969
Deferred Tax	1,310,224	1,164,362	355,714	252,107
Current Assets	8,724,261	12,585,916	14,874,977	12,216,361
Total Assets	47,975,552	52,535,462	54,080,705	51,562,277
Non-current Liabilities	25,378,017	23,952,107	24,004,451	22,443,437
Current Liabilities	10,718,477	11,517,507	5,762,794	4,051,845
Total Liabilities	36,096,494	35,469,614	29,767,245	26,495,282
Net Assets	11,879,058	17,065,848	24,313,460	25,066,995
Shareholders' Fund				
Share Capital	4,933,025	4,933,025	4,933,025	4,933,025
Legal Reserve	1,436,224	1,436,224	1,340,068	1,340,068
Special Reserve	579,717	579,717	579,717	579,717
Share premium account	13,550,576	13,550,576	13,550,576	13,550,576
Retained earnings	(8,620,484)	(3,433,694)	3,910,074	4,663,609
Total Shareholders' equity	11,879,058	17,065,848	24,313,460	25,066,995

Al Mouj Muscat, be'ah, Wakud forge alliance for waste management

In a stride towards environmental stewardship and innovative waste management, Al Mouj Muscat signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Oman's waste management authority be'ah, and biodiesel producer Wakud to launch a Pilot Project aimed at converting Used Cooking Oil (UCO) from its residences and commercial outlets into biodiesel.

Residents of Al Mouj Muscat will be equipped with special bottles and funnels, facilitating the safe and efficient collection of UCOs, thereby contributing directly to the production of biodiesel. The collected UCO will be processed into green fuel at Wakud's advanced biofuel facility in Khazaen Economic City, symbolising significant advancements in sustainable waste management, recycling efforts, circular economy developments in Oman.

Nasser al Sheibani, CEO of Al Mouj Muscat, said, "This partnership with be'ah and Wakud underscores our commitment to sustainability and our vision for a greener future. By turning waste into energy, we are contributing to the creation of a circular economy that benefits our community and the environment."

As one of the fastest-growing alternative fuels globally, biodiesel aids sectors such as trucking, transport, shipping, and construction in dramatically reducing their carbon footprint. It provides a cost-competitive so-



lution that supports the achievement of climate goals, demonstrating the practical value of sustainable energy sources. As such, it represents a pivotal element for Oman to reach its 2050 Net Zero emissions goals.

Emphasising the extensive potential of these partnerships, Kumail Ahmed al Lawati, vice president of Business Development at be'ah, said, "These agreements mark concrete progress in be'ah's mission to

This partnership with be'ah and Wakud underscores our commitment to sustainability and our vision for a greener future

NASSER AL SHEIBANI

implement its strategy and contribute to the realisation of Oman Vision 2040. Our collaborations are crucial instruments that we will leverage fully to uphold our dedication to sustainable resource management and envi-

ronmental stewardship."

Lawati further stated, "The implications of this agreement extend beyond environmental advantages, as it creates fresh opportunities to engage with bio-fuel buyers."

Maher al Habsi, CEO of Wakud, said, "I am proud to announce the signing of this groundbreaking memorandum in the Sultanate of Oman, aligning with our nation's Vision 2040 and commitment to carbon neutrality by 2050. Our goal is to promote waste recycling and produce eco-friendly biofuels, safeguarding both the environment and community health. This partnership exemplifies the potential of local companies to drive positive change, and we thank the management of Al Mouj Muscat and be'ah for their trust and support in Wakud's pioneering initiatives."

This tri-party Pilot Project at Al Mouj Muscat hopes achieve more than the conversion of waste into green energy; it also aims to educate residents and retailers on the importance of responsible waste disposal, the broader implications of environmental sustainability, and the value of a circular economy as a driving force for a better future. By promoting practices that minimise waste and repurpose resources, this waste management programme demonstrates how communities can adopt strategies that are environmentally and economically rewarding.



SHABABUNA
PDO commemorated the accomplishments of 117 graduates from its groundbreaking programme 'Shababuna', in an official ceremony held under the patronage of Sayyid Salim bin Musallam al Busaidi Undersecretary of the Ministry of Labour for Human Resources Development



Maisarah Islamic rebrands as Dhofar Islamic

Maisarah Islamic Banking Services, a leading financial institution dedicated to providing Sharia-compliant banking solutions, announces the unveiling of its new rebranding as Dhofar Islamic, with a new visual identity.

The new identity was announced during a ceremony held at the JW Marriott Hotel, Muscat, under the patronage of H E Dr Mohammed bin Said al Maamari, Minister of Endowments and Religious Affairs, in the presence of a number of officials in the Sultanate of Oman and members of the executive management of BankDhofar and Dhofar Islamic.

This strategic move marks a significant milestone in the bank's ten year journey, reflecting a harmonious fusion of heritage and modernity, a press release said.

The new logo represents Dhofar Islamic's evolution from a single star to a galaxy of enhanced capabilities. Each star in the constellation symbolises the bank's core values, emphasising ethical banking, transparency, and customer-centricity. It also reflects the bank's commitment to customers to offer the best in class products and services

This rebranding is more than just a change in name - it is about

redefining the value proposition to its valued customers. This exercise started almost 18 months ago where Dhofar Islamic doubled its branch and ATM/CDM network, enhanced its product propositions and customer offering, trained staff on service values and enhanced digital experience apart from building a strong foundation for wealth offerings

Kamal Uddin al Maraza, GM and chief officer of Dhofar Islamic Banking, said, "Our rebranding to Dhofar Islamic is a forward looking step that reflects our deep connection with the Islamic values. It is not just a change in name."

ISWK holds farewell for class 12 graduates

The students, staff and school management of Indian school Al Wadi Al Kabir bade an emotional farewell to the students of class 12 of the outgoing batch of 2023-24 on February 324 at the senior school premises.

Padmanabhan Ananthan, managing director, Finance and Corporate Services of Bahwan Engineering Group, was the Chief Guest for the evening's programme. Other dignitaries present at the solemn ceremony were Anil Khimji, chief patron, Kiran Asher, founder and group managing director, Al Ansari Trading Enterprise, Alkesh Joshi, assistant executive director of ISWK and ISWK International school management committees, Sachin Toprani, honorary president of the school management committee of ISWK and other guests.

The ceremony commenced with lighting of the auspicious lamp by the chief guest, who was presented a potted plant, followed by a semi classical dance performance by the students.

Ananthan, in his address, offered valuable advice to students and encouraged them to treat every challenge as a learning opportunity. Highlighting the fact that college is not just a place to obtain a degree but an opportunity to gain knowledge, he spelt out the importance of three virtues - hard work, empathy and honesty - which will shape a student as an individual.

D N Rao, principal, on behalf



of the entire school community, extended his best wishes to the outgoing students for their exams. The phrase, 'it is not a departure but a see you later' conveyed a sense of continuity and connection, encouraging students to cherish their memories and stay connected even as they move forward in their lives, he said.

The act of seeking blessings from parents is a meaningful tradition at ISWK. The students were asked to come up on the stage to be blessed by their parents, adding an emotional touch to the farewell ceremony.

Hongqi HS3 redefines luxury in SUV segment

MHD ACERE is proud to announce the launch of the highly anticipated Hongqi HS3, the epitome of luxury, innovation, and performance in the SUV segment.

Crafted with meticulous attention to detail and engineered to exceed expectations, the Hongqi HS3 sets new standards for sophistication, comfort, and driving experience, a press release said.

Every model in the HS3 series is equipped with cutting-edge features designed to enhance convenience, safety, and driving pleasure. Standard features include a reversing camera and cruise control, ensuring seamless manoeuvrability and effortless driving experience in any situation.

Furthermore, high-end models elevate the driving experience with additional features such as 360° panoramic images, transparent chassis images, full-speed adaptive cruise control, automatic parking, and a premium audio experience with 10 Dynaudio speakers.

The Hongqi HS3 boasts the longest, widest, and tallest dimensions in its class, providing unparalleled spaciousness and comfort for occupants. With the highest wheelbase in its segment, the HS3 ensures a smooth and stable ride, making every journey a luxurious experience.

Experience ultimate versatility with the Hongqi HS3's array of customisation options. With five distinct drive modes, drivers can tailor their driving experience to



With its unparalleled features, striking design, and luxurious comfort, the HS3 is not just a vehicle; it's an experience that redefines the very essence of driving

MOHSIN HANI AL BAHRANI

suit their preferences and driving conditions. Additionally, the HS3

offers 12 driver seat adjustment options, ensuring optimal com-

fort and support for every passenger.

Indulge in a sensory experience like no other with the Hongqi HS3's 256 ambient lighting options, allowing passengers to set the mood for any occasion. Whether it's a relaxing evening drive or an exhilarating adventure, the HS3 creates the perfect ambiance to complement every moment.

Mohsin Hani al Bahrani, CEO of MHD ACERE, said, "The HS3 embodies our commitment to excellence, marrying cutting-edge technology with the timeless elegance that defines the Hongqi brand. With its unparalleled features, striking design, and luxurious comfort, the HS3 is not just a vehicle; it's an experience that redefines the very essence of driving."

Geely Cars sets new automobile standards in Oman

Geely Cars, a leading global automotive brand, is revolutionising the Omani automotive market with its exceptional lineup of models.

Whether it's the stylish Emgrand, the luxurious Azkarra, the versatile Okavango, or the compact and sporty Coolray, Geely Cars offers something for everyone, a press release said.

The Emgrand sets the standard for elegance and performance. With its sleek design and refined interior, the Emgrand is perfect for those seeking a sophisticated driving experience. Equipped with advanced safety features, cutting-edge technology, and remarkable fuel efficiency, the Emgrand ensures a comfortable and confident

journey on any road.

For those who crave luxury on the roads, the Azkarra delivers an unparalleled experience. This premium SUV exudes opulence with its exceptional design, lavish interior, and impressive technology.

With its powerful engine options, superior comfort, and state-of-the-art safety features, the Azkarra offers a seamless blend of style, prestige, and performance. Designed for those who value versatility and practicality, the Okavango is a seven-seater SUV that combines spaciousness with modern design.

With its intelligent driving features, ample storage capacity, and advanced entertainment system, the Okavango is the perfect companion for both family trips and thrilling adventures. This SUV effortlessly combines comfort and functionality to redefine the concept of a family vehicle.

Sporty, dynamic, and compact, the Coolray delivers an exhilarating driving experience. Packed with advanced safety



features and cutting-edge technology, this compact SUV is perfect for urban dwellers who desire speed and agility without compromising on comfort.

The Coolray offers state-of-the-art driving assistance systems, making it an ideal choice for those seeking a thrilling and safe journey.

Geely Cars takes pride in its commitment to innovation, continuously pushing the boundaries of automotive technology.

Asia Kitchen debuts in Oman

Asia Kitchen by Mainland China makes its debut in Oman, presenting an authentic Asian street food experience to its patrons.

With a vibrant live kitchen, the restaurant brings together an array of eclectic Asian flavours from regions including Hong Kong, Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, Japan, Korea, Myanmar, and China, a press release said.

