

Economy saw remarkable progress in 2023: Mawali

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Economy has stated that the sultanate witnessed several development activities and achievements that had a positive impact and improved performance of the Omani economy and citizens' standard of living in line with national priorities, objectives set in the 10th Five-Year Plan and the strategic directions of Oman Vision 2040.

According to Dr Nasser bin Rashid al Mawali, Undersecretary in the Ministry of Economy, 2023 is drawing to a close with qualitative improvement in the performance of the Omani economy; economic indicators are positive and reassuring. The Omani economy is expected to continue achieving further growth in 2024 by pursuing flexible economic policies that respond to global changes, adopting stimulating economic policies, and improving economic legislation.

Elaborating on the economic indicators, Mawali informed that the economy showed resilience and growth, posting a 2% increase in gross domestic product (GDP) to approximately



The economy showed resilience and growth, posting a 2% increase in GDP to approximately RO26.4bn

DR NASSER AL MAWALI

RO26.4bn by the third quarter of 2023. Oil production dropped 0.9%, but the value added by non-oil activities surged 2.7%, constituting 68.8% of the GDP.

Proactive measures and policy initiatives kept inflation within safe limits, registering a favourable 1.03% in 2023, compared to 2.9% in 2022.

Mawali added that prudent management of public finances and fiscal adjustment measures led to a fiscal surplus of RO830mn by October. There



was significant decline in public revenues and spending in this period.

Oman's credit rating received positive updates from global rating institutions like Fitch, Standard & Poor's and Moody's, indicating improved fiscal performance and reduced public debt risks, boosting investor confidence.

The 10th Five-Year Plan showcased positive results, surpassing the estimated GDP and progressing in key sectors like agriculture,

tourism and mining, achieving growth of 1.4%, 1.8% and 0.7%, respectively, and exceeding the plan for the year

According to Mawali, the sultanate has the infrastructure for hydrogen production and export projects, in addition to attractive incentives for investors in this field. Oman's strides in renewable energy are reflected in a hydrogen project agreement aiming to produce 1mn tonnes of hydrogen annually by 2030 inked at the Oman Green Hy-

drogen Summit.

During the year, several initiatives and projects were announced, including establishment of Khazaen Economic City in South Batinah, an integrated sports city project and launch of Oman Future Fund - at the end of May - with a capital of RO2bn.

Mawali affirmed that Oman's robust financial performance will continue to grow and prosper under the leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik.



Tour of Oman set for Feb 10

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The 13th edition of Tour of Oman will kick off on February 10, according to the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth (MCSY).

Speaking to Muscat Daily, an official at MCSY, said, "The organising committee of the 13th edition of Tour of Oman has begun marking the routes of the five different stages. The routes and distance of the stages will be revealed in the coming days.

"Tour of Oman 2024 is set to witness the who's who of the world's elite cyclists. The 13th edition will be held from February 10 to 14."

For the second time, the tour will include Muscat Classic, which will be held on the eve of the five-day event on February 10.

The MCSY official informed

The national cycling team will participate in Tour of Oman 2024 with a crew of seven riders

that the number of teams in the 13th edition is expected to exceed previous year's event which saw 18 of the most prominent international teams from Europe, Asia, the Americas and Australia.

"Our national cycling team will participate in Tour of Oman 2024 with a crew of seven riders, competing with the strongest international teams and riders and gaining more experience from this global race," the MCSY official added.

The first edition of Tour of Oman was held in 2010.

Yemen facing humanitarian crisis due to lack of aid

Muscat - The lack of humanitarian aid has exacerbated the situation in Yemen, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) has stated.

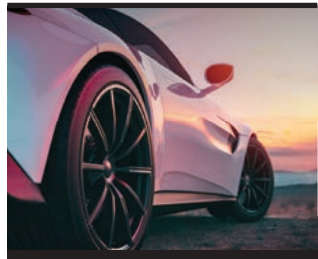
In a report, OCHA explained that Yemen is still facing one of the biggest humanitarian crises in the world, with about 21.6mn people in need of humanitarian assistance or protection. The situation is worsening as a result of the continuing crises, economic collapse, critical gaps in financing, and global inflation in 2023.

It confirmed that many vulnerable families in Yemen face difficulties in securing food as a result of unaffordable prices. OCHA pointed out that the humanitarian response plan for 2023 received only 37.5% of the required funding, forcing relief organisations to reduce or close vital assistance programmes.



DHOFAR IN ALL ITS COLOURS

An aerial view of Edgren Waterfalls in Wadi Ghadet, wilayat of Taqah in Dhofar, taken by photographer Majid al Amri. A major tourist attraction during khareef, it continues to fascinate lensmen off season



Work together to promote peace in region: Mandhari

Our Correspondent
Muscat

As 2023 concludes, it is time to renew the collective commitment for the coming year, and embrace the hope that the region and its people can live in safety, dignity and prosperity, Dr Ahmed al Mandhari, WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean, has stated.

His end-of-year message said, "As we bid farewell to 2023, I extend my heartfelt gratitude to WHO member states, partners and colleagues in the Eastern Mediterranean Region for your unwavering commitment over the past year towards realising



our vision of Health for All by All. It is with mixed emotions that I share this year-end message, my final one in the role of WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean."

Reflecting on the challenges and triumphs of the region, he said he was inspired by the collective strength and resilience displayed by communities. He described it as a testing time for

the region, marked by natural disasters, conflict and other crises of unprecedented scale. "At times, the trials faced by our region seem insurmountable. In the last quarter of 2023 alone, we have seen powerful earthquakes hit Morocco and Afghanistan, deadly floods in Libya and escalating hostilities in the occupied Palestinian territory. This is on top of ongoing emergencies such as the devastating war in Sudan, now in its ninth month. In the face of adversity, we have persevered, and it is crucial that we find hope amid the difficulties."

"The year 2023 marks WHO's 75th anniversary, a milestone that allows us to take pride in the

public health successes that have improved quality of life since our founding in 1948."

In reference to the 28th United Nations Climate Change Conference, hosted by the United Arab Emirates, he said he was heartened by the fact that more than 140 countries signed the COP28 UAE Declaration on climate and health, offering a ray of hope for the region and beyond. "Our countries and territories are among those that bear the brunt of climate catastrophes, as seen in Libya, Pakistan and Somalia in the past year or so alone."

But there were significant achievements in the region as well. Egypt achieved "gold tier"

status on the path to elimination of hepatitis C as per WHO criteria. "We are now closer than ever to a polio-free world. Urban reservoirs of polio that previously drove transmission have not reported a case in more than two years.

"Iraq eliminated trachoma as a public health problem, becoming the fifth country in the region, and the 17th globally, to achieve this milestone.

"I extend my warmest wishes to you and your families and may the New Year bring renewed strength and determination as we continue our journey towards a healthier and more peaceful and equitable future."

SQCCRC sets regional benchmark

M Najmuz Zafar
Muscat

Sultan Qaboos Comprehensive Cancer Care and Research Center (SQCCRC) has pioneered a breakthrough treatment for prostate cancer, which is the most common cancer in men and accounts for about 5% of new cancer cases in Oman.

With this breakthrough treatment, Oman has become the first country in the Middle East to offer LDR brachytherapy for prostate cancer treatment.

Spearheaded by Dr Nadeem Pervez, Senior Consultant - Radiation Oncology, and his team at SQCCRC, this innovative treatment has been successfully administered to ten patients since its initiation in November 2022.

"LDR brachytherapy offers multiple advantages over tradi-



Dr Nadeem Pervez

tional methods," said Dr Pervez. "It's a same-day procedure that is highly cost-effective, time-efficient and has a favourable side-effect profile, particularly concerning sexual dysfunction."

In contrast to conventional treatments, which may require up to 39 sessions of external beam radiation, LDR brachyther-



apy is a minor surgical procedure that takes less than two hours and allows the patient to be discharged on the same day.

To elucidate the process, Dr Pervez explained, "An ultrasound measures the prostate gland for treatment planning. Once planned, we place an order for the necessary radioactive io-

dine-125 seeds and needles with a supplier abroad. When the shipment arrives, the procedure is performed under general or spinal anaesthesia, and the patient can go home the same day."

The brachytherapy procedure involves insertion of needles containing radioactive seeds

smaller than grains of rice. These seeds release radiation locally over a period of time, destroying the cancer cells and stopping these from dividing and growing.

Given that prostate cancer accounts for about 5% of new cancer cases in Oman, this innovation is critical. "This is a silent disease often diagnosed

late. Early detection significantly improves outcome," Dr Pervez stressed. "Our patients no longer have to travel abroad for specialised operations. In fact, we are now attracting patients from neighbouring countries."

Setting up the new treatment posed challenges initially, espe-

cially given the use of radioactive material. "However, SQCCRC's multidisciplinary team successfully navigated regulatory requirements and procured necessary equipment."

As vice-chair of the Middle East Society for Therapeutic Radiation Oncology (MESTRO), Dr Pervez emphasised the organisation's role in implementing international standards and facilitating educational and research advancements in the region. "MESTRO serves to elevate the quality of radiation oncology treatments and comprehensive care for cancer patients in the Middle East," he said.

With such pioneering efforts, Oman has not only advanced its cancer treatment options but also positioned itself as a regional leader in healthcare management.

GCC, South Korea sign FTA

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Gulf Cooperation Council countries (GCC) and the Republic of Korea signed a free trade agreement (FTA) in the Korean capital, Seoul, on Thursday.

Jassim Mohammed al Budaiwi, Secretary-General of the council, signed the agreement on behalf of the GCC countries, while An Duk Gyeon, Minister of Trade, signed on behalf of the Republic of Korea.

The pact aims to fortify eco-



(Supplied photo)

nomics relations across various sectors, emphasising trade in goods and services and digital commerce, and fostering collaborative efforts in supporting

small and medium enterprises. "This agreement is a historic step towards achieving economic integration and strengthening economic and trade

relations between the two sides," Budaiwi said.

The signing, he noted, was the result of five rounds of negotiations, reflecting a genuine desire to strengthen strategic partnership and economic co-operation between the two parties. The agreement is expected to contribute to increasing bilateral trade volume, enhancing trade exchange in goods and services between the two parties, and boosting economic diversification plans in the GCC and South Korea.



'Asef with OQ' initiative concludes

Muscat - OQ Exploration & Production, a subsidiary of OQ Group, recently wrapped up the second edition of the 'Asef with OQ' initiative, which spanned across ten governorates. The primary objective of this year's programme was to train around 2,000 individuals from various government and civil society organisations, focusing on first aid, emergency medical response and injury management.

The initiative is a key component of OQ's corporate social responsibility strategy, embodying the group's deep-seated commitment to fostering a sustainable, positive societal impact.

'Asef with OQ' aims to raise health and safety awareness within the community and establish a sustainable community involvement culture. Achieving this objective involved empowering different segments of local communities with the necessary skills to respond quickly and effectively in emergencies, including administering first aid to individuals experiencing cardiac arrests.

The 'Asef with OQ' initiative engaged various participants, including volunteer and charity teams, youth clubs, health professionals, school nurses, sports teams and community members. Physical education teachers, laboratory technicians, school bus drivers, and students were also integral to the programme.

The diverse groups honed 24 essential skills, including first aid, rescue operations and emergency response.

BEYOND WORDS



VAISHALI HAMLAI

The columnist is a certified MBTI coach and a best-selling author, who delves into the complexities of the mind and soul to guide and interpret social behaviour

As each day passes, we are inching towards becoming more of a monster and lesser of a human. We have become the vision of the future apocalypse movies, where we become zombies and eat each other up. We are at the crossroads of our generational DNA change. We are at the intersection of a delicate situation where if we act, we can change the direction of the winds for future generations. We are at the decision-making stage where if we don't change, there will be no future.

As it is said, we live in the *Kal Yug*; the dark age of times. And who is responsible for being here at this curbstone, where we don't know if the future is bright or dark? Let's not start the blame game, because, as we know, reprimanding brings destruction, and we don't want to fall into that trap. So, let's analyse this theoretically.

Currently, we are all standing at the curbstone in our life, where if we make the right decision, we step back safely towards

the footpath. If not, we fall on the road ready for a truck to take us. Unfortunately, there are too many people with us at the curbstone, and no one wants to fall on the road. So, we are all pushing each other to make place for ourselves. What we don't realise is that if any one of us crosses the road, then it's the end for all of us. We individually cannot decide the fate of the future, we only

WHEN DOES THIS STOP?

collectively can decide the future, and we have to be united on this front together.