Resolute Group, renowned for its culinary expertise and success in the F&B industry, unveiled its latest venture, Asia Kitchen by Mainland China, in Oman on February 6. Situated at the Mall of Oman in Muscat, this opening signifies Asia Kitchen's expansion beyond the United Arab Emirates and underscores the group's dedication to reshaping the gastronomic landscape across the GCC region.

As an extension of Mainland



Asia Kitchen specialises in culinary delights from various corners of the Far East - mainly Chinese and Pan-Asian cuisine

China brand, Asia Kitchen specialises in authentic Chinese and Pan-Asian cuisine. By curating culinary delights from various corners of the Far East, the restaurant promises a dining experience like no other, complete with a lively atmosphere fuelled by its active live kitchen.

ISS valedictory ceremony for class 12 held

Indian School Sur held its valedictory ceremony on February 15, bidding farewell to 55 outgoing class 12 students.

The event was graced by Jami Srinivasa Rao, President of the School Management Committee (SMC), who was the chief guest, besides other dignitaries like Pradeep Kumar A V, convenor, Adv Saeed T P, treasurer, Dr Ramkumar, member, Shabeeb Mohammed, member, Nishreen Basheer, member, Dr S Srinivasan, principal.

Rao congratulated the students on their successful completion of schooling and encouraged them to utilise their acquired knowledge to overcome life's challenges effectively.

Ooredoo launches new HALA+ plans

With HALA+, Ooredoo's revamped Hala base plans, there's no need to worry when it comes to staying in touch with your family and friends in Oman or abroad because of budget constraints.

The upgraded prepaid plans include a data rollover on four-week plans, because why lose your data when you've paid for it? Plus, you can use the 'Roam like Home' feature while visiting other GCC destinations on RO10 and above plans. HALA+ also means more minutes for local calls and access to your favourite socials, including YouTube, Snapchat, Instagram, WhatsApp, X, and Facebook, a

press release said.

New and existing customers can choose from a wide range of one week and, even better value, four-week HALA+ plans. Whether they want a value-packed plan with loads of data or a more modest one, there's something for everyone. Starting from RO4 up to RO25, the revamped HALA+ plans can cover unlimited local calls and up to 75 GB of data.

Customers can also take unused data from one month to the next and their local data and minutes while roaming in GCC destinations, provided they meet specific terms and conditions.



NOTICE AND INVITATION TO ATTEND THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The Board of Directors of SEMBCORP SALALAH POWER & WATER COMPANY SAOG (the "Company") has the pleasure to invite the shareholders to attend the Annual General Meeting, which will be held on Thursday at 03:00 PM on 7 March 2024, via the electronic platform which can be accessed through the website of Muscat Clearing & Depository Company (www.mcd.om) and will be held Online. If the quorum requirement for holding the Annual General Meeting is not fulfilled, a second Annual General Meeting General Meeting shall be held on Monday at 03:00 PM on 11 March 2024, via the electronic platform which can be accessed through the website of Muscat Clearing & Depository Company (www.mcd.om) and will be held Online to discuss the following agenda:

Annual Ordinary General Meeting Agendas:

- To consider and approve the Board of Director's Report for the financial year ended 31 December 2023.
- To consider and approve the Corporate Governance Report for the financial year ended 31 December 2023.
- To consider the Auditor's Report and to approve the Financial Statements (Balance Sheet and Profit and Loss Account) of the Company for the financial year ended 31 December 2023.
- To approve the proposal to distribute cash dividends of Baizas 2.5 per share to the Shareholders who are registered with the MCD as at 1 April 2024.
- To approve the proposal authorizing the Board of Directors to determine and distribute cash dividends to the Company's Shareholders who are registered with the MCD on the 3 November 2024 out of the retained earnings as per the audited financial statements for the financial year ended 31 December 2023, provided that the amount shall not be more than 8 Baizas per share.
- To ratify the payment of sitting fees to the Board of Directors and Sub-Committees for the financial year ended 31 December 2023 and to determine the sitting fees for the financial year ending 31 December 2024.
- To consider and approve directors' remuneration amounting to RO 104,544 for the financial year ended on 31 December 2023.
- To disclose the transactions that the Company entered into with related parties during the financial year ended 31 December 2023.
- To inform the meeting of the donations made to support community services during the financial year ended on 31 December 2023.
- To consider and approve a proposal to spend the total sum of RO 64,000 to support community services during the financial year ending 31 December 2024.
- To approve the report on the evaluation of the performance of the Board of Directors.
- To elect one member to the Board of Directors of the Company to fill the vacant seat on the Board from Shareholders or non-Shareholders. Any person who wishes to nominate himself/herself to the Board of Directors should complete a nomination form available with the Company. The nomination form can be obtained from the Company's head office. The completed forms should be delivered to the Company minimum five working days prior to the AGM date. Nomination forms received after 5 pm on Thursday, 29 February 2024 shall not be accepted.
- To appoint the auditors of the Company for the financial year ending 31 December 2024 and determine their fees.

According to the Company's Articles of Association and the controls for holding General Meetings using modern technology issued by the capital market authority, we would like to draw your attention to the following:

- Legal person, exclusively, has the right to delegate a natural person to attend the General Meeting and vote on its behalf through technical means, provided that this natural person has an investor number in MCDC.
- Voting on any of the agenda items begins no more than three days before the date of the General Meeting until the voting process ends on the day of the General Meeting. If the shareholder's shares are increased or decreased, the voting process will be cancelled, and the shareholder will have to vote again on the day of the General Meeting.

For further information please contact on telephone No 93215022 or email: tariq.bashir@sembcorp.com

Chairman
Tan Cheng Guan

Legal Advisor
Al Busaidy, Mansoor Jamal
Barristers and Legal Consultant

External Auditor
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Jeanne Shaheen, co-Chair of the Senate NATO Observer Group

Hungary ‘refuses’ meeting with US senators over Sweden’s NATO bid

Ankara, Turkey - The Hungarian government refused a meeting with US senators in Budapest about Sweden’s accession to NATO, according to media reports.

Jeanne Shaheen, Democrat senator for New Hampshire and co-Chair of the Senate NATO Observer Group, expressed her disappointment in a news conference on Sunday over the move, the Budapest Times reported.

The Democrat senator recalled that Hungary was the last NATO member to not ratify Sweden’s membership.

Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban previously said that the parliament would ratify the bid in the spring session.

The US delegation said they will submit a resolution to Congress to urge Hungary to ratify.

Senators Thom Tillis and Chris Murphy are also part of the delegation.

Hungary became the only NATO ally that has yet to approve Sweden’s membership in the alliance after Turkish parliament ratified the Nordic country’s application on January 23.

The US delegation said they will submit a resolution to Congress to urge Hungary to ratify

Admission of a new member requires the unanimous support of all NATO member states.

Sweden and Finland applied for NATO membership in May 2022 following the start of Russia’s war on Ukraine earlier that year.

Finland joined the alliance as its 31st member in April 2023.

Anadolu Agency

Japan, Ukraine sign around 56 pacts for post-war recovery

Tokyo, Japan - Japan and Ukraine on Monday signed around 56 agreements in a range of fields including post-war recovery.

The agreements were signed during the Japan-Ukraine Conference for Promotion of Economic Growth and Reconstruction in Tokyo.

Addressing the conference, Prime Minister Fumio Kishida said fighting was still going on in Ukraine and ‘that the situation is not easy’, Japanese public broadcaster NHK reported.

Tokyo hosted the one-day conference as the Russia-Ukraine war completes two years this month.

Some 130 officials as well as business representatives from the two sides attended the conference. Kishida, who visited Kyiv last year, stressed that ‘promoting economic reconstruction in Ukraine is an investment for future’. ‘Japan is committed to strongly assisting such efforts with its public and private sectors working together,’ he said.

Ukrainian Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal said: ‘The conference will be the next step for Japan and Ukraine to develop bilateral relations.’

‘By working together, the two countries can turn current challenges into an opportunity for growth and prosperity,’ he added.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky cancelled his scheduled video address to the conference, with no reason provided, according to Tokyo-based Kyodo News.

The two sides agreed to work in the areas including infrastruc-



Ukraine's PM Denys Shmyhal (left) and Japanese PM Fumio Kishida (right) attend a memorandum of cooperation exchange ceremony in Tokyo on Monday

ture rebuilding, demining, agricultural expansion, improvement of the humanitarian situation, development of biotechnology, industry and information technology, and governance enhancement.

Tokyo and Kyiv are also working to eliminate double taxation. Besides Kishida’s government is mulling to open an office in Kyiv ‘to bolster business ties between the two countries’.

Japan has joined its Western allies in condemning Russia over its war on Ukraine and has sanctioned many Russian officials including President Vladimir Putin and Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov.

Danish donation

Denmark has pledged to transfer

all of its artillery to Ukraine and has called on Europe to unite in its support for Kyiv, Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen said during the Munich Security Conference in Germany, local media reported on Sunday.

Frederiksen urged European nations to donate their existing stockpiles of weapons, ammunition and air defence systems, which according to her should be allocated to Ukraine.

‘They are asking us for ammunition now, artillery now, and from the Danish side, we decided to donate our entire artillery,’ she said.

Frederiksen criticised European leaders who in her opinion tend to cite issues with arms production as an excuse for not supplying weapons to Ukraine

while at the same time urging them to increase their production.

‘This is not only a question about production because we have weapons, we have ammunition, we have air defences that we don’t have to use ourselves at the moment that we should deliver to Ukraine,’ she said.

Her announcement came as Ukraine continued to struggle with major personnel and ammunition shortages on the front lines and in the face of Russian gains in the east of the country.

Despite Kyiv’s continued efforts to press for more weapons, the European Union has said that it will only be able to supply half of a promised one million artillery pieces by March, with the remainder of the original target

to be delivered by the end of the year, the EU’s top diplomat, Josep Borrell, told reporters after an EU defence ministers meeting in Brussels on January 31.

Frederiksen also called on European countries not to wait for the US to approve financing of supplies to the Ukrainian Armed Forces.

‘It doesn’t matter what the US comes up with. We Europeans have to defend ourselves. This is a war on the European continent,’ she said.

Denmark is among the major suppliers of weapons to the Ukrainian Armed Forces, with the country promising to transfer 19 of its F-16 fighter jets by the end of the year and as soon as it finishes training Ukrainian pilots.

Anadolu Agency

Violence in Papua New Guinea leaves 64 dead

Port Moresby, PNG - In what has been described as the biggest tribal clashes in recent history, Papua New Guinea’s northern highlands witnessed a devastating episode resulting in at least 64 casualties, Al Jazeera reported citing local reports.

The violence erupted at dawn on Sunday in the Wapenamanda District of Enga Province, involving the Ambulin and Sikin tribes along with their respective allies. The clashes, marked by the use of high-powered firearms such as AK47 and M4 rifles, left a grim trail of 64 bodies strewn across the roadside, grasslands, and hills of Wapenamanda by Monday morning, Al Jazeera reported citing a report from Post-Courier newspaper.