If I decide that I won't let trees be cut to stand against deforestation, then it's not only I who has to decide. Because even if I don't, someone else will. Many of us believe in banning deforestation, but we still don't have a majority. What is it that we can do to get this majority? What is it that we can do to stop this? If I decide that there should be no war in the world, then does it suffice?

It doesn't. We collectively have to work towards peace and harmony across countries.

We all have to be collective in our future needs. But just as we know, not all our fingers are the same size; similarly we all don't think alike.

Then how do we assure a safe and secure future for our future generations? How do we bring peace and harmony, because clearly we as a generation have failed in bringing safety and security?

We do have a lifeboat; we do have a section of people who possess all the qualities we need in the future leader. That person needs to have an environmental quotient, have compassion quotient, have liberation quotient, and also a futuristic quotient. Everything that we wanted in the future leader of our world. They are the Youth of today, our youth, our own reflection.

It's time to ask them how we can be compassionate towards the bleeding world that we have created. Because we are now out of ideas!

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 Press & Publishing

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Desert tourism forum to be held on Jan 24

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) in North Sharqiyah governorate, in cooperation with the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MHT), will organise a tourism forum in Bidiyah on January 24, an official informed.

Salah Salim al Hajri, Chairman of the Tourism Committee of the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry's branch in North Sharqiyah, said that the 'Oman Desert Tourism Forum' is going to be the first of its kind in Oman.

The forum will be attended by a number of officials in the investment and tourism sectors, officials of travel and tourism companies, desert reserves, and owners of projects related to the desert winter season.

The tourism components of North Sharqiyah governorate offer the diversity of the terrain, nature and specific tourist places, which help it attract a large number of visitors from Oman and abroad.

The forum has been planned to celebrate the diverse atmosphere and tourist places of the governorate, with a motive to encourage private sector institutions to hold such events



Oman Desert Tourism Forum will work to highlight the cultural and historical heritage. It is important to shed light on economic activities in the desert tourism sector in the area

SALAH SALIM AL HAJRI



highlight these components.

"It is of great importance to shed light on investment and economic activities in the desert tourism sector in the governorate. The parameters that need attention and promotion include the laws regulating this sector, the investment opportu-

nities both for the local and foreign investors, the cultural and social dimension of desert tourism, and the Gulf experiences in this aspect," Hajri said.

According to him, 'Oman Desert Tourism Forum' will work to highlight the cultural and historical heritage of the

area, the diversity of tourism patterns that the desert of the sultanate enjoys, and its significance as a destination for local and international tourists.

In this regard, he indicated that there will be some important announcements during the forum, which will be made in co-

operation with other bodies.

About some qualitative initiatives, the Tourism Committee chairman said that specialised training courses in the field of tourism media will be launched, which may in the long run help prepare the people of North Sharqiyah for a vibrant tourism

industry.

Hajri informed that preparations for the forum began quite early, with many meetings held to finalise the topics that the forum would present. Committees and teams were formed entrusting them with the task of organising the forum in a befit-

ting manner.

"The forum will present working papers dealing with investment opportunities in desert tourism, legislation and laws in desert tourism, the reality of this tourism and its cultural and social dimensions," Hajri added.

OCCI to conduct study on business environment in Oman

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Board of Directors of the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) has decided to prepare a study report on business competitiveness that can be used as a reference for various agencies in the country to improve their business environment and attractiveness.

The board, during its eighth meeting of the year, headed by Faisal Abdullah al Rawas, Chairman of the Board of Directors, approved the issuance of a tender for the study of the challenges in the financing and economic diversification sectors. The board acknowledged the government's interest in supporting the private sector and enabling it to support Oman's economy in a bigger way.



The sector witnessed tangible and effective activities during the year 2023.

The board, in the same meeting, approved the chamber's budget for the year 2024, an official informed.

The budget report focused on projects, activities and events to be taken up during the coming

year, in order to achieve the chamber's strategic goals.

The budget report presented a roadmap for the chamber to expand the base of economic diversification at the governorate level.

The meeting also discussed issues related to economic affairs, supporting the business

environment, enhancing partnership and cooperation with various parties, while reviewing the extent of support extended by various governorates.

The board confirmed that the chamber's general budget for the year 2024 will enhance economic activities across the sultanate.

Oman unveils stamp showcasing ties with KSA

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman Post, a member of Asyad Group, unveiled a joint commemorative stamp, honouring fraternal ties between the Sultanate of Oman and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA).

The main image, comprising photos of the leaders of both countries and a palm tree in the centre, symbolises the two nations' thriving partnership.

A unique feature of the stamp is a digital screen with red dots representing the capitals, Muscat and Riyadh, as well



Khali) highway, a direct route linking Oman to Saudi Arabia. The road emphasises the common strive to facilitate commercial and cultural exchange. It symbolises economic prosperity and urban growth.

Two airplanes on top represent the advanced cooperation between the two countries.

Sheikh Ibrahim Sultan al Hosni, Acting CEO of Oman Post & Asyad Express, said, "The joint postage stamp reflects the strong Oman-Saudi bonds that are deep-rooted in history, as well as the two countries' future aspirations."

Muscat Municipality refutes rumour of increase in parking fees

Muscat - After a viral video circulating on social media purportedly depicted a smart device issuing 'hiked' fines and parking fees in Al Khuwair, Muscat Municipality on Saturday refuted the rumour, confirming that no change has been effected in the current set of fees and fines in the governorate.

In a statement, Muscat Municipality issued a clarification saying, 'Municipality wishes to inform the esteemed public that the installed devices in select public parking lots in Al Khuwair and wilayat of Bausher, are primarily intended for the implementation of intelligent systems related to public parking services. This initiative aims to enhance the overall service quality'.

Muscat Municipality asserted that there will be no increase in service fees for public parking or violations as the rumours are doing the rounds.

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Dubai's Golden Sands acquires 34.9% stake in Salalah Beach Resort

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Salalah Beach Resort Company (SBR) announced that its majority shareholder, the UAE-based Golden Sands Hotel Company, has acquired an additional 34.91% stake in the company, making it the sole owner of SBR.

In a disclosure submitted to the Muscat Stock Exchange, Salalah Beach Resort said, 'The company would like to inform that Golden Sands Hotel Company has successfully acquired a 34.91% stake in SBR through the compulsory acquisition process, in accordance with the stipulations outlined in Articles 62 to 65 of the Takeover & Acquisition Regulation of the Capital Market Authority (CMA).'

Before this acquisition, Dubai-based Golden Sands Hotel held 65.09% of SBR shares. This strategic move positions Golden Sands Hotel Company as the 100% shareholder of Salalah Beach Resort, effective December 27, 2023, according to the SBR disclosure.

On October 16, 2023, the Capital Market Authority approved Golden Sands Hotel Company's request to exercise compulsory acquisition to buy a 34.91% stake in SBR.

SBR, operating in the hospitality and tourism industry in Oman,



Before this acquisition, Golden Sands Hotel held 65.09% of Salalah Beach Resort shares. This strategic move positions Golden Sands Hotel as the 100% shareholder of Salalah Beach Resort

owns and operates the Hilton Salalah Resort.

As part of its takeover objectives, Golden Sands Hotel Company will continue the business of Salalah Beach Resort and make necessary investments to complete the renovation of rooms

and other facilities at the hotel in Salalah, as per Golden Sands Hotel Company's earlier announcement.

The company also announced that SBR shares will be delisted from MSX and converted into a closed joint-stock company.



ONEIC wins contracts worth RO21.3mn

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman National Engineering and Investment Company (ONEIC) has secured two major contracts with a total value of RO21.3mn, as per the company's disclosures to the Muscat Stock Exchange.

ONEIC announced the conclusion of a RO16.5mn contract to establish and maintain an international school in the Knowledge Oasis Muscat (KOM) area on an investment basis for one of the operators specialised in the field of education.

'The contract value, including the maintenance contract amount, is RO16.5mn over a period of 15 years in cooperation with Artemis Education International. The company expects to achieve good returns from the project in the coming years, contributing to the long-term stability of the company's business,' ONEIC said in its disclosure to the Muscat Stock Exchange.

In another disclosure to the Muscat Stock Exchange, the company announced that Sohar Titanium FZC has awarded ONEIC a contract for the construction of a 132kV/33kV

Sohar Titanium has awarded ONEIC a RO4.856mn contract for the construction of a 132kV/33kV power station in Sohar Free Zone for the period of 13 months

power station in Sohar Free Zone for the sum of RO4.856mn for the period of 13 months commencing on December 25, 2023.

'The company anticipates realising reasonable profits from this contract,' ONEIC added.

Located in Sohar Free Zone, Sohar Titanium project is a strategic partnership between Minerals Development Oman (MDO), Dubai Holding Company and Stork International Group through Gulf Titanium Company. The project is being established on an area of more than 120,000 sqm, with a capacity of 150,000 tonnes per year and a cost of RO43mn.

Qatar signs 5-year oil supply agreement with Shell

Doha, Qatar – QatarEnergy has announced a five-year crude oil supply agreement with Shell International Eastern Trading Company, Singapore (Shell).

The agreement stipulates the supply of up to 18mn barrels per annum of Qatar Land and Qatar Marine crude oils to Shell starting January 2024.

Saad Sherida al Kaabi, the Minister of State for Energy Affairs, the President and CEO of QatarEnergy, said, "We are delighted to sign our first ever five-year crude sales agreement. This agreement further strengthens QatarEnergy's relationship with Shell, which is not only a reliable crude oil off-taker, but also a major customer and a strategic partner of QatarEnergy. We look forward to building on our historic relationship and hope we achieve greater success with Shell."



The agreement highlights QatarEnergy's strategy in establishing longer-term strategic business relationship and cooperation.

QatarEnergy and Shell have a long-standing strategic partnership through several shared investments in the energy industry in Qatar and globally, including QatarEnergy LNG projects, the Pearl GTL Plant, and several other joint investments.

Abu Dhabi's real GDP expands by 2.8%

Abu Dhabi, UAE – The Statistics Centre - Abu Dhabi (SCAD) has reported a substantial 7.7% growth in the real non-oil GDP of Abu Dhabi during the third quarter of 2023, in comparison to the same period in 2022.

Preliminary estimates released by SCAD reveal that most of non-oil activities have sustained growth rates, contributing 52.8% to the overall economy. Despite fluctuations in the oil and gas global markets, the Abu Dhabi's economy continues to exhibit promising prospects.

Marking a significant milestone, the emirate's economy reached its highest quarterly value at AED290.5bn, posing a positive growth of one percent in real GDP during Q3 2023 compared to the same quarter the previous year, despite the decline in oil prices.

The statistical results indicate a 2.8% growth in real GDP over



the first nine months of 2023 compared to the same period last year, and a robust 8.6% expansion in non-oil activities during the same timeframe.

In a press statement, Ahmed Jasim al Zaabi, Chairman of the Abu Dhabi Department of Economic Development (ADDED), said: "The consistent stellar growth of Abu Dhabi's economy is a solid proof of its resilience

and the effectiveness of our approach to turn headwinds into tailwinds during this challenging time as the global economy is witnessing major shifts that impact different markets and industries around the world."

Manufacturing activities, which is a leading non-oil activity, reached a value of AED26.3bn, contributing over 17% to the non-oil GDP and 9% to the overall

GDP in the third quarter of 2023. This underscores the continued success of diversification initiatives, including the Abu Dhabi Industrial Strategy (ADIS) aiming to strengthen the emirate's position as the region's most competitive industrial hub, and the rapid growth of non-oil activities in the Emirate.

In a parallel development, construction activity maintains a positive momentum, achieving a growth rate of 14.3% during the third quarter of 2023 compared to the same period in 2022. The value of construction activity reached AED25bn, contributing more than 16.3% to the non-oil GDP and 8.6% to the total economy during the third quarter of 2023.

Statistical estimates released by the Statistics Centre - Abu Dhabi highlight growth across most non-oil sectors, including the transport and storage sector,

achieving a remarkable growth rate of 20% in the third quarter of 2023, surpassing growth rates in previous quarters. This surge can be attributed to the substantial expansion of the shipping container market and the increased volume of flights and passengers.

In the same context, financial and insurance activities experienced a growth of 14.4% during the third quarter of 2023 compared to the same period last year. This growth elevated the value of the sector to AED18.7bn, contributing 6.4% to the emirate's gross domestic product during this period.

The robust economic growth experienced by Abu Dhabi had a notable impact on foreign investment which witnessed a significant 9.7% increase in total foreign investments throughout 2022, surpassing an impressive value of AED831bn.

Oil prices rise over fears of further escalation in Middle East

Muscat – Oil prices further increased on Friday over escalating tension in the Middle East and expectations of the US Federal Reserve interest rate reductions in March.

The international benchmark crude Brent traded at \$77.53 per barrel on Friday, a 0.49% increase from the closing price of \$77.15 a barrel in the previous trading session on Thursday.

The US benchmark, West Texas Intermediate (WTI), traded at the same time at \$72.02 per barrel, up 0.35% from Thursday's close of \$71.77 per barrel.

Both benchmarks slipped around 3% in previous trade

over easing supply concerns after the world's top shipping companies, including container giants Maersk and Hapag-Lloyd, announced plans to resume shipping transit through the Red Sea following the suspension of services due to increased attacks on commercial ships by the Yemeni Houthi rebel group.

However, prices rebounded after industrial data revealed an upsurge in demand in the US, the world's largest crude oil-consuming country.

According to data released by the Energy Information Administration (EIA) on Thursday, US commercial crude oil inventories



decreased by around 6.9mn barrels to 436.6mn barrels, compared to the American Petroleum Institute's expectation of a rise of around 1.8mn barrels.

The Houthi group has repeatedly threatened to target ships owned or operated by Israeli

companies 'in solidarity with Palestine' and has urged countries to withdraw their citizens working within the crews of these ships.

The French CMA CGM shipping company said it was working on plans to gradually increase

the number of sailings through the Red Sea.

"We are currently devising plans for the gradual increase in the number of vessels transiting through the Suez Canal. We are monitoring the situation constantly and we stand ready to promptly reassess and adjust our plans as needed," the company said in a statement.

However, persistent fears of rising tension in the region, especially in the event of the possible inclusion of Iran in support of Hamas forces in Palestine, might further disrupt regional trade routes and impede price increases.

Predictions of the Fed's ap-

proach to its two-year fight against inflation with the likelihood of interest rate reductions are also supporting higher prices.

According to analysts, macroeconomic data set to be released in the US later on Thursday will offer investors indicators about the economy's direction.

Weak demand signals in US The American Petroleum Institute (API) late Wednesday announced an estimated increase of nearly 1.8mn barrels in US crude oil inventories, against the market expectation of a rise of 939,000 barrels.

If the US Energy Information Administration (EIA) confirms

the stock build when it releases actual data on oil stocks later on Thursday, prices could fall.

US dollar-indexed oil prices are benefiting from a soft landing as a result of the growing probability of the US Fed's interest rate cuts in March and the depreciation of the dollar.

The dollar index, which measures the value of the American dollar against a basket of currencies, including the Japanese yen, British pound, Canadian dollar, Swedish krona and Swiss franc fell 0.11% to 100.79, encouraging oil-importing countries to purchase more crude oil at cheaper dollar prices.

Agencies

India's Russian crude imports prevented global oil price surge

New Delhi, India - In the face of international scrutiny, India has staunchly defended its substantial purchases of Russian crude oil since the onset of the Ukraine war.

A recent report from a parliamentary panel highlighted that all import deals were executed within the scope of Western sanctions imposed on Moscow for its involvement in the conflict, as per S&P Global.

The report emphasised that these purchases, totalling an estimated 1.95mn barrels per day (bpd), were pivotal in averting potential chaos in the crude oil market and preventing a surge in prices by approximately \$30-\$40 per barrel.

According to the Petroleum and Natural Gas Ministry, India's increased imports of Russian oil after Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 prevented "havoc" in the global oil market. The ministry said that if India had not increased its imports, global crude oil prices would have increased by around \$30-\$40 per barrel.

The parliamentary panel report quoted a representative from the petroleum ministry, stating that Indian oil and gas companies meticulously adhered to international laws and sanc-



India increased imports of Russian oil after Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022

Recent parliamentary panel report emphasised that India's imports of Russian oil, totaling an estimated 1.95mn barrels per day, were pivotal in averting potential chaos in global oil market and preventing a surge in prices by approximately \$30-\$40 per barrel

easing the global supply situation.

The official further justified these transactions, noting that Indian refiners followed all prescribed price caps, rules, and regulations within the financial domain.

Despite the economic sanctions complicating logistics arrangements for Indian buyers, such as the availability of ships and insurance, the report outlined the measures taken to navigate these challenges.

Indian buyers, including major entities like Indian Oil Corporation, opted for delivery-based arrangements, with sellers assuming responsibility for delivering crude oil with suitable insurance coverage at discharge ports in India.

The parliamentary panel acknowledged the payment challenges faced by Indian buyers due to economic sanctions, citing difficulties in processing payments for crude oil imports in US dollars through Indian banks.

However, it emphasised the meticulous adherence to international financial channels like SWIFT.

Russia remains a primary supplier, contributing over 35% of India's total crude imports in October and approximately 1.58mn

bpd in November.

Projections from S&P Global Commodity Insights estimate Russian crude imports to reach around 1.73mn in 2023.

The report also highlighted the currency woes associated with crude oil imports, constituting about 25% of all merchandise imports.

In response, the Indian government has explored options to settle crude oil imports in rupees to alleviate the impact on the trade deficit.

The Reserve Bank of India introduced additional arrangements for invoicing, payment, and settlement of exports and imports in rupees.

Addressing the need for diversification, the parliamentary panel recommended the petroleum ministry explore further diversification of crude oil imports.

Currently, over 60% of crude imports by state-owned refiners come from the Persian Gulf region.

The panel emphasised the importance of modernising vintage refineries to enhance their capabilities in processing a wider variety of crude oil, contributing to a more resilient and cost-effective import strategy for India.

ANI



Russia in compliance with OPEC+ deal: Novak

Moscow, Russia - Russian Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak declared that Russian oil companies are fulfilling their oil output cut obligations in line with the OPEC+ pledges that are allocated in proportion to the group's overall output.

In an interview with the Rossiya-24 TV channel, Novak said Russian companies are fulfilling their obligations voluntarily to maintain oil sector stability and strategic growth.

The companies are also taking into consideration the investments needed to maintain and attract investors to the business, he added. Novak said that the Ministry of Finance has confirmed that the country's oil and gas revenues are on target to reach about 9tn rubles (\$89.12bn) by the end of the year, approximately equivalent to the level in 2021.

Anadolu Agency

US stocks finish 2023 with best performance in years

New York, US - The US stocks closed lower Friday, but exchanges managed to finish 2023 with their best performances in years.

The Dow Jones was down 20 points, or 0.05%, to end the day at a new record close of 37,689, but the blue-chip index posted a 13.7% gain in 2023.

The S&P 500 fell 13 points, or 0.28%, to finish at 4,769. The index posted its ninth consecutive weekly gain - its longest winning streak since 2004 - as it jumped 24.2% for the year.

The Nasdaq was off 83 points, or 0.56%, to close the day at 15,011. The tech-heavy index soared 43.4% for the year - its highest annual gain since 2020.

The VIX volatility index, also known as the fear index, was down 0.16% to 12.45. The 10-year US Treasury yield rose 1.1% to 3.891%.

The dollar index increased 0.16% to 101.39, while the euro shed 0.2% to \$1.1036 against the greenback.

Despite gains in recent days,



S&P 500 Index posted its ninth consecutive weekly gain - its longest winning streak since 2004 - as it jumped 24.2% for the year. Nasdaq soared 43.4% for the year - its highest annual gain since 2020

precious metals were down with gold losing 0.1% to \$2,063 per ounce and silver trimming 0.8% to \$23.79.

Oil prices were in negative territory, with global benchmark Brent crude at \$77.06 per barrel and US benchmark West Texas Intermediate crude at \$71.25.

Both benchmarks shed approximately 10% in 2023, marking their first annual losses since 2020.

Anadolu Agency

Trade restrictions on rare earths pose threat to green energy transition: IMF

Istanbul, Turkey - Trade disruptions in rare earth minerals could impede the global transition to green energy sources, according to an International Monetary Fund (IMF) report.

Rare earth minerals are in high demand as they are vital components for clean energy technologies for the production of solar panels, wind turbines and electric vehicles (EVs).

However, as the global production of these rare earths is highly concentrated and cannot be easily substituted, they are extremely susceptible to trade disputes, as the IMF's latest report, A Critical Matter, revealed.

The report finds that a race between competing powers to obtain these strategic minerals could worsen the world's path to net zero by raising their costs, with the knock-on effect of making the energy transition more expensive.

Nonetheless, the cost of clean energy systems is expected to increase without any trade disruptions coming into play. The International Energy Agency forecasts a 1.5-fold increase in



demand for copper, a doubling in demand for nickel and cobalt, and a six-fold rise in demand for lithium by 2030.

In the report's scenario, in which rare earths are used, these elements are expected to become as vital as crude oil for the global economy over the next two decades.

To prevent countries from using trade restrictions as a risk management tool, the report advocated for multilateral cooperation in the form of an agreement to enhance World Trade Organization rules for export restrictions and tariffs, as well as discriminatory subsidies.

investment in mining, exploration, storage and critical mineral recycling.

According to the research, industrial policies should be carefully crafted to ensure equal treatment of firms across competitive markets to prevent adverse cross-country spillovers, minimize distortions and inefficiencies, and mitigate fiscal risks and harmful political economy outcomes. China, the world's top processor of rare earths, banned the export of technology used to extract and separate critical minerals, according to reports by international media outlets last week.

The ban comes after the country's restriction on exports of 'highly sensitive' graphite products, which are key elements for manufacturing batteries for EVs. It also follows the US decision to impose restrictions on exports of high-tech microchips in October.

The country also holds roughly two-thirds of global scarce metals and minerals and supplies 98% of the EU's demand for rare earth minerals.

Anadolu Agency

Russian natural gas hub project in Turkey to begin in 2024

Istanbul, Turkey - Approval for a roadmap on a natural gas hub project in Türkiye, proposed by Russian President Vladimir Putin in 2022, is imminent, Russian Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak said.

The project is expected to be implemented in 2024, Novak said during an interview with the Russian Rossiya-24 television channel.

The project, currently in its initial stages, requires a roadmap.

Novak explained that their Turkish partners will visit the Russian city of St Petersburg

soon, where an exchange of experience and information will take place.

Russian experience in the field will 'be useful to establish an electronic platform and center in Türkiye,' Novak added.

The idea of a gas hub in Türkiye was first suggested by Russian President Putin in October 2022. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan also expressed considerable interest in the idea.

The country's efforts to become a natural gas hub resurfaced in September 2023, when Putin and Erdogan met in Sochi. During the meeting, a



road map between Russian energy company Gazprom and the Turkish Petroleum Pipeline Corporation BOTAS was referenced, with establishing a joint working group being the next move.

A regional natural gas center would contribute to the security of Türkiye as well as Europe's energy supplies.

Europe is heavily dependent on natural gas and imports, mostly from Russia. Nonetheless, after the Russia-Ukraine war, the EU vowed to eliminate all Russian fossil fuel imports by 2027.

Anadolu Agency



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• Final date for submission of quotations is extended to Thursday 11/1/2024, before close of business at 5 pm



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Bank Muscat gets disabled-friendly

In line with its commitment to its customer-centric vision and financial inclusion, Bank Muscat upholds its leadership positioning by providing a full suite of banking services and facilities to all segments of the society to meet their diverse banking needs.

The Bank extends its support to customers with visual, hearing, and physical impairments by implementing a strategic development plan to offer them different banking services and amenities. The Bank also ensures the provision of these services in the new branches it inaugurates.

In this regard, Bank Muscat has taken proactive effective steps to equip its branches distributed across the sultanate with suitable amenities and



banking requirements customized to this group of customers. Bank Muscat currently owns 180 branches and services centers featuring multiple

banking amenities, appropriate spatial facilities and infrastructure.