George Kakas, a senior officer in the country’s police force, expressed the unprecedented scale of the bloodshed, saying: ‘This is by far the largest (killing) I’ve seen in Enga, maybe in all of Highlands as



The clashes, marked by the use of high-powered firearms such as AK47 and M4 rifles, left a grim trail of 64 bodies strewn across the roadside, grasslands, and hills of Wapenamanda by Monday morning, Al Jazeera reported

well, in Papua New Guinea.’ The intensity of the conflict surpassed previous clashes involving the same tribes, which resulted in 60 deaths in Enga Province the previous year.

The aftermath has left communities devastated and mentally stressed, with Kakas

struggling to comprehend the scale of the tragedy. In the capital, Port Moresby, opponents of Prime Minister James Mara’s government urgently called for action, including the swift deployment of additional troops to the afflicted area. They implored the government to investigate the sources of firearms and ammunition contributing to the violence.

Meanwhile, Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese expressed deep concern over the distressing developments, acknowledging the gravity of the situation. ‘That is very disturbing news that has come out of Papua New Guinea,’ he remarked in a radio interview on Monday.

Australia, in support of its neighbouring nation, has been actively involved in providing significant assistance, particularly in training police officers and enhancing security measures in Papua New Guinea.

ANI

12 people burned alive, 15 injured in northwest Nigeria

Abuja, Nigeria - Unknown gunmen attacked a small village in Kaduna State in northwest Nigeria on Sunday, and during their rampage, they set their homes on fire, burning 12 people alive and injuring 15 more with burns.

Some gunmen stormed Gindin Dutse Makyal village in Kajuru area of Kaduna State, and shot sporadically into houses, local community youth leader Isa Yusuf told Anadolu over the phone.

‘There was a lot of firing, and we were scared to come out of our homes. They set fire to numerous houses. Twelve people were burned in their homes, and about 15 were seriously injured,’ he said.

The gunmen burned down 17 houses, and 15 injured people were transported to a nearby hospital for treatment, he added. The attack is one in

a series of violence in the area allegedly carried out by herders in frequent clashes with farmers over access to water and cattle grazing around farmlands.

Nigeria’s northwest region is predominantly a farming region, with occasional nomad movement. Residents believe the attackers were herders who had been linked to previous attacks since 2021.

However, the police said their investigation into the perpetrators has not yet been completed to ascertain who was involved in the rampage and killing of 12 innocent people. Mansir Hassan, a police spokesperson for Kaduna State, confirmed the attack, saying police have deployed special forces to the area to ‘prevent further attacks and restore confidence’ in the locals.

Anadolu Agency

Environment agency records Abu Dhabi’s first rare green turtle nest

Abu Dhabi, UAE - During its annual turtle survey and as part of the marine assessment and conservation programme, the Environment Agency - Abu Dhabi (EAD) recorded the first nest of ‘green turtles’ at one of the core Hawksbill turtle nesting sites in Al Dhafra Region.

Although Green turtles are found extensively in Abu Dhabi’s waters, nesting activity has never been reported.

Ahmed Al Hashmi, Executive Director of Terrestrial and Marine Biodiversity Sector at EAD,

said: ‘During one of our nocturnal turtle surveys conducted this year, we spotted a Green sea turtle nesting at one of our core Hawksbill turtle nest locations. Abu Dhabi offshore islands are known Hawksbill turtle nesting sites, however, this discovery is considered an aberration and will be added to the sporadic records of Green turtle nesting behaviour in the UAE and in countries along the Arabian Gulf.’

‘We normally conduct annual monitoring of all recognised and potential nesting areas, and al-



though Green turtles forage extensively on seagrass meadows in Abu Dhabi, no evidence has ever been found to suggest that

they have nested in any other location within the emirate. We have also seen from previous satellite tracking studies on Abu

Dhabi’s Green turtles that most have migrated to Oman to nest before returning to our waters.’

He added: ‘The island where the nest was seen is characterised by multiple, small pocket beaches separated by rocky outcrops - a contrast to Oman’s long and wide beaches where Green sea turtles nest in abundance, which is why this is an unexpected sighting, but the EAD is committed to continue extensive monitoring of all confirmed and potential beaches for any similar occurrences.’

‘We also recorded a total of 247 Hawksbill turtle nests this year, in comparison to 193 nests in 2022, with a 72 per cent hatching success - a sign of this species’ population stability in Abu Dhabi waters. This increase in nesting activity reflects the EAD’s ongoing efforts to protect its marine turtle populations, with nesting seen as a key indicator of a healthy marine ecosystem.’

Seven marine turtle species are found worldwide. Four can be spotted in Abu Dhabi’s waters, with a total population of more

6,000 individuals - two of which, the Hawksbill and Green turtle - are predominantly found here, with two other species - the Loggerhead turtle and the Olive Ridley turtle - considered occasional visitors.

In Abu Dhabi, most Hawksbill and Green turtles have been spotted in the waters of Al Dhafra region between the islands of Abu Al Abyadh and Bu Tinah, and the waters bordering the islands of Al Yasat and Muhayimat.

WAM

Israel indicts Saleh al-Arouri’s sister for ‘supporting’ Hamas

Jerusalem - The Israeli police accused on Monday Dalal Suleiman, the sister of the deputy head of the political office of the Hamas movement, Saleh al-Arouri, of supporting the movement. Al-Arouri was assassinated in an Israeli airstrike in Lebanon last January.

According to the indictment, the Israeli police alleged that ‘Dalal Suleiman transferred funds to Hamas over the past two years’, Israel’s public broadcaster reported. “She was also accused of praising in media interviews the Hamas attack on October 7, 2023,” the broadcaster added.

Suleiman was arrested at her home in the town of Aaroura in the central West Bank last January following the assassination of her brother.

She was then ‘presented before a military court in the northern West Bank on charges of working for an unauthorised movement, incitement, and supporting a hostile organisation’, according to the broadcaster.

No comment has been issued by Suleiman or her lawyers regarding the Israeli accusations and claims as yet.

25 more held in West Bank raids

The Israeli army rounded up 25



more Palestinians in military raids across the occupied West Bank on Monday, according to prisoners’ affairs groups.

Most of the arrests took place in the cities of Hebron, Ramallah, Jerusalem, Nablus, and Jenin, the Commission of Detainees’ Affairs and the Palestinian Prisoners Society said in a joint statement.

“The arrests were marked by acts of sabotage and destruction of citizens’ homes, in addition to severe beatings of detainees and their families, and the confiscation of money,” the statement said.

There was no comment from the Israeli army on the report.

According to prisoners’ affairs groups, at least 7,100 Palestinians have been detained by Israeli forces in the West Bank since October 7. At least 398 Palestinians have since been killed and 4,500 others injured by Israeli army fire in the occupied territory, according to the Health Ministry.

Meanwhile, the Israeli army said it closed four roads to traffic near the Lebanese border on Monday, according to Israeli media. The decision was made after an assessment by the army of the situation in the region, leading to the closure of four roads until further notice.

Anadolu Agency

Hearings begin on Israeli practices

At least 50 countries will present their arguments at International Court of Justice (ICJ)

The Hague, Netherlands - Public hearings at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) on Israeli practices in Palestine began on Monday.

The public hearings started following the UN General Assembly’s request for an advisory opinion on the legal consequences arising from policies and practices of Israel in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem.

A General Assembly resolution asked the ICJ to determine legal consequences ‘arising from the ongoing violation by Israel of the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination’, and ‘from its adoption of related discriminatory legislation and measures’.

At least 50 countries will present their arguments regarding the legality or otherwise of the Israeli occupation in the Palestinian territories, according to the court.

South Africa brought a genocide case against Israel to the ICJ in late December and asked it to grant emergency measures to end the bloodshed in Gaza.

The court on January 26 ordered Israel to take ‘all measures within its power’ to prevent acts of genocide in Gaza but fell short of ordering a cease-fire.



The hearings on the advisory proceedings of the ICJ on the legal consequences of Israel’s practices in the Palestinian territories begin in The Hague, Netherlands on Monday (Anadolu Agency)

It is time to end double standards and enforce international laws on all countries. Israel has left Palestinians with only 3 options: displacement, detention, or death

RIYAD AL-MALIKI

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

‘Illegal’ occupation

Palestinian Foreign Minister Riyad al-Maliki who addressed

the ICJ on Monday, urged the court to terminate the Israeli occupation and deem it ‘illegal’.

“We call upon the International Court of Justice to declare the Israeli occupation illegal and emphasise the necessity of ending it immediately and unconditionally,” Al-Maliki said during an in hearing session.

“It is time to end double standards and enforce international laws on all countries without exception,” he said.

Highlighting the stark realities faced by Palestinians, the minister said: “Israel has left Palestinians with only three options: either displacement, detention, or death.”

Al-Maliki further said: “Palestine remains the greatest test of the credibility of the international system based on laws, and humanity cannot bear its failure.”

Meanwhile, a group of protesters burned an Israeli flag in front of the ICJ, as the court was in session. One of the

protesters was seen in an Anadolu footage taking down the flag from a car window as the vehicle drove by the protesters. The flag was burned by protesters later on.

Gaza death toll rises to 29,092

The Palestinian death toll from Israel’s offensive in the Gaza Strip since October 7 has risen to 29,092, the Health Ministry in the besieged Palestinian enclave said on Monday. In a statement, the ministry said that 69,028 others were also injured in the ongoing onslaught.

It added that in the past 24

hours, Israeli forces killed 107 people and wounded 145 others.

“Many people are still trapped under rubble and on the roads and rescuers can’t reach them,” it added.

Israel has pounded the Gaza Strip since a cross-border attack by Palestinian group Hamas in October, in which nearly 1,200 Israelis are believed to have been killed.

The Israeli war on Gaza has pushed 85 per cent of the territory’s population into internal displacement amid acute shortages of food, clean water, and medicine.

Anadolu Agency

25 people killed, 10 injured in landslide in Afghanistan

Kabul, Afghanistan - At least 25 people lost their lives following a massive landslide in the Nuristan province of Afghanistan on Monday, Khaama Press reported, citing the Taliban-led Ministry of Disaster Management.

Moreover, 10 people have also sustained injuries in the landslide that hit the Nuragram district of Nuristan province.

Mohammad Abdullah Jan, the ministry’s head of Information and Communications, announced in a recent statement that the mountain slide, caused by recent rains in the village of ‘Nakrah’ in Nurgaram district, resulted in both human casualties and the complete or partial destruction of 15 to 20 residential houses.

He said that recent rains have caused roadblocks in various provinces, which include Nuristan, Kunar, and Panjshir.

Quoting the head of information and communications at the Ministry of Disaster Management, Khaama Press reported that a snow avalanche hit Panjshir province, resulting in the disappearance of five workers.

However, local officials in Panjshir have claimed that two of these miners have already died.

ANI

Israel threatens to expand military operations in Rafah

Tel Aviv, Israel - Israeli war cabinet minister Benny Gantz issued a stark warning, declaring that Israeli military operations in Rafah would be expanded if hostages held by Hamas were not returned by the commencement of Ramadan, expected on March 10 or 11, CNN reported.

This statement represents the most explicit deadline yet for potential Israeli military action in the southern Gaza city, where over one million displaced Palestinians seek refuge near the Egyptian border.

Speaking before a gathering of American Jewish organisations in Jerusalem, Gantz emphasised the gravity of the situation, stating: “The world must know, and Hamas leaders must know - if by Ramadan our hostages are not home - the fighting will continue to the Rafah area,” as reported by CNN.



He outlined a plan for coordinated action, seeking to minimise civilian casualties through dialogue with American and Egyptian partners for the evacuation of civilians.

The intention to expand ground operations into Rafah has been reiterated by Israel as part of its broader objective to dis-

mantle Hamas following the October 7 attacks.

However, concerns are rising over the approximately 1.5mn Palestinian people currently sheltering in Rafah as viable relocation options become increasingly limited. Addressing those concerned about potential humanitarian costs, Israeli minister

asserted: “To those saying the price is too high, I say this very clearly: Hamas has a choice - they can surrender, release the hostages, and the citizens of Gaza will be able to celebrate the holy holiday of Ramadan.”

Amidst escalating tensions, reports indicate that the Nasser Medical Complex, the largest functioning hospital in the Gaza Strip, is now inoperable due to recent raids by Israeli forces. The World Health Organisation (WHO) and the Hamas-run Ministry of Health in Gaza confirmed the facility’s incapacitation.

WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus expressed deep concern, revealing that approximately 200 patients remain in the medical facility, which WHO teams were denied access to on Friday or Saturday.

ANI

Medics begin collective resignations amid healthcare concerns in S Korea

Seoul, South Korea - Patient care in South Korea has faced possible disruption as trainee doctors began to submit mass resignations on Monday in protest against the government’s proposal to increase the number of school admissions for medical students, according to local media.

Prime Minister Han Duck-soo said early on Monday that the government plans to expand telemedicine services in case of a mass walkout, the Seoul-based Yonhap News reported. Doctors claim the government ‘lacks transparency’ and that the move to increase the number of medical students will ‘compromise’ the quality of medical education and services.

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



in rural areas and crucial specialties. Currently, South Korea’s annual enrolment for medical seats is 3,058 seats.

Last Friday, the country’s Health Ministry banned large-scale resignations and issued action against doctors’ collective resignations.

In addition, to manage the patient rush due to the fallout from resignations, government-run hospitals in the capital Seoul have decided to extend

normal operating hours.

Patients and their families have expressed concerns and complaints online about potential disruptions in healthcare services.

The government asked trainee doctors to resume work and get back to hospitals.

South Korea’s healthcare system heavily relies on trainee doctors, especially in emergency and acute care.

Anadolu Agency

INDIA

Gandhi to appear before court amid Yatra

Rahul Gandhi has to appear before Sultanpur district court in connection with a defamation case

New Delhi - Congress General Secretary in charge Communications, Jairam Ramesh on Monday said that the Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra will be paused on Tuesday morning as Congress leader Rahul Gandhi has been issued a summons to appear before the district civil court in Sultanpur in connection with a defamation case.

In a social media post on X, the Congress general secretary informed that the Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra which has entered its 37th day on Monday, will be paused on Tuesday morning and will resume from Fursatganj in Amethi at 2pm.

"Rahul Gandhi has been issued a summons to appear in the district civil court in Sultanpur tomorrow morning in connection with a defamation case filed by a BJP leader on August 4h, 2018. The Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra will, therefore, pause tomorrow morning and will resume at 2pm from Fursatganj in Amethi," the Congress leader posted on X.

Rahul Gandhi has been summoned by MP/MLA court in connection with a 2018 case



Congress leader Rahul Gandhi addresses the party's 'Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra', in Prayagraj on Sunday (ANI)

over using derogatory remarks against Union Home Minister Amit Shah in a Bengaluru conference. The complaint was filed by the then BJP district vice

president Vijay Mishra.

"Rahul Gandhi had accused Amit Shah in Bengaluru that he is a murderer. When I heard these allegations, I felt very

pained because I am a 33-year-old worker of the party. I filed a complaint regarding this through my lawyer and this continued for almost five years,"

Vijay Mishra told ANI earlier.

Santosh Kumar Pandey, a lawyer who appeared for Vijay Mishra said that Rahul Gandhi can be given a maximum pun-

Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra which entered its 37th day on Monday, will be paused on Tuesday morning and will resume from Fursatganj in Amethi at 2pm

ishment of two years if sufficient evidence is found against him.

SP chief Yadav sets condition

Meanwhile, Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav has made his participation in the Congress' Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra conditional to a decision on seat sharing, saying that he will be joining it the moment the seats for the upcoming Lok Sabha elections are distributed between the two parties.

"Right now talks are going on, lists have come from their side and from ours as well, the moment the seats are distributed and decided, the Samajwadi

Party will join Congress's Nyaya Yatra," Yadav said speaking to reporters on Monday.

The Samajwadi Party and the Congress are partners in the INDIA bloc. The success of the seat sharing talks between the two are crucial, especially after the failure of such talks with West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, who has decided to contest in her state alone.

The Samajwadi Party president had come to pay his obeisance to Acharya Narendra Deva on his death anniversary.

"Acharya Narender had strengthened and given a new direction to the socialist movement. Socialists have a lot to learn from his life. So we come back here every time," Yadav said speaking on the contributions of the freedom fighter.

Speaking about the significance of the upcoming Lok Sabha polls, Yadav said: "The 2024 elections are significant. It is an election to save the Constitution and save the future of the country, save Ganga-Jamuni Tehzeeb, to save fraternity," ANI

Sarang helicopter team all set for Singapore Airshow 2024

New Delhi - The Sarang helicopter display team of the Indian Air Force (IAF) conducted its first practice display in Singapore on Sunday, ahead of their final display during the Singapore Airshow scheduled to commence on Tuesday.

The Sarang team had arrived in Singapore on February 12. The team is operating from the Changi airbase of the Republic of Singapore Air Force (RSAF). The biennial Singapore Air Show is scheduled to commence on Tuesday and shall conclude on February 24. The airshow will feature a variety of display teams from all across the globe. The show also will feature leading aircraft and system manufacturers and operators showcasing their products.

The Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) manufactured Advanced Light Helicopter (Dhruv), which the Sarang team operates, is featuring in the show for the very first time.

The first international display



This file photo shows IAF's Sarang team performing during Wings India 2024 at Begumpet Airport in Hyderabad on January 18 (ANI)

for the Sarang team also happened to be in Singapore for the Asian Aerospace Airshow at Changi Exhibition Center in 2004. The Sarang team is performing a four-helicopter display for the audience at the Singapore Airshow this year.

The display is designed to highlight the ALH Dhruv's agility and manoeuvrability, as well as the high degree of skills of the IAF pilots flying these machines.

The indigenously manufac-

tured ALH and its advanced variants are operated by all the military services of India. The successful induction and operational utilisation of this platform is said to be one of the success stories of self-reliance (Aatmanirbharta) in the defence sector.

The Sarang Helicopter Display Team was formed in 2003 and was initially raised as a three-helicopter formation.

ANI

Tamil actor Vijay's party sets membership target at 2 crore

Chennai, Tamil Nadu - Actor Vijay's Tamizhalaga Vettri Kazhagam held a consultation meeting here on Monday and decided to start a membership drive that targets two crore members for the party.

Addressing a press conference after the meeting, Tamizhalaga Vettri Kazhagam General Secretary N Annand said: "On the advice of our president, we hold a consultation meeting today. We fixed the target at two crore members to be enlisted in the party through the membership drive."

He also said that the party will announce its stand on each issue via statements in the coming days.

According to the official press release issued by the party after the meeting, 'as instructed by our party president, the membership drive can be conducted across the state district-wise and assem-



Superstar Thalapathy Vijay officially announced the name of his political party as 'Tamizhalaga Vettri Kazhagam', in Chennai on February 2 (ANI)

bly constituency-wise to strengthen the grassroot organisation of the party'.

It also said: "With the aid of a state-of-the-art mobile app

that will be made available soon, the district and assembly constituencies in charge shall undertake a membership drive at the district municipal corpo-

ration municipality block, town panchayat, village unit and ward level across Tamil Nadu."

The statement also added that there will be an exclusive women-led membership drive, which will be introduced very soon by Party President Vijay.

Actor Vijay launched his political party, Tamizhalaga Vettri Kazhagam, earlier this month, expressing his intention to fight in the 2026 assembly polls.

The actor said he wouldn't lend support to any party in the upcoming parliamentary elections.

Meanwhile another Star Politician from Tamil Nadu Kamal Hassan who heads the Makkal Needhi Maiyam said that his party would make an official announcement on its alliance for the Lok Sabha elections in the next two days. In 2019 Kamal Hassan had offered support to the DMK-Congress alliance.

ANI

Pakistan: Nawaz Sharif active behind scenes

Islamabad, Pakistan - Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) leader Nawaz Sharif is keeping a low profile but active behind the scenes in the formation of federal and Punjab governments, reported Dawn.

Despite facing challenges, the PML-N and Pakistan People's Party (PPP) are anticipated to forge a federal coalition government, with Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM) as their third partner, as per a senior PML-N leader.

"Although he (Nawaz) is holding meetings with top bureaucrats of Punjab along with his daughter, who is PML-N's nominee for chief minister, as part of her training, he is keeping a low profile in the political situation obtaining after the elections," a party insider close to the Sharif family told Dawn.

The elder Sharif, pitched by his party before the polls as a

favourite for the slot of PM, had to surrender in favour of his younger brother, Shehbaz Sharif after the party failed to secure a simple majority in the lower house.

According to Dawn, sources highlight that Nawaz Sharif, a three-time premier, has assumed a more discreet role following the unexpected electoral outcomes, refraining from aggressively pursuing leadership due to concerns regarding the polls' legitimacy.

"He has saved his energy to make a comeback some other day," the insider said, adding that the elder Sharif was busy short-listing names for the federal and Punjab cabinets.

"Nawaz Sharif's current role is calling shots from behind the scenes -recommending names for federal and Punjab cabinets as well as nominating bureaucrats of his choice for key posts," he said.

A party leader said Nawaz



Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) leader Nawaz Sharif

Sharif was given a 'reality check' in the elections. "Sharif was least expecting the blow received by his party."

Furthermore, PML-N spokesperson Marriyum Aurangzeb did not deny or confirm when asked about Nawaz Sharif holding meetings with bureaucrats and being busy in efforts to form the federal and Punjab gov-

ernments. Meanwhile, former defence minister Khawaja Muhammad Asif expressed confidence in a PML-N and PPP coalition forming the federal government, citing Shehbaz Sharif's adeptness in managing coalition partners.

"The N League, PPP and Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM) are going to form the

federal government as the party has nominated Shehbaz Sharif for the office of prime minister, keeping in view his experience dealing with the allied parties," Khawaja Asif told reporters in Sialkot.

In Lahore, Khawaja Saad Rafiq said: "State institutions and politicians should sit at the negotiating table to come out of the imbroglio. Otherwise, he warned, enemies could take advantage of political uncertainty."

Speaking to the media, he said: "The PTI founder would be acceptable only after he gave up 'politics of hatred'. He said a way forward is found only when one's rival accepts one." While focusing on the February 8 vote results, Rafiq said: "PML-N too could have raised multiple reservations on the results, but it prudently followed the path of conceding to the mandate of people in certain constituencies." ANI

Heatwave continues to scorch parts of Malaysia

Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia - The ongoing heatwave in parts of Malaysia has seen authorities warning citizens to take measures to protect their health.