These branches are also supplied with modern technologies

including 11 interactive ATM machines, corridors and reception desks, designated parking spots, waiting areas, stairs and elevators, and entrances to

banking institutions. In addition to this, the Bank has implemented a number of initiatives and promotional programs to improve customers' financial

awareness.

A number of Bank Muscat's branches have 141 qualified and experienced staff who are trained to learn sign language,



and 42 employees trained to serve customers with disabilities. To emphasise the Bank's commitment to providing distinguished services to customers with disabilities and enhancing their banking experience, the Bank has prepared a full manual that states all instructions and guiding tips set for employees to comply when serving this segment of customers.

The Bank also constantly ensures communicating to the Central Bank of Oman (CBO) reports illustrative of Bank Muscat's full suite of services and amenities offered to customers with disabilities to enhance financial inclusion and allow this segment to avail these services catering their diverse needs.

Malabar Gold & Diamonds continues expansion drive



Malabar Gold & Diamonds, the 6th largest jewellery retailer globally with over 335 showrooms across 12 countries, has launched its new showroom in Pune, Maharashtra (India). Located at the Phoenix Mall Of The Millennium in Wakad, the expansive showroom has further strengthened Malabar Gold & Diamonds' retail footprint in Pune by taking the store tally to 7.

The showroom was inaugurated by Ashwini Jagtap, MLA from Chinchwad constituency,

in the presence of Fanzeem Ahamed, regional head (West Zone) of Malabar Gold & Diamonds, other management team members from Malabar Gold & Diamonds, other dignitaries, customers and well-wishers, a press release said.

Spread over 2000sqft, the Wakad store offers an extensive array of bridal, traditional, contemporary, and lightweight jewellery in gold, diamonds, precious gemstones, and platinum. It also showcases jewellery from Malabar Gold &

Diamonds' popular sub-brands, including MINE Diamond jewellery, Era uncut diamond jewellery, Divine Indian heritage jewellery, Ethnix handcrafted antique jewellery collections, and Precia precious gemstone jewellery and collections like Zoul lifestyle jewellery and Viraz Polki jewellery, besides others. Apart from unparalleled design variety, the store also offers its customers a world-class shopping experience.

M P Ahamed, chairman of Malabar Group, said, "We are

excited to launch our new store at Wakad. The store further strengthens our association with Pune. I would like to thank the people of Maharashtra for making Malabar Gold & Diamonds a household name and the most sought-after jeweller. The new store underlines our continued focus on serving jewellery buyers in Maharashtra with unmatched transparency in quality and pricing. We welcome all to visit our new store at Wakad for an extraordinary jewellery-buying experience."

SEHA highlights role of organ donation in saving lives

The Abu Dhabi Health Services Company (SEHA), a subsidiary of PureHealth - the largest healthcare platform in the Middle East, emphasised the importance of organ donation and transplantation, as well as highlighted the need to adopt a healthy lifestyle during the ADNOC Abu Dhabi Marathon 2023 in the UAE capital.

As part of its participation in the marathon and related events, which was held in Abu Dhabi from December 12 and culminated with the main race on December 16, SEHA set up an emergency clinic at the ADNOC Marathon Village and organised an awareness campaign on the importance of Hayat - the National Programme for Organ Do-

nation and Transplantation, a press release said.

Participants as well as visitors at the ADNOC Abu Dhabi Marathon were encouraged to register their willingness to donate organs on the Ministry of Health and Prevention's Hayat application. The awareness campaign also urged people to adopt a healthier lifestyle to reduce the need for organ transplants, and importance of good health to qualify for organ donation.

The showcase of Hayat programme was aimed at dispelling myths and misconceptions surrounding organ donation and encouraging individuals to make informed decisions as organ donors. Activities included Hayat cinema - showcasing inspiring

real organ donation stories from the UAE, Hayat registration, Hayat partners, Hayat passport through health check-up stations, and other activations.

The Hayat Programme has enabled a total number of 582 organ transplant operations in the country since 2017, including 328 kidneys, 199 liver, 16 hearts, 26 lungs, and 13 pancreases. The total number of donors have reached 202 since 2017.

The programme is distinguished by its community solidarity and tolerance by enabling transplantation for needy organ failure patients in the country regardless of race, religion, or income, as more than 52 different nationalities have contributed and benefited.

OOC organises rehabilitation and recovery workshop

The rehabilitation and recovery workshop for muscle tissue and bones, organised by Oman Olympic Committee (OOC), represented by Oman Sports Medicine and Anti-Doping Committee, concluded last Thursday.

The workshop aimed to enhance understanding and skills in the field of physical therapy as well as, provide an environment for effective educational programmes for national team specialists and rehabilitation experts in order to improve the care of athletes and enhance their physical performance, a press release said.

The workshop strived to learn about the foundations, principles and philosophy of osteopathy, understand and apply biomechanics to the body, and be able to make an initial differential manual diagnosis. It also aimed to identify and diagnose physical dysfunction, learn manual assessment skills and review skeletal motor tests to aid in diagnosis. In addition to safely mastering the practical use of skeletal techniques on the spine and limbs, and integrating actual practical cases with osteopathic techniques and how to deal with different cases.

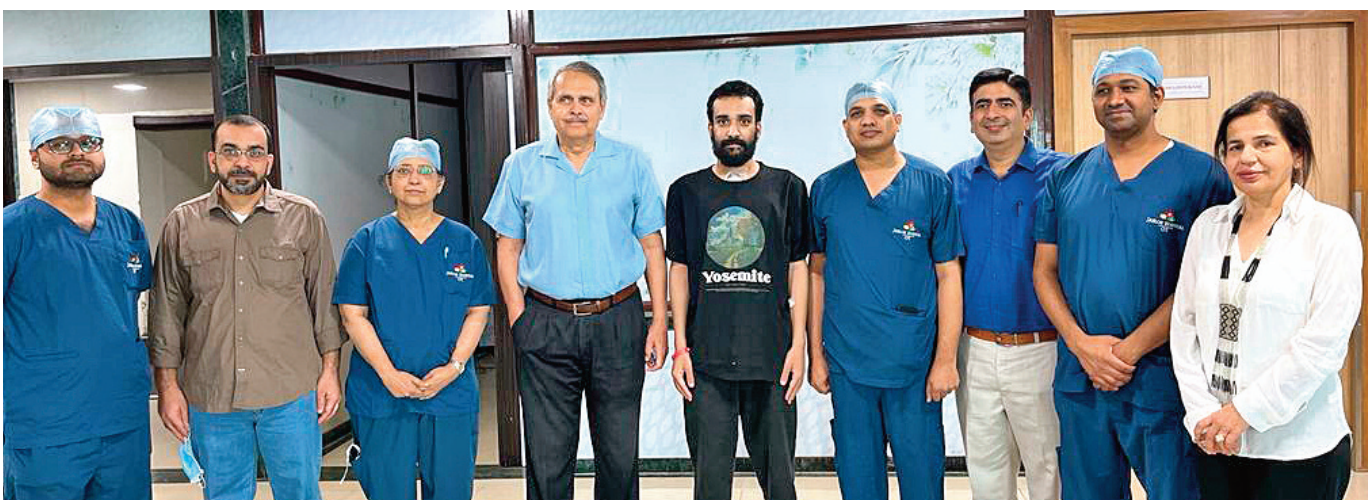
The workshop was lectured by orthopedic medicine specialist Dr. Ayman Al-Batawi, with the participation of 23 physical therapists from the national teams. It included theoretical lectures and practical applications on many diverse topics of relevance, including anatomy, manual assessment skills, biomechanics, initial differential diagnosis, and spinal laws and terminology and structural examination of osteopathy. Additionally, functional dysfunctions and structural treatment of the lumbar spine, techniques using muscle strength, and others.

Omani youth undergoes complex heart surgery in Mumbai

A 24-year-old youth from Oman, Khattab Omar Rashid, was admitted to Jaslok Hospital & Research Centre in Mumbai on October 9 for the management of a complex heart problem.

Khattab had previously undergone four open heart surgeries, the most recent one being about two months ago in another hospital in India. The patient was in critical condition, experiencing heart failure and an active infection, a press release said.

The sequence of surgeries began with the first operation addressing a birth defect of the heart (subaortic membrane removal). Subsequently, he required another operation to correct the aortic valve, which was replaced. However, a leak developed beside the valve,



leading to two more surgeries in Oman. Despite a surgery in India for the infected valve, the patient continued to experience complications, ultimately being diagnosed with an ascending aortic aneurysm, a condition

where the main blood vessel from the heart becomes dilated like a balloon, carrying a risk of rupture.

Managing an aortic aneurysm, particularly when it has eroded the back of the

breastbone, and undergoing repeat open heart surgery is an exceedingly high-risk procedure. Such cases are typically handled in specialised quaternary care centres like Jaslok Hospital & Research Centre. These proce-

dures pose significant risks, including excessive bleeding and potential damage to vital organs such as the brain, kidneys, and liver, especially when there is an active infection.

The patient's treatment at

Jaslok Hospital involved a 'Heart Team Approach', a collaborative effort comprising experienced cardiac surgeons, cardiologists, anaesthetists, intensivists, infection specialists, and technologists. This complex surgery was successfully carried out by the team headed by Dr Suresh Joshi, director, Cardiovascular & Thoracic Surgery, and assisted by Dr Upendra Bhalerao, consultant, Cardiovascular & Thoracic Surgery, Dr Rajashri Agasakar, consultant Anaesthesia, Dr Anurag Jain, consultant, Cardiac Anaesthesia, and Kiran Ambre, Heart & Lung Machine technologist (special expertise for such complex cases).

Dr Joshi highlighted the hospital's status as a referral center for complex aortic surgeries and re-operative heart surgeries

across the world. He emphasised, "Conducting a fifth Repeat Open Heart Surgery is rare and poses extreme technical challenges, considering the inherent risks associated with such multiple open heart surgeries and the intricate nature of the recent procedure. It speaks of the hospital's commitment to excellence in cardiac care, as well as the patient's resilience and the effectiveness of the 'Heart Team Approach' employed in managing such complex cases. We were confident that we could handle this case successfully. Jaslok Hospital continues to be a Centre of Excellence for heart valve surgery and minimally invasive heart surgery, attracting patients from across India and around the world."

Death toll in Gaza Strip rises to 21,672

About 70 per cent of the victims are children and women, according to Palestinian health ministry

Ankara, Turkey - The Palestinian death toll from Israeli army's on-going attacks on the Gaza Strip since October 7 has risen to 21,672, with 56,165 others injured, the Health Ministry in the blockaded enclave said on Saturday.

The ministry said in a statement that 'the Israeli occupation committed 14 massacres during the past 24 hours, which led to the death of 165 Palestinians and the injury of 250 others'.

About 70 per cent of the victims are children and women, the ministry added.

Israel has launched relentless air and ground attacks on the Gaza Strip following a cross-border attack by Palestinian group Hamas on October 7.

Authorities claim the Hamas attacks have killed around 1,200 Israelis.

The onslaught has left Gaza in ruins, with at least 60 per cent of the enclave's infrastructure damaged or destroyed and nearly 2 million residents displaced amid acute shortages of food, clean water, and medicines.

UN warns of infectious disease spread

The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) warned on Saturday of the intensification of infectious disease spread in the Gaza Strip, which suffered a lack of humanitarian aid and subsequent disastrous repercussions.

The spread of diseases in Gaza has intensified, especially due to the recent mass displacement throughout southern Gaza and the need for some families to move several times, OCHA said in a statement.