The worst-hit states are Perlis, Kedah, and Penang with the hot and dry conditions blamed on the El Nino phenomenon. The meteorological department considers temperatures above 35 degrees Celsius for three days in a location to be a heatwave.

Penang state's Public Health Executive Councilor Daniel Gooi Zi Sen told local media on Sunday that the four districts in Peninsular Malaysia most impacted by hot weather in the past week are all in the north.

He also called on medical practitioners to advise their

patients about the heatwave, while also checking for signs of heat stroke or fatigue which would be more common now.

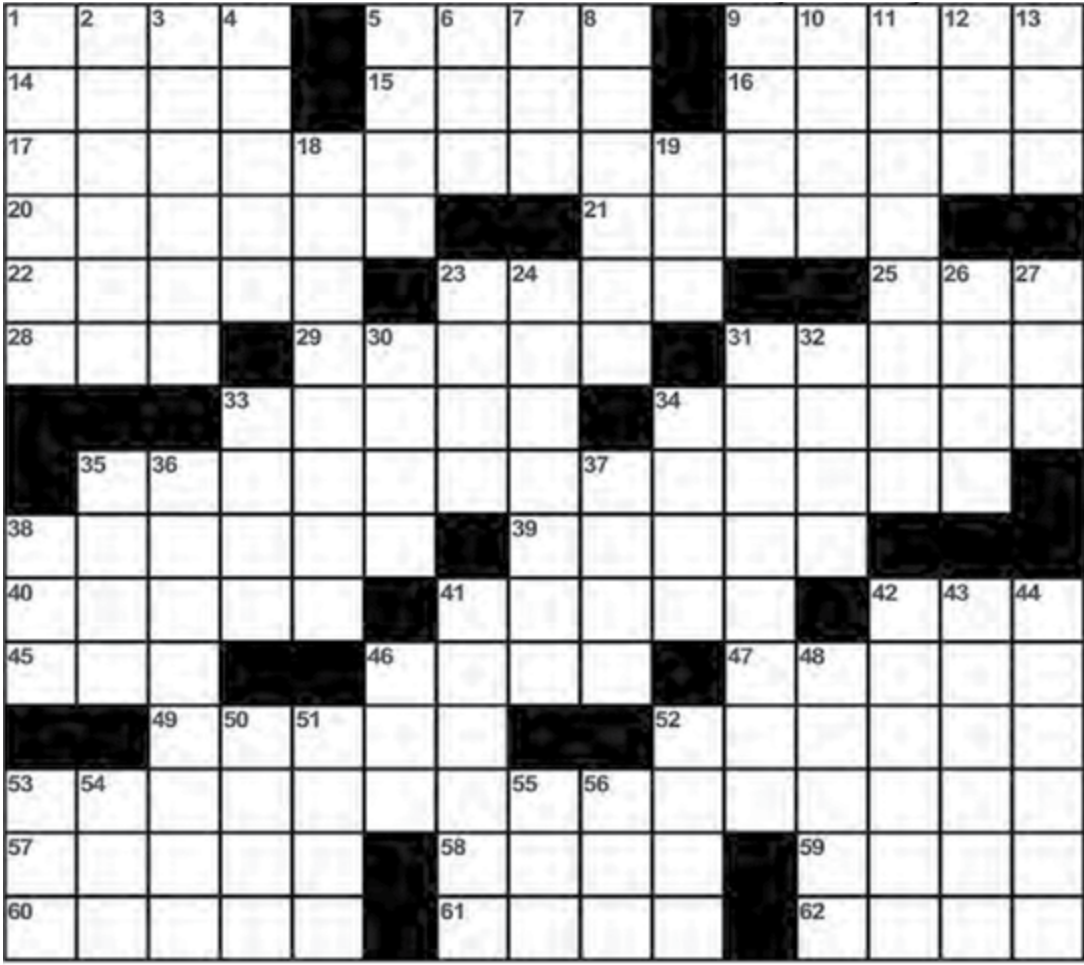
Gooi urged people to conserve tap water, limit their activities under the sun, drink water constantly, use a hat or umbrella to protect from the searing sunlight, wear lightweight attire, and use a fan to stay cool.

Previously the country's meteorological department had warned that the El Nino would become more intense until early this year.

The El Nino is a naturally occurring climate pattern associated with warming of ocean surface temperatures in the central and eastern tropical Pacific Ocean.

Xinhua

DAILY CROSSWORD



ACROSS

- 1) Part of any profit calculation
- 5) "Be it, so humble ..."
- 9) Debris at the base of a mountain
- 14) With the ability
- 15) Extreme anger
- 16) Shoe parts
- 17) Getting hyped for the weekend
- 20) Kleenex, e.g.
- 21) Gofers and such
- 22) One putting people in their places
- 23) Like bone-dry land
- 25) Relaxing health facility
- 28) Place for a pig
- 29) Cut at an angle
- 31) Chimney parts
- 33) Pago Pago's place
- 34) Scarcity
- 35) Becoming allies
- 38) Peril
- 39) Tidal bore
- 40) Correct, as text
- 41) Anxious
- 42) That thing's
- 45) One of the major networks
- 46) Crumbs leftover from dinner

- 47) Widespread craze
- 49) Dead to the world
- 52) Bit of buckshot
- 53) Increasing a store's merchandise
- 57) With_ in sight
- 58) Dirt for a garden
- 59) Affirm positively
- 60) Chilean range
- 61) Blockhead
- 62) 1990 World Series champs

DOWN

- 1) It has points in the desert
- 2) Player of a double reed instrument
- 3) Like half-melted snow
- 4) On edge
- 5) Lake seen from Toledo
- 6) Delivery vehicle
- 7) Easter basket item
- 8) Not wholesale
- 9) Something snakes do
- 10) Formally surrender
- 11) Comfort verbally
- 12) Cathedral city of England
- 13) Suffix cousin of "trix"
- 18) In a Mideast headdress

- 19) Concealed
- 23) Shakespeare's river
- 24) Analyst's chemical
- 26) Guinea pigs and hamsters, often
- 27) Burning result
- 30) Dubai dignitary
- 31) Charon and others
- 32) Shoestring
- 33) Communicate silently
- 34) Boxers and retrievers
- 35) Door part
- 36) Biased
- 37) Parts of a healthy diet
- 38) Christmas mo.
- 41) Creative painter, e.g.
- 42) Smitten
- 43) Like stadium rows
- 44) Some woodland deities
- 46) Alternative to .net
- 48) Church part
- 50) Prime-time hour
- 51) Concludes
- 52) Bombard, as with water balloons
- 53) Santa __, California
- 54) Mafia head
- 55) Definitely not later
- 56) Seven, on a grandfather clock

NOTE PAD



YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE



ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

Any bad news you get today is really not going to be bad news at all, and it won't cause a real problem for you or your people. The person who will be telling you the news thinks things are different than they really are, so they'll be happy when you set their mind at ease. All in all, you can expect this day to be neither totally fun nor utterly frustrating. It's a kind of neutral day in which nothing is going to get finalized or started.



LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

All that glitters is not gold, especially today, when someone is going to say whatever it takes to get their way, even if it's not totally true. In order to make sure you listen only to those who speak the truth, you might have to avoid listening to anybody for the time being. Be critical, be objective, and be skeptical. It might not make you the most fun party guest right now, but it will keep you safer, richer, and wiser in the long run.



SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

Your ambitions take you forward in life, but have you ever stopped to think about what (or who) they may have forced you to leave behind? Take some time today to remember the people, places, and things you miss. It won't be unpleasant. You'll love reminiscing about the old days. You will get a fresh new perspective on where your life is now. If you feel the urge to visit those long-lost places or people, put a plan together to do just that.



TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

Now is not the time to go solo. Your energy is contagious, and you will be practically irresistible to other people. It's a great day to make new connections, especially if you will be in a mixed group of people you know and people you don't know well. In this kind of social contexts, you get the safety of familiar faces and the excitement of new ones, and it's an invigorating combination. Go ahead and introduce yourself. Get some new conversations started!



VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

This is a day when you can make a lot of headway working through a love, friendship, or work relationship issue. More than ever your mind is prepared for open and honest communication, which is essential for effective dialogue and respectful disagreement. You can't wait any longer to tell someone your true feelings, and they are ready to get to the bottom of it just as much as you are. By the end of the day, all of the unpleasantness will be behind you both.



CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

Be happy, not annoyed, if a few people reach out for some assistance today. You should be only too glad to help the people who have helped you so much in the past. And aren't you flattered that they think you have what it takes to make their life better? There are many erratic energies humming around your circle of friends and family right now, and you seem to be the only person who has the antidote. You have a calmness about you that people love. Share it generously.



GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

Even if it puts a strain on your free time, you should start accepting any and all invitations that come your way, especially the ones that come from unlikely sources. The way you get involved with other people affects your reputation and how other people see you, so be as enthusiastic as you can. Your outgoing nature is growing stronger and making people want to have you around more. This is a very promising time for you in terms of building a better career network.



LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

It looks like that issue you were worrying about will turn out to be a fat load of nothing, so get ready to breathe a huge sigh of relief today. This wonderful release of tension will keep you smiling all day long and make more than a few people notice how cute you are when you're happy. Take this feeling of freedom and put it to good use. It's a great time for a spontaneous adventure or last-minute road trip. Get your sweetie or best friend to join you if you can.



AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

If you're holding joint assets with anyone right now, you should check in with them. You need to make sure that things are still in the status you thought they were in. It's not that you shouldn't trust this person; it's just that things could have changed, and you need to stay on top of it. You share the responsibilities and you share the benefits, so no one should feel like they are losing ownership. There is no need to worry, though. Everything is fine or will be fine soon.



CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

Today, all of your friends are going to help you maintain the good energy in your life and show you how to get rid of the bad energy that has been creeping in lately. These people know you better than almost anyone, and they know exactly what to say to help you see the glass as half full, not half empty. You should choose to spend time only with people who are positive influences in your life. Let the relationships that bring you stress fade away and dissolve naturally.



SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

The dreams you have about your life are starting to come true, at least partly. A new person could come into your life today, although their role might be so minimal that you won't even notice them at first, but you will soon enough! This is a good time to get rid of emotional baggage and get closure on any outstanding unrequited love you've been wallowing in. This new person could represent a huge leap forward for you in terms of romance and the future.



PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

Today, why not treat yourself to a few of your favorite things? Buy yourself something that you've been wanting for a while. Take yourself out for a special dinner at your favorite restaurant. Relax a little longer in bed, or maybe schedule in a nice long nap. Whatever special thing you do for yourself doesn't have to be expensive or extravagant. It just has to be completely unnecessary. Right now, no one is better at putting a smile on your face than you!