The agency added that this



Citizens recover dead and wounded from under the rubble of a house destroyed by Israeli warplanes in the Nuseirat camp, Gaza, on Saturday (WAFA)

The health ministry said in a statement that the Israeli army carried out 14 attacks during the past 24 hours, which led to the death of 165 Palestinians and injuries to 250 others

situation increases pressure on the already overwhelmed Palestinian health system, which is struggling to meet the enormous needs of the population at a time when the majority of hospitals across the strip are out of service. It explained that nearly

180,000 people suffer from upper respiratory infections, while there are 136,400 cases of diarrhea, with half of them reported among children under the age of five. Meanwhile, 55,400 people have had scabies, 5,330 have

chickenpox, 42,700 suffer from skin rashes, and 126 suffer from meningitis. The statement pointed out that 1.9mn people in Gaza, or approximately 85 per cent of the whole population, have become internally displaced, including those who are forced to move frequently to seek refuge. It added that the lack of food and survival items and poor hygiene exacerbate the already difficult living conditions of the displaced and prompt the spread of diseases. The UN office said that due to

the major security incidents that occurred in the vicinity of the Kerem Shalom crossing since it was partially reopened on December 17, humanitarian aid through this crossing between Israel and Gaza was suspended during the past four days. Meanwhile, 81 trucks loaded with food and medicine entered Gaza through the Rafah crossing with Egypt on Friday, the office added. However, the aid convoys could face multiple challenges in their delivery. The UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine

Refugees said the Israeli forces opened fire on Friday on an aid convoy that was returning from northern Gaza in a route designated by the Israeli army, leading to damage to one vehicle. The World Food Program warned a few days ago that the Palestinian enclave is facing the fifth stage of acute food insecurity and that the risk of famine is increasing daily amid intensified conflict and restricted humanitarian access. Meanwhile, dozens of Israelis living in Berlin demonstrated on Friday to end the war against the

Gaza Strip. About 60 demonstrators gathered in front of the Foreign Ministry building and called for a cease-fire. They carried banners that read 'Peace is possible', 'Israelis against ethnic cleansing', 'Stop the massacre in Gaza', 'Human rights for all' and 'Only peace can bring security, not a military solution'. They also demanded the release of all prisoners and a diplomatic solution between Israel and Palestine. South Africa said on Friday it is 'gravely concerned' about the plight of civilians caught in Israeli attacks on the Gaza Strip due to the indiscriminate use of force and forcible removal of inhabitants. "There are ongoing reports of international crimes, such as crimes against humanity and war crimes, being committed by Israel in Gaza," the Foreign Ministry said in a statement. It said there also reports that acts meeting the threshold of genocide or related crimes as defined in the 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide, have been and may still be committed in the context of ongoing massacres in Gaza. South Africa said as a country party to the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, it is under a treaty obligation to prevent genocide from occurring. Pretoria said as a result, it filed an application instituting proceedings against Israel before the International Court of Justice (ICJ). South Africa, which has repeatedly condemned all forms of attacks against Israeli and Palestinian civilians, said it decided to approach the court on December 8. Agencies

Health workers, journalists hold vigil in London for colleagues killed in Gaza

London, UK - Health workers and journalists held a vigil in front of 10 Downing Street to pay tribute to colleagues killed by Israel in Gaza and demanded an immediate cease-fire in the ongoing conflict. Participants, including prominent figures like Omar Adel-Mannan, a pediatric neurologist, and Lemis Andoni, a seasoned Palestinian journalist, not only paid respects but urged the government to advocate for lasting peace.

'Holocaust of 2023' Adel-Mannan, who had previously worked in Gaza, delivered a stirring message to the 'silent majority', urging them to 'break their silence and take action in response to the humanitarian crisis unfolding in Gaza'. "Shame on every single one of you. Because you have seen children being decimated. You have seen mutilated bodies. What more do you need? Stand up,



A commemoration is being held in London for health workers and journalists who lost their lives in Gaza

have some courage, some humanity," he said. Expressing frustration with the lack of collective response, Adel-Mannan emphasised the urgency of the situation. "This is a basic humanitarian crisis. This is a genocide. This is a holocaust of 2023 because that is the reality,"

he said, underlining the severity of the atrocities occurring in Gaza. He urged the silent majority to overcome hesitations and actively contribute to efforts to address the crisis. "There are many of us, there are large numbers of us. We are safe in our numbers. When we have been

attacked or threatened at work, in our homes, or in our places of worship, there are plenty of us to understand that this is a basic humanitarian crisis," he said. Andoni also held the British government accountable for the ongoing violence. Anadolu Agency

Palestinians worried about Israel stealing organs from bodies

Gaza City, Palestinian Territories - A Palestinian woman, Rasmia Kodeih, has been demanding the release of her deceased son's body from Israeli authorities for almost three months. Kodeih, whose son was killed on October 7, believes that his body is detained by Israeli authorities. Kodeih told Anadolu that she feared that Israel would 'steal his organs'. "Stop Israel's theft of martyrs' organs. I want my son's complete body back, with all of his organs," sobbed the Palestinian mother. Kodeih condemned 'the Israeli audacity to steal organs from the bodies of Palestinians in full view of the world'. "This is a major crime that requires Israel to be subjected to trial and punishment," Kodeih said. "I am a mother. I just want them to give me my son's body as it was." Since the beginning of the ground Israeli war on the Gaza Strip on October 27, Palestinian families have reported that



they do not know the fate of their family members who were arrested by the Israeli army and taken to unknown destinations. The war of genocide, the mass executions of displaced people sheltering in schools, hospitals, and residential neighbourhoods, give Israel the opportunity to mutilate martyrs and steal their organs, said Ashraf Al-Qudra, spokesman for the Health Ministry in the Gaza Strip. In a statement to Anadolu, Qudra called on international institutions to 'carry out their duty

to protect the Palestinians as well as the bodies of martyrs from Israeli mutilation and organ theft'. The official also called on the international community to 'restrain the Israeli occupation and stop its behaviours that are contrary to international humanitarian law. Qudra pointed out that specialised teams 'received, the bodies of about 80 Palestinians who were killed by the Israeli army and detained for the period of its ongoing ground operation in the northern Gaza Strip'. Anadolu Agency

UN official warns of Houthi militia threat to maritime navigation in Red Sea

United Nations - UN official on Friday warned of the consequences of the threat posed by Yemen's Houthi militia on maritime navigation in the Red Sea. "The continued Houthi threat to maritime navigation in the Red Sea is of growing concern. It risks exacerbating regional tensions, and further escalation, and also has potentially grave political, economic, and humanitarian ramifications for millions in Yemen and the

region," said Khaled Khiri, UN assistant secretary-general for the Middle East, Asia and the Pacific. This threat also has potential ramifications at a global scale if regional and international shipping and supply chains are adversely impacted by further escalation in the Red Sea, he told the UN Security Council. The United Nations continues to encourage de-escalation



Khaled Khiri at the UN Security Council meeting on Friday (Xinhua)

and a cessation of attacks and threats so that traffic through the Red Sea can return to its normal state and the risk of Yemen being dragged into a regional conflagration be avoided, said Khiri. "The United Nations underscores the importance of ensuring that international law is respected in full in relation to maritime navigation. We appeal to all members of the international community to do

everything in their power to use their influence on the relevant parties to prevent an escalation of the situation in the region," he said. Briefing the Security Council on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, Khiri said the situation in the region is alarming. In Gaza, Israeli intense ground operations and fighting between Israeli forces and Hamas and others continued in

most areas. Hamas and other Palestinian factions continue to fire rockets from Gaza into Israel. Civilians from both sides, particularly in Gaza, continue to bear the brunt of this conflict. The humanitarian situation in Gaza continues to deteriorate, he said, reiterating UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres' call for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire. Xinhua

Pakistan's election chief rejects Imran Khan's nomination papers

Islamabad, Pakistan - The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) confirmed on Saturday that it has rejected the nomination papers for Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) founder Imran Khan, dealing a major blow to the former Prime Minister ahead of the upcoming elections slated for February 8, 2024, The News International reported on Saturday.

Despite being disqualified from contesting the upcoming general elections in Pakistan, jailed ex-PM, Imran Khan submitted his nomination papers from his home constituency in Mianwali on Friday, as reported by Geo News. Khan had his nomination papers submitted for the National Assembly's NA-89 constituency. PTI leader Umar Bodla appeared on the former prime minister's behalf.

The PTI founder, a 70-year-old former international cricket star, has been at the centre of a political crisis since he was ousted in a parliamentary no-confidence vote in April 2022.

The cricketer-turned-politician was sent to jail for three years on August 5 after being found guilty of selling state gifts during his 2018-22 tenure as prime minister - the charges he denies, Geo News reported.

Khan is seeking to overturn that conviction, which has barred him from contesting elections for five years. He filed a plea in the Islamabad High Court, but it was rejected, after which the party moved to the Supreme Court.

In a separate victory for his legal team, they managed to get him bail from the apex court earlier in the day; however, the incarcerated former PM still won't



A file photo of Pakistan's former prime minister Imran Khan at his residence in Lahore (AFP)

Despite being disqualified from contesting the upcoming general elections in Pakistan, former prime minister Imran Khan submitted his nomination papers from his home constituency in Mianwali on Friday

be able to come out of jail anytime soon as he was arrested in two more cases during his incarceration, according to Geo News. Khan's legal team says that the district court, which sent Khan to jail and had him disqualified, gave a 'baseless' judgement.

Pakistan's general elections will take place on February 8, 2024, with political parties turning up the heat by staging rallies or wooing politicians with a substantial voter base into their

ranks. The top two issues that the incoming government will have to deal with are economic stabilisation and political uncertainty, both of which have been persistent since PTI's ouster.

According to Geo News, several politicians have hinted that a coalition would rule the country as no single leader or party is in a position to form the majority.

Despite his disqualification and fallout with the establishment, Khan remains a crucial

reason for PTI's vote bank, as was evident when his party released an AI-generated audio of Khan to boost the supporters' morale, Geo News reported.

An uphill task remains for the PTI as it goes into the polls after Khan stepped down as the PTI chairman and handed over the reins to Barrister Gohar Khan, the man who has been in the party for around a year.

The election commission also moved Peshawar High Court to challenge its single-bench ruling on PTI's electoral 'bat' symbol, The News International reported.

It reported that ECP has requested the court to review the PTI's intra-party elections and its decisions related to the election symbol and also requested the court to fix the plea before a divi-

sion bench in the greater interest of the public. It said that the ECP is charged with the duty to conduct elections honestly, justly, fairly and under law. The petition read that Article 218(3) allows the electoral body to organise and conduct the elections, adding that the ECP is also responsible for making all necessary arrangements ahead of the polls.

"This court observed that election is a process that starts with the issuance of the election programme and consists of the various links and stages on that behalf, such as the filing of nomination papers, their scrutiny, the hearing of objections and the holding of actual polls. If any of these links are challenged, it really (is) tantamount to challenging the said process of election," it said. "This case implies that where a violation of the standards mentioned in Article 218(3) has not yet taken place, the Election Commission is legally empowered under Article 218(3) to exercise its powers pre-emptively in order to avoid a violation of these standards," said the petition.

The plea said that the petitioners have sought 'interim relief' for the suspension of ECP's order as well as for the publication of an intra-party certificate on its website along with the restoration of the 'bat' symbol.

"This court cannot grant final relief as interim relief; hence, the interim relief so granted vide order dated December 26, 2023 is against the law as well as against the dictum laid down by the Supreme Court in its judgement," it added.

ANI



Argentine President Javier Milei

Argentina pulls out of plans to join BRICS bloc

Buenos Aires, Argentina - The newly elected far-right President of Argentina, Javier Milei, pulled out of plans to join BRICS bloc of developing economies and said that the timing for Argentina's membership in the bloc is not opportune, Al Jazeera reported on Friday.

Fulfilling a campaign promise pledged to pursue closer ties with the West, Milei wrote a letter dated December 22 but released on Friday, in which he told the leaders of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa that the timing for Argentina's membership in the bloc was not opportune.

Milei said in his letter that his approach to foreign affairs 'differs in many aspects from that of the previous government. In this sense, some decisions made by the previous administration will be reviewed'.

Al Jazeera said in its report that Argentina's new president, a self-described anarcho-libertarian who has pushed forward a series of radical economic reforms since taking office in December, has said that he will pursue a foreign policy that aligns

with Western countries, moving away from the previous administration's efforts to build ties with other developing countries. Former centre-left President Alberto Fernandez had promoted Argentina's inclusion in BRICS as a way to foster economic relations with the bloc, whose members account for about 25 per cent of world GDP. Argentina had been set to join on January 1, 2024.

Reporting from the capital city of Buenos Aires, Al Jazeera correspondent Monica Yanakiew said that Milei has already issued sweeping changes during his three weeks in office.

"He has already made dramatic changes in all walks of life; from expediting divorce procedures to deregulating prices to eliminating subsidies, everything is changing here now," she said.