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

1. In the British version of "The Apprentice", which first went to air in February 2005, who do the contestants try to get a job with?
- A. Alan Sugar (Lord Sugar)
 - B. Richard Branson
 - C. Nick Hewer
 - D. Karren Brady

2. Who was known as "The Waltz King"?
- A. Johann Strauss
 - B. Johan Sebastian Bach
 - C. Ludwig van Beethoven
 - D. George Frideric Handel

3. Which Olympic Games was the most northerly to be held?
- A. 1952
 - B. 1976
 - C. 1994
 - D. 1956

Answers: 1.A,2.A,3.B

KIDS COLOURING



BOGGLER

I	U	T	A
D	R	R	O
I	E	G	Y
I	V	E	L

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

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

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

Rayo hope for chasing pack

Leaders Real Madrid held to frustrating 1-1 draw at Vallecano

Madrid, Spain - LaLiga leaders Real Madrid were held to a frustrating 1-1 draw at lowly city rivals Rayo Vallecano on Sunday as Joselu's early strike was cancelled out by Raul de Tomas' penalty, a result that could spice up the title race with surprise package Girona.

After dealing what could have been a massive blow to Girona's title hopes by thrashing them 4-0 last week, a wasteful Real Madrid stumbled at Vallecas and could see the Catalan upstarts edge closer in the rear mirror once again.

The draw saw Carlo Ancelotti's side move to 62 points, six points ahead of second-placed Girona who have a game in hand at Athletic Bilbao on Monday. Barca are a distant third on 54 points, three ahead Atletico Madrid in fourth.

Forward Joselu gave Real Madrid the lead after they took advantage of a wasted opportunity by Rayo forward Raul de Tomas that allowed the visitors to start a quick counter attack.

Brahim Diaz delivered a brilliant long pass into the stride of Federico Valverde who, unmarked on the right wing, put the ball on a plate for Joselu with a low cross that the Spanish forward only had to tap into the empty goal.

Joselu's first-time effort from inside the box was at first ruled out for offside by the linesman but VAR quickly corrected the decision as the Spanish forward was clearly onside.



Real Madrid's Luka Modric loses his footing as he battles for the ball with Rayo Vallecano's Alfonso Espino during their La Liga match on Sunday

ward only had to tap into the empty goal.

Joselu's first-time effort from inside the box was at first ruled out for offside by the linesman but VAR quickly corrected the decision as the Spanish forward was clearly onside.

Real dominated proceedings with up to 65% possession but were wasteful and allowed the locals to equalise in the 27th minute with De Tomas' penalty after the VAR spotted a handball by midfielder Eduardo Camavinga.

The equaliser sparked wild celebrations among the Vallecas' crowd, with the stadium roaring support for their team who have moved up a spot to 16th, eight points off the relegation places.

Missing injured England midfielder Jude Bellingham, Real

were on top in the second half but kept missing chances.

The closest they got was a Toni Kroos free kick from the edge of the box that was brilliantly saved by Stole Dimitrievski who leaped to palm the ball round the post from a curling

The draw saw Carlo Ancelotti's side move to 62 points, six points ahead of second-placed Girona who have a game in hand at Athletic Bilbao on Monday. Barca are third on 54 points, three ahead Atletico Madrid.

strike that was destined for the upper left corner in the 80th minute.

The disgruntled visitors were

reduced to 10 men in added time when 75th minute substitute Dani Carvajal was shown two yellow cards in two minutes.



Manchester United players celebrate Rasmus Hojlund's goal

Hojlund's brace helps Man United down battling Luton

Luton, England - Rasmus Hojlund's early double proved enough to secure Manchester United an absorbing 2-1 Premier League victory at Luton Town on Sunday and push them closer to the battle for the top four.

Danish striker Hojlund pounced on a defensive error to give United the lead after 37 seconds and then made it 2-0 with only seven minutes on the clock to put his side in control.

Relegation battlers Luton dusted themselves down though and responded impressively with Carlton Morris's brave header halving the deficit in the 14th minute.

The only surprise in a wide-open game was that there were no more goals as both sides carved out good chances.

Sixth-placed United were guilty of wasting several gilt-edged opportunities in the second half while Luton's Ross Barkley headed against the crossbar in stoppage time.

United's fourth successive

league win put them on 44 points from 25 games, five points behind Aston Villa who are fourth.

'We must score more'

United must become more clinical in front of goal and put teams to the sword, said manager Erik ten Hag.

The Dutchman told reporters United had been "fragile" at times after failing to kill the game off.

"We missed some really massive chances and we should have scored and we know that," he added.

"On the other hand, Luton Town have lost games this season, but only two times by more than two, so it is not easy here.

"The way we started was perfect and that's the way we want to do it, it was a perfect game plan but the only thing we didn't do is be more clinical in front of goal. "We must score more goals because today we could have easily scored five goals."

Hojlund no longer a Haaland imitation

Luton, England - It was not long ago that Manchester United's signing of Rasmus Hojlund was a rich source of humour for fans of rivals Manchester City as the young Dane laboured to make an impression in the Premier League.

Not helped by United's worst start to a season since the early 1960s, Hojlund, who cost 72 million pounds (\$90.71 million), looked lost at times as his wait for a first Premier League goal dragged on.

The contrast with City's Norwegian Erling Haaland, who stormed the Premier League in record-breaking fashion in his first season, was almost laughable.

But suddenly the boot is on the other foot.

While Haaland is hardly having a bad season with a league-topping 16 goals, Hojlund no longer looks like a poor imitation.

A day after Haaland missed an absolute sitter in City's 1-1 draw with Chelsea, Hojlund's brace helped United to get a 2-1 win at Luton Town that pushed his side closer to the top four.

Haaland has almost monopolised the record books since arriving in England in July 2022,



Rasmus Hojlund

I need to say thanks to my teammates and coach because they kept believing in me

RASMUS HOJLUND

but the 21-year-old Hojlund has now scored in six successive Premier League games, the youngest player ever to do so. In-

credibly it took him until after Christmas to register his first Premier League goal.

Now he has seven to his name and there look to be plenty more where they came from, with Sunday's double at Kenilworth Road illustrating the confidence that has returned.

"I think I need to say thanks to my team mates and the coach because they have showed me great confidence and kept believing in me," said Hojlund, who arrived from Atalanta in August.

"I knew as well that I could score goals but of course it was annoying I didn't score in the Premier League."

Hojlund's sudden goal surge has been timely for manager Erik ten Hag who was coming under increasing pressure with his team misfiring and Hojlund unable to locate the net. "We recruited him on his character, I knew it was strong. He can really perform under stress and that is something you need as a Man United striker," Ten Hag said.

Ten-man Brest move to second with dramatic win

Brest, France - High-flying Brest earned a dramatic 1-0 home win over Olympique de Marseille on Sunday courtesy of Pierre Lees-Melou's late goal to climb to second place in the Ligue 1 standings.

Brest, winless in their last four matches in all competitions, moved up to 40 points, one clear of Nice, who lost 1-0 at Olympique Lyonnais on Friday.

Paris St Germain top the



Pierre Lees-Melou of Brest celebrates after scoring against Marseille on Sunday

standings with 53 points.

Lees-Melou scored two minutes from time after stealing a Marseille ball from a throw-in to make a fine individual run into the box and beat goalkeeper Ruben Blanco.

Gennaro Gattuso's side had better possession throughout the game but could not capitalise on their numerical advantage after Brest striker Steve Mounie was sent off in the 60th minute.



Monza's Matteo Pessina celebrates his goal against Milan

Milan miss chance to go second in Serie A after defeat at Monza

Monza, Italy - AC Milan missed out on the chance to move into second in the Serie A standings when they lost 4-2 at mid-table Monza on Sunday after being reduced to 10 men early in the second half.

Milan remained third in the standings on 52 points, two adrift of second-placed Juventus and 11 behind leaders Inter Milan, who have a game in hand.

The Rossoneri, who beat Stade Rennais 3-0 at home in the Europa League in midweek and travel to France for the second leg on Thursday, suffered their first league loss in more than two months to end their unbeaten run of nine games.

Matteo Pessina and Dany Mota put Monza ahead in the first half before substitutes Olivier Giroud and Christian Pulisic pulled Milan level in the second. Warren Bondo and Lorenzo Colombo secured the hosts all three points with a goal apiece in the dying minutes.

Milan went down to 10 men in the 52nd minute when Luka Jovic was sent off for violent conduct against Monza captain Pessina, with the referee overturning his original decision to just book the Serbia striker after consulting the VAR screen.

SHOW OF BENCH STRENGTH

India’s fringe players steal limelight in Rajkot Test to ease transition concerns

New Delhi, India - India may not be contemplating life after Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli just yet but the robust display of their fringe players against England will have eased any fears about how they will cope when the old guard steps aside.

Kohli, 35, is not playing in the five-test series due to personal reasons, leaving Rohit, a year older, to juggle the captaincy with the burden of leading India's batting.

With Shreyas Iyer, 29, struggling to meet the demands of Test cricket and 31-year-old KL Rahul battling fitness issues, India have been left wondering how to plug the gaping hole in the middle order.

Behind the stumps, India have also been searching for someone to replace the neat glove work and uninhibited hitting of Rishabh Pant, who remains out of action since a horrific car accident in 2022.

But three matches into the series against England and most of these concerns appears to have been addressed.

Seven months after Yashasvi Jaiswal burst onto the scene by hitting 171 in his debut Test in West Indies, the opener struck back-to-back double hundreds



Yashasvi Jaiswal (R) and Sarfaraz Khan were India's star performers with the bat in Rajkot

against England.

The 22-year-old smashed a record-equalling 12 sixes in his unbeaten 214 in the third Test in Rajkot which prompted comparisons with former India opener Virender Sehwag, who was famed for his take-no-prisoners batting.

"India has a new @virender-sehwag....," former England captain Michael Vaughan posted on X, formerly Twitter, calling Jaiswal "a player who will destroy many attacks in all formats exactly like Viru used to do".

In seven Tests, Jaiswal has passed the 100-mark three times and converted two of them into

With Shreyas Iyer, 29, struggling to meet the demands of Test cricket and 31-year-old KL Rahul battling fitness issues, India have been left wondering how to plug the gaping hole in the middle order

double hundreds.

India will also take heart from the performance of two players who made their Test debut in Rajkot.

Middle-order batter Sarfaraz Khan has been knocking on the door for a while, and his twin half-centuries left many wondering why it took so long to blood the 26-year-old.

Wicketkeeper Dhruv Jurel also impressed in replacing Srikar Bharat, who played the first two Tests against England.

Jurel occasionally struggled to read left-arm wristspinner Kuldeep Yadav in the first innings but his glove work was significantly better in the second.



Thomas Tuchel

Bayern coach ‘Tuchel to stay in charge next week’ despite third loss

Bochum, Germany - Bayern Munich coach Thomas Tuchel will remain in his position for next week's Bundesliga game despite Sunday's shock 3-2 loss at VfL Bochum in the side's third straight defeat across all competitions, club CEO Jan-Christian Dreesen said.

"Of course," Dreesen told reporters when asked whether Tuchel would be in charge for next Saturday's game against RB Leipzig.

"I am not a fan of monstrous coach-backing statements," he said. "They usually run out after a week. But this (the coach's future) is not an issue we are dealing with at the moment."

"We have to focus on our next matches," he said.

The Bavarians are out of the German Cup, are second in the league, eight points off the top, and lost

I am not a fan of monstrous coach-backing statements. They usually run out after a week.