During his campaign, Milei railed against countries ruled 'by communism' and neighbouring economic power Brazil and said he would pursue greater alignment with 'free nations of the West' such as Israel and the US in his economic and foreign policy.

ANI

Moscow, Ankara will continue expanding cooperation: Putin

Moscow, Russia - Russian President Vladimir Putin said on Saturday that Moscow and Ankara will continue expanding their political dialogue and productive cooperation in multiple spheres in 2024.

Congratulating his Turkish counterpart Recep Tayyip Erdogan in a New Year message, published on the Kremlin's website, Putin noted that Russia and Turkey 'have been quite effective in developing their multi-faceted cooperation' over the past years.

"The two countries worked together on major energy and infrastructure projects and facilitated efforts to settle regional conflicts. In 2024, Moscow and Ankara will continue expanding their political dialogue and productive cooperation in multiple spheres, which is expected to benefit their friendly nations and contribute to strengthening secu-



Russian President Vladimir Putin

rity and stability on the Eurasian continent," the message read.

Russia and Turkey have been actively developing economic cooperation in many areas, including agriculture and energy sector. The two countries also set an ambitious goal of raising the bilateral trade turnover to US\$100bn, and, according to assessments of the presidents, the two countries 'are successfully approaching' the target.

Anadolu Agency

CALF BACK WITH ITS HERD



A five-month-old elephant calf, which was found roaming in the Manambolly range private forest area of Anamalai Tiger Reserve, in India's Coimbatore, was reunited with its herd after a rescue operation by the wildlife department officials on Saturday (ANI)

Austria impresses on Bulgaria, Romania to accept refugees for entry into Schengen

Belgrade, Serbia - Austria said on Friday that Bulgaria and Romania need to accept refugees from Afghanistan and Syria as a condition for entry into the Schengen Zone.

Interior Minister Gerhard Karner said there must be visible progress in the area of the protection of the EU's external borders to reach the point that Bulgaria and Romania are accepted into 'air Schengen', according to reports by Bulgarian

National Television.

Romania and Bulgaria, member of the EU since 2007, will enter the Schengen area of free movement by air and sea borders in March, Romania said on Wednesday.

Karner stressed in a statement the need for bolstered border controls in those countries, insisting on increased military presence, especially along land borders between Romania and Bulgaria.



This file photo shows a refugee mother with her child at a camp in Athens

He added that the conditions include increasing Frontex operations in Bulgaria and controls at land borders, and receiving financial support from the EU Commission to strengthen controls at land borders.

Frontex is the EU border and coast guard agency.

The Austrian Interior Ministry emphasised that there are no ongoing negotiations for the two countries' accession to Schengen with land borders and

therefore there is no planned date.

The formal approval of all members states is needed as the last step to materialise the agreement, the statement noted.

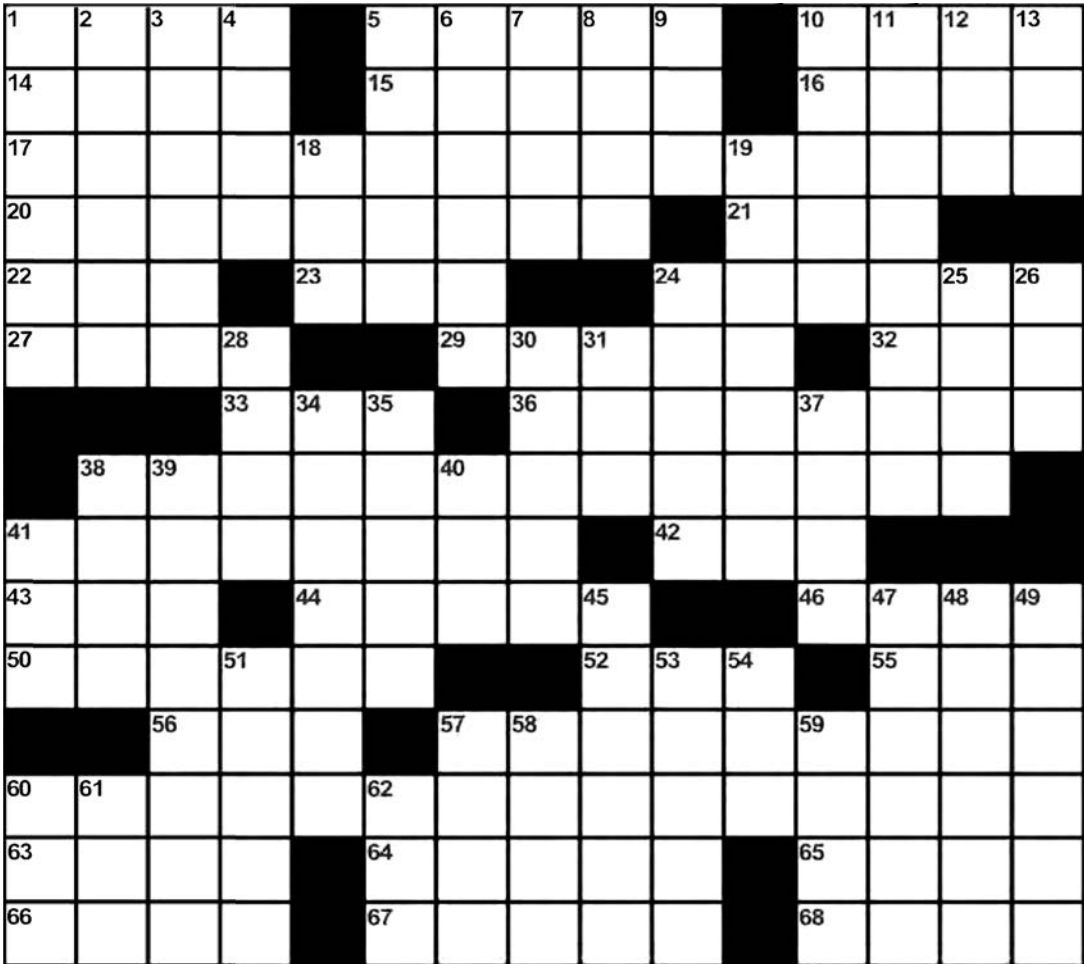
The Schengen area currently includes 23 of 27 European countries as well as Iceland, Norway, Switzerland and Liechtenstein. It allows residents to travel freely among member countries without

going through border controls.

Austria argued earlier that the increasing flow of undocumented migrants to Europe proves that the Schengen area does not function properly, and the Netherlands, which insisted that Bulgaria should undertake comprehensive judicial and anti-corruption reforms - has long blocked Romania and Bulgaria's entry into the Schengen area.

Anadolu Agency

DAILY CROSSWORD



ACROSS

- 1) Old sorcerer
- 5) It's waved before musicians
- 10) Bounce back, in a way
- 14) Milky birthstone
- 15) ancient Greek market-place
- 16) Blooper
- 17) It's attractive in cartoons?
- 20) Many French immigrants
- 21) It plays it
- 22) Under a doctor's care
- 23) Some widths for printers
- 24) Harangue
- 27) Some deer
- 29) Anklebone
- 32) Intense anger
- 33) "Right there, that's it"
- 36) Private, as information
- 38) Old-fashioned mode of transportation
- SADDLE UP
- 41) Birthright
- 42) 'Neath counterpart
- 43) Important time
- 44) "You did _nice job"
- 46) Dutch cheese

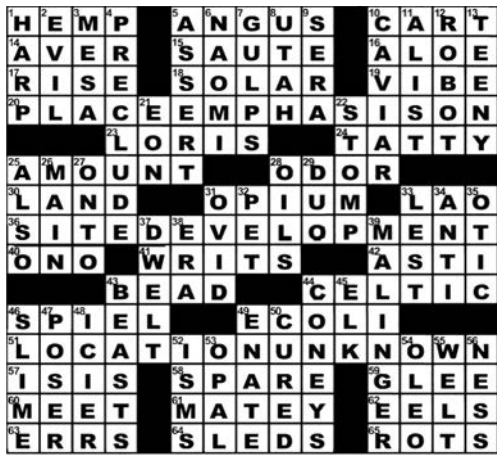
- 50) Detonating device
- 52) Smartphone program
- 55) Contraction before "seen worse"
- 56) Crumb on a dinner table
- 57) It prevents embarrassment
- 60) Activity seen at Pimlico
- 63) Miscellaneous assortment
- 64) Mysterious ancient letters
- 65) "Bus Stop" playwright William
- 66) Unskilled working stiff
- 67) Daisy variety
- 68) They are chipped on golf courses
- DOWN
- 1) Angora coat
- 2) Classic Harlem venue
- 3) Use mouthwash, e.g.
- 4) " ... or _!"
- 5) It holds water
- 6) Horrified
- 7) Warner Bros. creation
- 8) Assayers' subjects
- 9) '60s conflict site
- 10) "Doctor Dolittle" actress Samantha

- 11) Participating in a certain line dance
- 12) Farmer's tool
- 13) Many a time
- 18) " ..._ he drove out of sight"
- 19) Under debate
- 24) Engine supercharger
- 25) Heavy cart
- 26) Slippery sea creature
- 28) Bombay dress
- 30) Sleeper's breathing problem
- 31) Trailed no one
- 34) Ancient goddess of fertility
- 35) Got wind of
- 37) Shrek, e.g.
- 38) "Catch!"
- 39) Handel bars?
- 40) Cause of wrinkles
- 41) Cool, old-school
- 45) Servile servant
- 47) Kind of inspiration
- 48) Exact retribution for
- 49) Integrates
- 51) Improper lighting?
- 53) As such
- 54) Letters of pressure
- 57) Imitation, as fur
- 58) Unflattering facial marks

- 59) Mine entrance
- 60) Bounce

- 61) "Bravo, bullfighter!"
- 62) Generic family nickname

NOTE PAD



YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE



ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

Embrace novelty today and venture into unexplored territory. You possess the audacity to take risks, and now is the time to discover your center and stay committed. This will be the defining moment when you truly understand the satisfaction of immersing yourself in focused work and accomplishing your goals. If necessary, you can revisit this juncture in a month to embark on yet another invigorating journey. Prepare yourself with prompts and cues to avoid starting from square one.



LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

You're in the zone now! Positivity permeates your thinking, and a contagious enthusiasm fuels your every endeavour. With your swiftness and unwavering resolve, you're perfectly positioned to seize opportunities today and reap the rewards they offer. If you come across more than you can personally utilize, consider storing or sharing the excess. It would be a shame to let any of this abundance go to waste.



SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

Take a firm hold on the significance of it all and envision how it can be tailored to suit your needs. Let your aspirations be guided by a combination of rationality and foresight, as today you'll find yourself in a mindset that embraces the future. Your focus is on harnessing energy, seeking simplicity, and seizing opportunities. By staying attentive and prepared, you won't have to exert excessive effort when fortune presents itself directly to you.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

01. The Iguazu Falls are on the border of which two countries?

- A. China & Korea
- B. Syria & Jordan
- C. Thailand & Cambodia
- D. Brazil & Argentina



TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

Seize the day, as the responsibility falls squarely on your shoulders. There's a crucial project awaiting completion, and your exceptional creative spark positions you as the ideal candidate. Can you push yourself beyond your recent efforts? Absolutely! Demonstrate your unwavering commitment and unwavering strength by dedicating yourself to achieving something significant for your loved ones or colleagues.



VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

Seems like you're experiencing a rather peculiar state of mind, don't you think? It's intriguing how your emotions fluctuate, alternating between warmth and passion, only to be followed by irritability. It would be wise to refrain from being curt or snappy. Here's a helpful guideline: avoid uttering words that might require apologies later. If you find yourself feeling narrow-minded, it's best to keep those thoughts to yourself.



CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

Avoid assuming the role of an oppressive dictator, constantly squashing any opposition in your path. It's akin to a toddler disrupting a game without consideration for others. Likewise, refrain from being a disrespectful scofflaw, persistently defying authority just for the sake of being rebellious, like a teenager seeking thrills from being obnoxious. Take a moment to remove your earbuds and genuinely listen to those individuals who might seem bothersome today.



GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

Today, your business acumen and eloquence are at their peak. Not only can you effortlessly explain anything, but you also possess the ability to sell it convincingly. Utilize these talents to propel yourself towards your objectives. Navigate social settings adeptly, engaging with others confidently and forging connections, but always maintain ethical boundaries. While it's tempting to employ charm and audacity to attain your desires effortlessly, remember to approach this task with sincerity.



LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

It's time to engage your intellect and channel your newfound confidence. You're bursting with self-assurance, but be cautious not to become overly audacious. To truly achieve something exhilarating, it may be necessary to abandon old habits and methods. Instead, focus on groundbreaking, original ideas. Today is all about unleashing innovative energy and adopting daring strategies.



AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

Within your realm, curiosity thrives and pulses with vitality. That glimmer at the periphery of your vision? It's likely the reflection of your own captivating personality and brilliant intellect. Will this attract attention today? Absolutely. Regardless of the tune others may be singing, their reactions will resonate with you. Direct your attention towards the aspects you share in common, even if it's as simple as a fondness for the extraordinary.



CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

Mishaps are bound to occur, and emotions may run high. In this imperfect world, it's important to remember that not every setback is a personal attack. If you find yourself longing for an escape from the current situation, it's natural to seek someone to hold responsible. However, consider that those around you may be aware of your desire for solitude rather than engaging in the process and offering suggestions.



SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

If you have individuals in your life who rely on you or regard you as a role model, like employees, colleagues, or children, it's important to be mindful of your interactions with them today. Your energy seems unsettled, and unintentionally, you may be projecting an authoritarian demeanor instead of being a supportive friend or ally. It's crucial to acknowledge that you may not possess all the expertise or hold an undisputed leadership position.



PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

Embrace the tranquility of the moment, as it aligns perfectly with your preferences. It seems fortune has smiled upon you, granting a fortuitous respite—a day of leisure to unwind and navigate effortlessly between tasks and challenges. What's more, you can even indulge in impulsive decisions without causing offense. Don't anticipate accomplishing a great deal in the immediate future, unless you focus on finalizing ongoing projects and resolving loose ends.

02. What actor had the title role in the film "The 40-Year-Old Virgin"?

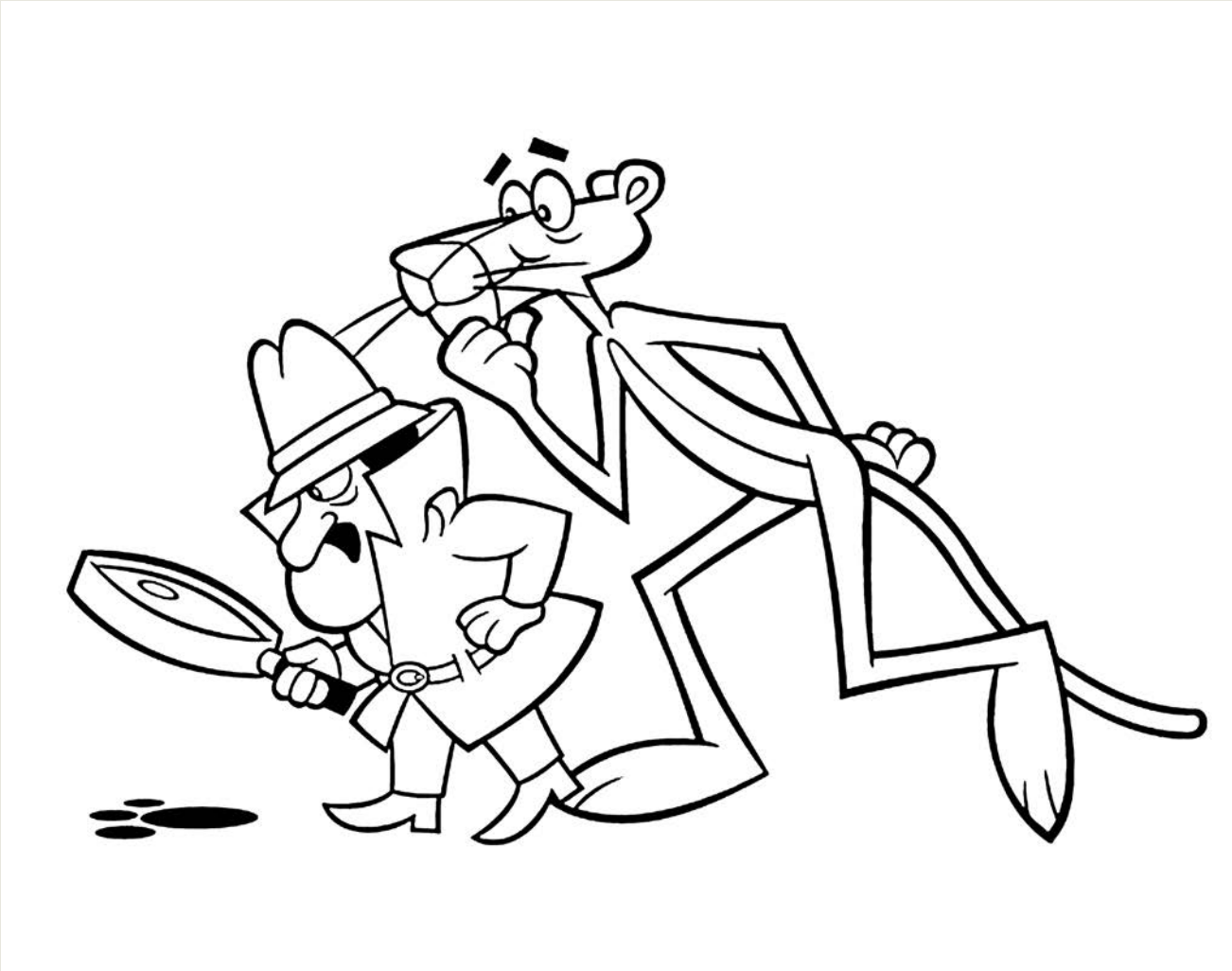
- A. Ben Stiller
- B. Will Ferrell
- C. Adam Sandler
- D. Steve Carell

03.Which of these was a ruler of the Aztec empire?

- A. Ataturk
- B. Montezuma
- C. Santa Anna
- D. Nicholas

Answers: 1.D 2.D 3.B

KIDS COLOURING



BOGGLER

O	R	E	R
D	Y	S	E
A	M	E	O
P	I	L	E

Each game will present you with a matrix filled with letters. The objective is to form words by linking adjacent letters - to the left, right, on top, bottom, or diagonal to each other. The Boggles Classic game uses a 4 x 4 matrix. Words are valued at one point for each letter in excess of two letters. A three letter word is worth one point, a four letter word is worth two points, and so on. Valid words must be at least three letters long.
Solution 20-25 words: Excellent, 15-20 words: Very good, 10-15 words: Good, 5-10 words: Average

DO YOU SUDOKU?

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

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

WORD BUILDER



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

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

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER

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

Mendis named Sri Lanka's ODI captain

Top-order batsman replaces Shanaka; Hasaranga to lead in T20Is

Colombo, Sri Lanka - Dasun Shanaka's reign as Sri Lanka's white-ball captain has come to an end as Sri Lanka's new selection committee appointed Kusal Mendis and Wanindu Hasaranga to lead the ODI and T20I sides, respectively. With Dimuth Karunaratne currently leading the Test side, this is the first time Sri Lanka have three different captains in the three formats.

Shanaka first captained Sri Lanka in 2019, on the team's first tour to Pakistan since the 2009 Lahore attack, but it was not until 2021 that he became their regular captain. Under him, Sri Lanka won 23 out of 41 ODIs and 22 out of 48 T20Is. The highlight of his tenure was the 2022 T20 Asia Cup victory in the UAE where Sri Lanka beat Pakistan in the final.

Also notable were ODI series wins against South Africa and Australia, and a T20I series win against India at home, all at home. Shanaka also oversaw Sri Lanka's unbeaten run through the 2023 World Cup Qualifier. But all these achievements were interspersed with poor showings in



Kusal Mendis

the 2021 and 2022 T20 World Cups as well as the 2023 ODI World Cup.

However, it was his poor form with the bat, primarily in ODIs, that put him under the most scrutiny and made people question his place in the side. As such, it was widely expected that the new selection committee would look elsewhere in terms of the captaincy.

His replacements, Mendis and Hasaranga, both have recent experience in leadership roles. Mendis is a former Under-19 captain and the current skipper of Dambulla Aura in the LPL. Midway through the 2023 ODI World Cup, he took over the reins from Shanaka when the latter got injured. Hasaranga, who is currently recovering from a hamstring surgery, had earlier this year led B-Love Kandy to their inaugural LPL title.

Shanaka may still play a role in Sri Lanka's white-ball set-ups after he was named in the preliminary squads for the limited-overs series against Zimbabwe at home in January.

Kathmandu court finds Lamichhane guilty of rape

Kathmandu, Nepal - A single-judge bench of the Kathmandu District Court has found Sandeep Lamichhane guilty of raping an 18-year-old woman and has fixed January 10 for sentencing, according to Reuters.

The court, however, has concluded that the victim was not a minor at the time of the incident, as had been reported earlier. The next hearing on the matter will determine Lamichhane's sentence. He is currently out on bail.

Lamichhane could face up to 10 years in jail. His lawyers said he would appeal the verdict to a higher court.

"We did not expect this judgement... we are frustrated," lawyer Sabita Bhandari Baral told Reuters about Friday's verdict by the Kathmandu district court. "We'll definitely appeal."

On Friday, the day of his conviction, Lamichhane had led PARS Club XI to a win over Nepal Army Club in a Nepal Pro Club Championship match. In early September last year, Lamichhane, then the Nepal captain, was suspended by the Cricket Association of Nepal (CAN) after an arrest warrant



Sandeep Lamichhane

was issued against him in Kathmandu over the matter. It followed the news that a complaint against Lamichhane had been lodged.

At the time, Lamichhane was in the West Indies with Jamaica Tallawahs taking part in CPL 2022. The club announced that Lamichhane would be leaving the tournament with immediate effect. Upon landing at the airport in Kathmandu in early October, he had been taken into custody.

Shortly before being arrested, Lamichhane had written on Facebook that he would "fully cooperate in all stages of the investigation."

Thiem makes Brisbane International main draw after snake holds up match

Brisbane, Australia - Former US Open champion Dominic Thiem weathered a unique challenge on his path to the Brisbane International main draw on Saturday, as a venomous snake momentarily halted his qualifying clash against Australian youngster James McCabe.

With tensions rising in the second set after Thiem dropped the first, sharp-eyed fans spotted the unwelcome intruder slithering near the court's electrical

wires. Recognizing the potential danger, officials promptly called for a halt in play and summoned a professional snake handler.

The approximately 50-centimeter reptile, subsequently identified as a potentially deadly eastern brown snake, was safely removed after a 40-minute delay. "While I admire and appreciate all forms of wildlife," Thiem remarked afterwards, "the snake's proximity to the ballkids necessitated cautious and

swift action." He further acknowledged, "It's an experience I will undoubtedly never forget."

Shaken but determined, Thiem channelled his focus, clawing back the second set in a tie-break before sealing his victory 2-6 7-6(4) 6-4 to secure a place in the main draw. This hard-fought triumph serves as a promising prelude to the upcoming Australian Open, beginning January 14, for the former world number three who currently



Dominic Thiem

ranks 98th due to injury setbacks.

Adding to Brisbane International's allure is the anticipated return of tennis royalty Rafael Nadal. The 22-time Grand Slam champion, making a comeback after hip surgery, will partner with Marc Lopez in a doubles match on Sunday.

Furthermore, Nadal is slated to compete in the singles draw against a qualifier, marking his first competitive singles action

since June and potentially the commencement of his farewell tour.

Another captivating storyline unfolds in the women's draw, where reigning Brisbane champion Naomi Osaka takes centre stage after a maternity break. The Japanese superstar kicks off her comeback campaign against Tamara Korpatsch, promising a highly anticipated spectacle for tennis enthusiasts eagerly awaiting her return to the court.

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SETBACK FOR INTER

Serie A leaders held to hard-fought draw at Genoa

Genoa, Italy - Serie A leaders Inter Milan stumbled to a 1-1 draw away to Genoa as Marko Arnautovic's early strike was cancelled out by a Radu Dragusin header just before halftime.

Inter remain top with 45 points, but Juventus, trailing by five points, have a chance to close the gap when they host AS Roma on Saturday. Genoa sit comfortably in mid-table at 13th with 20 points.