JAN-CHRISTIAN DRESEN

their Champions League round-of-16 first leg at Lazio 1-0 on Wednesday.

They went in front against Bochum but conceded twice late in the first half after the game was interrupted by fans who threw tennis balls to protest against a planned foreign investment in the Bundesliga.

"That interruption threw us off our rhythm," Dreesen said.

For Bayern midfielder Leon Goretzka the current run feels like a bad film.

"It feels like a horror movie that is not ending. Everything is going against us at the moment," said Goretzka. "We can again sit here and say we started well. But now you feel stupid to limit yourself to half an hour. In the end we tried everything, so you can't blame us."



Ben Duckett's hundred had England well and truly in the game on the second day before India tightened the screw

‘England need tweaks to Bazball approach’

New Delhi, India - Former England captains aimed both barrels at the team's high-wire 'Bazball' approach in the wake of their thrashing by India in the third Test on Sunday and called for Ben Stokes' side to temper their aggressive strategy to avoid further humiliation.

England lost by 434 runs in Rajkot to go 2-1 down in the five-match series, with the heavy defeat prompting questions about the attacking blueprint laid out for the side by skipper Stokes and head coach Brendon 'Baz' McCullum.

"This England team are hell bent on doing things their way, and 'saving Test cricket'. They are giving Test cricket a shot in the arm because they are so exciting," Michael Vaughan wrote in Britain's *Daily Telegraph*.

"But ultimately they have to be better than that now. They didn't win in New Zealand, they didn't win the Ashes, and if they

carry on like this, they are going to lose in India. As a team, you are judged on series victories."

Michael Atherton said opener Ben Duckett's "the more the better" comments after the third day regarding a realistic target England could chase down were fanciful. "One can admire the positivity and playfulness of Ben Duckett and this England team — such were his comments on the third evening — while also questioning their occasional self-delusion," Atherton wrote in the *Times*.

Writing in his column for the *Daily Mail*, Nasser Hussain said England must learn from their mistakes. "If England don't consider tweaks, Bazball just becomes a cult that can't be questioned," he added. "I am not asking them to alter their mantra, just to review the last couple of matches and ask themselves: 'how can we improve?'"



Bochum players celebrate their win against Bayern Munich

Pressure mounts on Tuchel as Bochum hand Bayern third straight defeat

Bochum, Germany - Champions Bayern Munich crashed to a 3-2 loss at VfL Bochum on Sunday for a third straight defeat in all competitions, dropping eight points behind league leaders Bayer Leverkusen.

The Bavarians, who had Dayot Upamecano sent off for the second consecutive match after his dismissal in Wednesday's Champions League loss to Lazio, showed no real game plan with coach Thomas Tuchel now facing mounting pressure.

His team had lost last week's big league match against Leverkusen and suffered a 1-0 defeat to Italy's Lazio in their round-of-16 first leg.

"Now (the title) does not look very realistic," Tuchel said. "But last season we believed until the end and we were rewarded. So we will keep working at it."

Referring to the pressure on him following his team's third loss, he added: "That happens after every defeat."

"The 'how' we played is key."

The 'how' was good today and that's why today's 90 minutes are very different from the second half at Lazio or the game at Leverkusen."

Bayern were desperate to bounce back and did get a 13th-minute lead when Jamal Musiala drilled in from a tight angle as early pressure paid off.

Bundesliga top scorer Harry Kane should have made it 2-0 but he missed a sitter in front of goal in the 19th, firing wildly over the bar before the game was in-

terrupted.

Fans started throwing tennis balls on to the pitch in protest at a planned foreign investment in the Bundesliga.

Such protests have increased on recent matchdays with almost every league game on Saturday and Sunday having been briefly interrupted.

The 15-minute stop in play did wonders for Bochum's game, with Takuma Asano completing a quick break to stun Bayern with a 38th-minute equaliser.

FIA and F1 hope for swift resolution in Horner case

London, England - Formula One and its governing body have commented for the first time on allegations against Red Bull boss Christian Horner who is fighting to save his job at the reigning world champions with testing and the start of the season looming.

Red Bull's parent company in Austria announced on February 5 an independent investigation into the 50-year-old Briton's conduct after unspecified allegations against him. The process



Christian Horner

remains ongoing. Horner has denied any wrongdoing.

Formula One's commercial rights holder issued a short statement on Sunday in which it hoped "that the matter will be clarified at the earliest opportunity, after a fair and thorough process."

The FIA followed on Monday with a statement emphasising that it "remains committed to upholding the highest standards of integrity, fairness and inclusivity within the sport."

Both said they would make no further comment until the outcome was known.

Neither the energy drink company nor the British-based team have given details of the allegations, although media reports have spoken of inappropriate and controlling behaviour towards a female colleague.

Horner said last Friday that he was confident and cooperating with the process and denied "absolutely any allegation that's been made against me."

'A DREAM COME TRUE'

Oman's Ahmad al Harthy officially confirms dual 2024 GT programme with team WRT and BMW

Muscat - Oman's Ahmad Al Harthy officially launched his biggest ever season of racing on Sunday - a headline-grabbing move to Team WRT and BMW for a dual programme in the FIA World Endurance Championship and GT World Challenge Europe Endurance Cup.

Marking a huge development in Al Harthy's glittering motorsport career, the Sultanate's number one racing driver revealed his exciting new global challenge at BMW Oman in Muscat where he was joined by key partners, sponsors, dignitaries, media, family and friends.

For his second season in the globe's premier endurance racing category, the FIA World Endurance Championship, Al Harthy joins the prestigious new WRT and BMW partnership in the No.46 BMW M4 GT3 car of worldwide sporting icon Valentino Rossi and pro BMW factory driver Maxime Martin.

Italian legend Rossi is a nine-time Grand Prix motorcycle racing World Champion including seven Moto GP world titles. Martin is one of the most respected drivers in modern endurance racing, a former winner of the Le Mans 24 Hours.

The BMW M4 GT3 car which will feature in the Fanatec GT



Ahmad al Harthy (3L) will drive a BMW M4 GT3 car

World Challenge Europe powered by AWS Endurance Cup was displayed at the launch. Run by Team WRT under the OQ by Oman Racing banner, the Omani will be joined in the No.30 Bronze class entry by Sam De Haan and BMW factory driver Jens Klingmann.

Al Harthy will be supported by an incredibly prestigious lineup of key partners - OQ, Oman Ministry of Culture, Sports and

ing new partnership. "To be competing in the new LMGT3 class in FIA WEC with Maxime and the legend that is Valentino Rossi - someone I watched on TV in MotoGP in Oman - is quite incredible, truly a dream come true. Of course, it is a huge bonus to be able to learn from such amazing and talented drivers, continue our learning curve, and the two programmes in WEC and GTWCE will help

It is a huge time in my career, all of the success of previous years has allowed us to be in the position to be part of this unbelievably exciting new partnership

AHMAD AL HARTHY

Youth, Omantel, Experience Oman and BMW Oman.

"Today has been an extremely proud moment for us, unveiling our collaboration with Team WRT and BMW in both programmes and announcing the incredible portfolio of partners who are making such a dream season possible, said Al Harthy. "It is a huge time in my career, all of the success of previous years has allowed us to be in the position to be part of this unbelievably excit-

each other. "It's fantastic to be racing with Sam again in GTWCE in our OQ by Oman Racing car and I'm looking forward to working with Jens for the first time as well. None of this would be possible without our incredible partners, and having the Oman Ministry of Culture Sports and Youth on-board with our programme again is wonderful news. We are proud promoters of Oman and it is an honour to have the support of the

Sinner wins title to continue hot streak

Rotterdam, Netherlands - The Rotterdam title may pale in comparison to winning the Australian Open Grand Slam but Jannik Sinner said his victory in the ATP 500 event was still important to him after the Italian rose to a career-high number three in the world rankings.

Sinner, who lifted his first major at Melbourne Park by defeating Daniil Medvedev in the final, stretched his winning run in 2024 to 12 matches with a 7-5 6-4 victory over Alex de Minaur in the Rotterdam final on Sunday.

The 22-year-old's second trophy of the season means he will leapfrog Medvedev to number three when the rankings are updated later on Monday.



Jannik Sinner

"Every time you win a title, it doesn't matter how big, it means a lot," Sinner said.

"I had a bit more attention (as Australian Open champion), but when you earn something, you

have to deal with that. I felt like I was trying to put 100% effort into everything I've done and that's the result of this week.

"It's going to start again from zero at Indian Wells, so I'm already trying to improve. Let's see what's coming."

Sinner will look to gain ground on world number two and defending Indian Wells champion Carlos Alcaraz in the hardcourt tournament next month.

"My team, we did a really good job a few weeks ago and now we did a very good job here. I'm really proud of the level I played throughout the week," he said. "We've been in tough situations but we handled it the right way."

'My mindset is to keep fighting'

Dubai, UAE - Aryna Sabalenka said it is in her nature to keep striving for success and that she has become addicted to that winning feeling as the Australian Open champion returns to action at the Dubai Championships this week.

The Belarusian won her second Grand Slam title with a 6-3 6-2 victory over Zheng Qinwen last month, becoming the first woman in 11 years to retain the Melbourne Park crown, and the

25-year-old said there is no chance she will rest on her laurels.

"My mindset is to keep doing what I'm doing, keep fighting, keep working. After my career, to look back and think, 'whoa, I was able to achieve that. That's crazy,'" said Sabalenka, who begins her Dubai campaign on Tuesday against Donna Vekic.

"I'm not the type person that's going to win something and stop. I'm addicted to wins.

"I feel like it's just something in my blood and I keep doing, keep working and hopefully keep winning."

Among the most consistent players on the tour, Sabalenka has reached at least the semi-final stage of the previous six Grand Slams and she said the decision to drop her psychologist in 2022 has been a key factor in her progress.

"I feel like no one know better yourself than you," she said. "That was the best decision to start. In the end, the only one thing helping me is just myself, just stop expecting people to fix my problems, start fixing my problems myself."



Aryna Sabalenka

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RESISTANCE TRAINING



A new study by researchers at University of Limerick in Ireland and at Iowa State University has demonstrated the impact resistance exercise training can have in the treatment of anxiety and depressive symptoms.

The new study provides evidence to support the benefits of resistance exercise training can have on anxiety and depression and offers an examination of possible underlying mechanisms.

The research, published in the Trends in Molecular Medicine journal, was carried out by Professor Matthew P Herring at University of Limerick and Professor Jacob D Meyer at Iowa State University.

The researchers said there was 'exciting evidence' that resistance exercise training may be an accessible alternative therapy to improve anxiety and depression like more established therapies, while also improving other important aspects of health.

Dr Herring explained, "Anxiety and depressive symptoms and disorders are prevalent and debilitating public health burdens for which successful treatment is limited.

"The healthful benefits of resistance exercise training, or muscle-strengthening exercise involving exerting force against a load repeatedly for the purpose of generating a training response, are well-established," said Dr Herring, Associate Professor in the Physical Activity for Health Research Centre, Health Research Institute, and Department of Physical Education and Sport Sciences within the Faculty of Education and Health Sciences in UL.

"However, the potential impact of resistance exercise training in the treatment of anxiety and depressive symptoms and disorders remains relatively understudied. Moreover, the plausible psychobiological mechanisms, which help us to better understand how and why resistance exercise training may improve these mental health outcomes, are poorly understood."

The researchers argue that, while the available studies in this area are focused on relatively small sample sizes, there is sufficient evidence from previous and ongoing research at UL and the National Institute of Health funded research, with Dr Meyer and colleagues at Iowa State University, to suggest that resistance exercise training does improve anxiety

and depressive symptoms and disorders - though disorders themselves are scarcely studied.

"There is a critical need for confirmatory, definitive trials that adequately address limitations, including small sample sizes, but the limited evidence available to us provides initial support for the beneficial effects of resistance exercise training

on these mental health outcomes, including increased insulin-like growth factor 1, cerebrovascular adaptations, and potential neural adaptations influenced by controlled breathing inherent to resistance exercise," Dr Herring explained.

"We are tremendously excited to have what we expect to be a highly cited snapshot of the promising available literature that supports resistance exercise training in improving anxiety and depression.

"Notwithstanding the limitations of the limited number of studies to date, there is exciting evidence, particularly from our previous and ongoing research of the available studies, that suggests that resistance exercise training may be an accessible alternative therapy to improve anxiety and depression.

"A more exciting aspect is that there is substantial promise in investigating the unknown mechanisms that may underlie these benefits to move us closer to maximising benefits and to optimising the prescription of resistance exercise via precision medicine approaches," Dr Herring added.

Professor Meyer, a co-author on the study, said, "The current research provides a foundation for

testing if resistance training can be a key behavioural treatment approach for depression and anxiety.

"As resistance training likely works through both shared and distinct mechanisms to achieve its positive mood effects compared to aerobic exercise, it has the potential to be used in conjunction with aerobic exercise or as a standalone therapy for these debilitating conditions.

"Our research will use the platform established by current research as a springboard to comprehensively evaluate these potential benefits of resistance exercise in clinical populations while also identifying who would be the most likely to benefit from resistance exercise."

(Courtesy: sciencedaily.com)

ALTERNATE THERAPY FOR anxiety



VANDANA CHAWLA

NUTRITION & YOU

Our brain is a vital organ that never sleeps. It is working 24x7 without taking a single moment of rest. This means that it needs a continuous supply of fuel, which means the food we eat. What we eat, how much we eat and how often do we eat has a direct impact on our brain and its functioning.

Food and mental wellbeing

To understand this, let's consider our brain with a car and food that we eat with fuel of a car. If the fuel added is of good quality, the car will run well; in the same way, if we eat balanced meals with right amounts of nutrients, then our brain also works well.

Eating foods that contain vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants will not only nourish the brain but will also protect it from oxidative stress -

Boosting mental health through food

the 'waste' or free radicals which can damage brain cells.

On the contrary, if the diet is loaded with refined processed foods, containing chemicals, additives, sugars, unhealthy fats, then over a period of time the brain starts getting rusted or its cells undergo oxidative stress, inflammation which becomes the main cause of reduced mental activity leading to poor mental health.

Research indicates that diet of poor quality can increase the risk of depression, low moods, poor memory, and learning skills.

Mediterranean and Japanese diets are considered ideal diets in terms of their impact on overall well-being. Lately these diets have been suggested to act as a treatment for depression, and in some cases, to prevent it.

How to keep the brain healthy?

Keep refuelling the brain. As said earlier, since the brain works non-stop, it needs a continuous supply of fuel and that too in the form of high quality foods. Foods like, whole grains, nuts, seeds, raw veggies, fruits, and millets bring slow and steady increase in blood sugar and work as slow energy releasing capsules,



that continue fuelling the brain.

- **Keep yourself well hydrated at all times and in all seasons** - Dehydration has a negative impact on brain health. It can cause confusion, poor concentration and slowing of thinking process. Fluids like water, infused water, are the best choices along with vegetables, lentils or chicken soups. Limit intake of tea, coffee and avoid carbonated beverages, processed fruit juices or fruit drinks.
- **Make your diet rich in protein** - Proteins

help to support mental health. Amino acids, the building blocks of proteins, are the major ingredients for the synthesis of neurotransmitters that regulate various mental activities, including thinking and memory. Beans, nuts, eggs, fish, dairy and meat are some of the great sources of proteins.

- **Be wary of caffeine** - Caffeine acts as a stimulant for the brain but excess can be really harmful for the brain. Also some people react more strongly to caffeine than others. Hence

to keep your brain happy and not overactive, limit your intake of carbonated beverages, sports drinks, and strong coffees which are loaded with caffeine.

- **Include healthy fats** - Healthy fats that are found in nuts, seeds, fish, avocados, and vegetable oils are good sources of Omega 3 and Omega 6 fatty acids that keep the brain working well. On the contrary, processed foods contain trans fats which are truly unhealthy as they have a damaging effect on brain cells.
- **Gut healthy means brain healthy** - All foods that keep your gut healthy, that is, the ones which are rich in pre and probiotics are good for brain health also. Fruits, veggies, yoghurt, fermented foods promote gut health and brain health too.
- **Mindful eating** - Pay attention to how you feel when you eat, and what you eat. This is one of the first steps in making sure you're getting well-balanced meals and snacks. Over-eating or binge eating or eating excess sugary foods when stressed or feeling low is a sign of some underlying mental problem.

(Vandana Chawla is an Online Nutrition Expert and a Registered Nutritionist-UKVRN)



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STRONG ARMS



UPPER BODY STRENGTH



Strong arms and an attractive upper body are every athlete's dream goal. Conjuring upper body strength, however, requires patience and perseverance.

Arms workouts involve something one can do anytime, anywhere, without having to go to the gym and using heavy equipment. It adds to the cumulative load of physical activity experienced that triggers the adaptive response in muscles and helps make you stronger.

Start with simple moves using your own body weight or light weights that can comprise household items like a heavy book, a water bottle., or even a pack of groceries.

Here are a few exercises that help build stronger arms and shoulders.

Overhead Press

The overhead press aims to strengthen your shoulders, upper back, and triceps as well as your chest and neck. You can do this move holding a

household item such as a soup can or small water bottle or with small dumbbells. If you have access to a gym, you can use barbells or an overhead press machine.

- Start with your hands raised and your elbows at a 90-degree angle
- Slowly raise your arms above your head
- Hold for one to three seconds
- Slowly lower your arm to the start position and repeat

You can do one to three sets consisting of eight to 10 repetitions each.

Upright Row

The upright row targets your trapezius, deltoid, and bicep muscles. If you're doing this at home, you can use a resistance band. If you're at the gym, you can use a machine designed for upright row exercises or use free weights with a spotter.

- Stand with the resistance band under your feet and one end in each hand. If you are using weights or a machine, stand with the bar in your hands and your feet shoulder-width apart
- Turn your hands so that your palms face your body
- Pull your arms upward so that your hands come up the center of your body and your elbows bend out to your sides
- Hold for one to three seconds
- Slowly return your arms to the start position and repeat

You can do one to three sets of this exercise consisting of eight to 10 repetitions each.

Wall Push-Ups

This exercise works the bicep, tricep, pectoral, and anterior deltoid muscles. You can adjust the difficulty by moving your feet closer to or farther away from the wall.

- Stand in front of a wall at your pre-

ferred distance

- Place your hands on the wall at chest height, shoulder-width apart
- Bend your elbows to bring your upper body closer to the wall, leaving your feet in place. Let your heels come up off the floor.
- Keep your core rigid and don't bend at the waist
- Push yourself back to the start position and repeat

You can do one to three sets of this exercise consisting of 10 to 15 repetitions each.

Bicep Curls

This is a classic exercise that will lead to stronger biceps. It also works the brachialis and brachioradialis muscles which help with lower arm fitness. You can do this exercise with dumbbells, cans, or bottles in your hand.

- Stand with your feet shoulder-width apart
- Hold one weight in each hand with your palms facing forward
- Slowly bend your elbows to bring the weights up toward your shoulders
- Hold for one to three seconds
- Slowly return arms to the starting position

Do one to three sets of eight to 10 curls.

Frequency of arms exercises

If you're just starting a strength training routine, you should give your muscles time to recover between workouts. Each muscle group needs at least 48 hours between workouts. That gives your muscles time to rest but not so much time between sessions that you lose all your progress.

You should aim to work out every day, alternating between muscle groups so that you don't risk injury. If you're unsure whether you're healthy enough for strength training, check with your doctor.

Back pain – signs and solutions



Dr Shafeeq Mohammed A
Specialist Orthopedic Surgeon
Badr Al Samaa Hospital, Al Khoud

Back pain is a common reason for absence from work and for seeking medical treatment. It can be uncomfortable and debilitating.

It can result from injury, activity and some medical conditions. Back pain can affect people of any age, for different reasons. As people get older, the chance of developing lower back pain increases, due to factors such as previous occupation and degenerative disc disease.

Lower Back Pain: Lower back pain may be linked to the bony lumbar spine, discs between the vertebrae, ligaments around the spine and discs, spinal cord and nerves, lower back muscles, abdominal and pelvic internal organs, and the skin around the lumbar area.

Upper Back Pain: Pain in the upper back may be due to disorders of the aorta, tumours in the chest, and spine

Types of back pain

Back pain is categorised into two types:

Acute pain starts suddenly and lasts for up to 6 weeks.

Chronic or long-term pain develops over a longer period, lasts for over 3 months, and causes ongoing problems.

Causes of back pain

The human back is composed of a complex structure of muscles, liga-

ments, tendons, discs, and bones, which work together to support the body and enable us to move around. The segments of the spine are cushioned with cartilage-like pads called discs.

Problems with any of these components can lead to back pain. In some cases of back pain, its cause remains unclear. Damage can result from strain, medical conditions, and poor posture, among others.

Strain

Back pain commonly stems from strain, tension, or injury. Activities that can lead to strains or spasms include:

- Lifting something improperly
- Lifting something that is heavy
- Making an abrupt and awkward movement

Structural problems

A number of structural problems may also result in back pain.

- Bulging/ruptured disc
- Sciatica
- Arthritis
- Abnormal curvature of spine
- Osteoporosis
- Kidney problems
- Movement and posture

Back pain can also result from some everyday activities or poor posture.

Other causes

Some medical conditions can lead

to back pain.

- Cancer of the spine
- Infection of the spine
- Sleep disorders

Risk factors

The following factors are linked to a higher risk of developing low back pain:

- occupational activities
- pregnancy
- a sedentary lifestyle
- poor physical fitness
- old age
- smoking
- strenuous physical exercise or work
- genetic factors

Diagnosis

A doctor will usually be able to diagnose back pain after asking about symptoms and carrying out a physical examination. An imaging scan like X-Ray, MRI or CT Scan, Bone Scans, EMG and other tests may be required to be done.

Treatment

Back pain usually resolves with rest and home remedies. Initial treatments comprise applying a hot compress or an ice pack. Resting from strenuous activity can help, but moving around will ease stiffness and reduce pain. If home treatments do not relieve back pain, a doctor may recommend medicines, physical therapy or both.



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