Arnautovic, finally fit after a hamstring injury, opened his Serie A account for Inter after 42 minutes, tapping in after Nicolo Barella's volley struck the post. However, Genoa roared back just before the break as Dragusin's powerful header from a corner proved too much for Yann Sommer despite the goalkeeper's valiant effort.

"We knew the type of game that we were going into," said Inter manager Simone Inzaghi. "Genoa are in great shape, both physically and mentally, it was a hard-fought match."

He added, "The second half probably would have been different without conceding at that moment (in first-half added time). We wanted to win, we are not happy with the point, but we must continue and remember that every match holds dangers."

The match was briefly interrupted by flares and smoke early on, but soon returned to its fiery pace. Genoa, who held Juventus to a draw earlier this month, refused to back down against a weakened Inter squad missing Lautaro Martinez and Federico Dimarco. Around the hour mark,



Genoa players celebrate Radu Dragusin's goal against Inter Milan on Friday

Inter found their rhythm, and Francesco Acerbi almost put them back in front with a header, only to be denied by a stunning save from Josep Martinez.

"It was not easy to play on a heavy pitch that made it tough for both teams," said Inzaghi. "We had a huge chance with Acerbi - their goalkeeper made a great save - and we tried to limit their counter-attacks."

"It was not easy to play on a heavy pitch that made it tough for both teams," Inzaghi added. "We had a huge chance with Acerbi - their goalkeeper made a great save - and we tried to limit their counter-attacks. "We must retain the solidity, the hunger and clearly try to bring more consistency," said Inzaghi. "We know that we're not even halfway through the season. It will be a long and tough road with difficulties that we must overcome."

Ultimately, both sides seemed satisfied with a draw to end the year, leaving Inter to reflect on their missed opportunities and Genoa to celebrate their resilience against the league leaders.

Looking ahead to the New Year, Inter host Hellas Verona on January 6, while Lazio, who won 3-1 against Frosinone thanks to late goals from Valentin Castellanos, Gustav Isaksen, and Patric, travel to Udinese the following day.

Chelsea survive late Luton fightback

Luton, England - Cole Palmer was the star of the show as Chelsea survived a late fightback from Luton Town to edge to a 3-2 victory at Kenilworth Road.

The midfielder scored twice while also supplying the assist for Noni Madueke's second goal in as many games as Chelsea ended a four-match losing streak away from home. But it was a close-run thing as Luton fought back with two goals in the final 10 minutes through Ross Barkley and Elijah Adebayo and almost snatched an equaliser.

Chelsea rewarded a bright start by opening the scoring for



Chelsea's Cole Palmer celebrates after scoring against Luton Town

only the seventh time this season through Palmer in the 12th minute. Madueke doubled Chelsea's lead eight minutes before half-time with an emphatic finish at the near post. Chelsea made it 3-0 in the 70th minute as Palmer scored his second of the

match with great composure.

Adebayo thought he gave Luton a lifeline four minutes later as he converted Alfie Doughty's cross, but the goal was overturned after a VAR review because Doughty had been offside. That did not stop Luton as ex-Chelsea player Barkley flicked in in Doughty's corner with 10 minutes to go.

It was now all Luton as Djordje Petrovic parried Carlton Morris's header on to the bar from close range. But in the 87th minute, it was 3-2. Petrovic parried Doughty's header, but only into the path of Adebayo to head in.

Turkish Super Cup final in Riyadh postponed amid row

Istanbul, Turkey - The Turkish Super Cup final between Galatasaray and Fenerbahce, scheduled for Friday in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, was postponed, reportedly, due to a dispute over the teams' desire to wear t-shirts featuring Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder of modern Turkey.

While the official reason for the postponement remains unclear, Turkish media reports suggest Saudi officials denied the clubs' request to wear the Atatürk t-shirts during the warm-up. This reportedly led both teams to refuse to play at the King Saud University Stadium, forcing the organisers' hand.

Saudi state TV cited a statement by organisers saying the cancellation of the final was the result of the teams not adhering to match regulations.

Bennacer in Algeria squad for Africa Cup of Nations

Algiers, Algeria - Algeria have unveiled their 26-man squad for the upcoming African Nations Cup finals in Ivory Coast, featuring the welcome return of AC Milan midfielder Ismael Bennacer alongside some intriguing inclusions and surprising omissions.

Bennacer, who underwent knee surgery in May, makes a triumphant return to the national team after months of recovery. He last donned the Algerian colours in March during Nations Cup qualifiers and will bolster the Desert Foxes' midfield engine.

Alongside Bennacer, several established stars like Al Ahli forward Riyad Mahrez and Wolverhampton Wanderers defender Rayan Ait Nouri solidify the squad's attacking and defensive flanks. However, the inclusion of AS Roma midfielder Houssem Aouar throws up a question mark. Despite being sidelined with muscular pain in recent weeks, he finds himself entrusted by coach Djamel Belmadi. Aouar's fitness will be closely monitored in the lead-up to the tournament.

West Ham's winger Said Benrahma, initially included in the



Ismael Bennacer

preliminary squad, misses out on the final list.

Nigeria recall Musa

Nigeria's 25-man squad for the upcoming African Cup of Nations finals in Ivory Coast has a familiar face rejoining the ranks: veteran captain Ahmed Musa.

Earning a recall after his last appearance in June, Musa, with his 108 caps, brings a wealth of experience to the side alongside another 2013 champion, defender Kenneth Omeruo. The duo will aim to recapture the

magic that led Nigeria to glory a decade ago in Johannesburg.

Coach Jose Peserio's squad boasts eight players from English clubs, but a notable omission is Nottingham Forest striker Taiwo Awoniyi. Instead, Peserio opted for Victor Boniface, whose 10 goals for Bundesliga leaders Bayer Leverkusen have proven irresistible. Another surprise absence is Nice striker Terem Moffi, who misses out in a stacked attacking lineup led by Napoli's African Footballer of the Year, Victor Osimhen.

Nigeria are placed in Group A alongside hosts Ivory Coast and will kick off their campaign in Abidjan on January 14 against Equatorial Guinea.

Senegal include Dia

Holders Senegal have rolled the dice on the fitness of striker Boulaye Dia, including him in their 27-man squad for the African Cup of Nations finals in Ivory Coast despite injury concerns.

Coach Aliou Cisse, who led Senegal to glory in Cameroon two years ago, has picked three players with fitness questions hanging over them.



Napoli's Khvicha Kvaratskhelia vies with Monza's Roberto Gagliardini for the ball during their Serie A match on Friday

Wasteful Napoli held to goalless draw by visiting Monza

Naples, Italy - Napoli's Serie A top-four ambitions suffered another setback after a frustrating goalless draw against visiting Monza, who missed a golden opportunity to steal the win from the penalty spot.

Despite dominating the game and creating numerous chances, Napoli couldn't find the elusive goal, leaving them stuck in seventh place with five points separating them from the top four. Matteo Pessina's weak penalty in the 68th minute denied Monza a chance to win the game, handing Alex Meret an easy save.

Manager Walter Mazzarri bemoaned the wasted opportunities, stating, "I am not worried by the table, my focus is on getting

my lads to play well and today that is what they did. The only regret is that we failed to score a goal, but we deserved to win 2-0 or 3-0."

Victor Osimhen's suspension proved a significant blow to Napoli's attack, with Andre-Frank Zambo Anguissa and Khvicha Kvaratskhelia coming closest to breaking the deadlock. Anguissa's close-range volley was superbly saved by Monza's Michele Di Gregorio, while Kvaratskhelia twice saw Di Gregorio deny him.

Frustration boiled over in the closing stages, with both Mazzarri and Monza coach Raffaele Palladino receiving red cards for separate incidents. Mazzarri, vis-

ibly disappointed, said, "At one point, it looked like a game of rugby more than football."

"I went over to the referee and told him that Kvara (Kvaratskhelia) was not allowed to play because he was systematically fouled. The rules have to be applied."

Monza substitute Mirko Maric also joined the growing list of red cards awarded in stoppage time, adding to the chaotic atmosphere that overshadowed Napoli's underwhelming performance.

Napoli will aim to put this draw behind them when they travel to Torino on January 7, hoping to reignite their push for a Champions League spot.



Jean-Michel Basquiat, El Gran Espectaculo (The Nile), 1983

Sold for: US\$67mn
The highest price of a Christie's contemporary evening sale held in May was made by this Basquiat triptych, in which floating skulls and figures are set against scrawled phrases referencing ancient mythological texts. It had come to auction from the collection of fashion designer Valentino Garavani, and estimated to sell around US\$45mn.

Pablo Picasso, Femme à la montre, 1932

Sold for: US\$139mn
This painting was made in 1932, like many of the most expensive works by Picasso that have been sold at auction. It came from the collection of the late New York philanthropist Emily Fisher Landau, and was sold in November at Sotheby's during a New York evening sale. Femme à la montre now marks the second-highest price achieved by Picasso at auction.



Gustav Klimt, Dame mit Fächer (Lady with a Fan), 1917

Sold for: US\$80mn
When Sotheby's London branch announced that it was selling this painting, which is thought to be the last portrait Klimt painted, the house said it thought it would bring in £65mn (US\$80mn). No painting had ever been given a higher estimate upon appearing at auction in Europe, and expectations ran high. The painting surpassed that estimate.



Gustav Klimt, Insel im Attersee (Island in the Attersee), ca. 1901-02

Sold for: US\$53mn
Once owned by the art collector Otto Kallir, who helped popularise Austrian modernists in the United States, this painting went for US\$53mn during a Sotheby's evening sale in New York in May. The work, which depicts a body of water in the Salzkammergut region of Austria, had never before appeared at auction.

2023 SALES

ART

DOWNTURN

There's been a sure downturn in this year's art sales. The total figures for the top ten lots exhibit a drop-off - US\$660mn in 2023 versus US\$1.1bn in 2022



In 2020, only two of the ten most expensive works of art sold at auction went for prices exceeding US\$50mn. Then, the next year, driven in part by the sale of artworks from the divorced couple Harry and Linda Macklowe, each of the top ten lots surpassed the US\$50mn mark. In 2022, the bar was raised once again: the least expensive piece in the top ten, a work by René Magritte, was sold for US\$79.8mn.

Now, that bar has been lowered. In 2023, the landscape changed once again, with the prices of the most expensive works sold at auction having dropped off significantly from last year.

Compare this year's tenth-most expensive work to 2022's. Henri Rousseau's Les Flamants (1910) sold this past May for US\$43.5mn, setting a new auction record for him. That's a little more than half the price of the Magritte sold in 2022.

Signs of a downturn are evident in other ways, too. This year, four of the works that generated the year's top ten prices overall went for under US\$50mn - many fewer than last

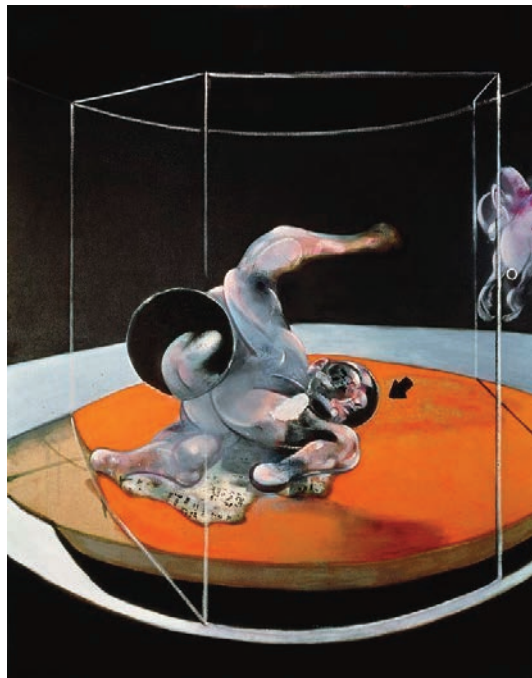
year. Consider the case of the most expensive work sold at auction, too. This year's most expensive work, a Picasso painting, sold for US\$139mn. Last year's, a Warhol painting of Marilyn Monroe, sold for US\$95mn. That's a 29% drop-off between the two.

The total figures for the top ten lots exhibit a similar drop-off - US\$660mn in 2023 versus US\$1.1bn in 2022. Here's a look at the most valuable lots sold at auction in 2023:

(Source: www.artnews.com)

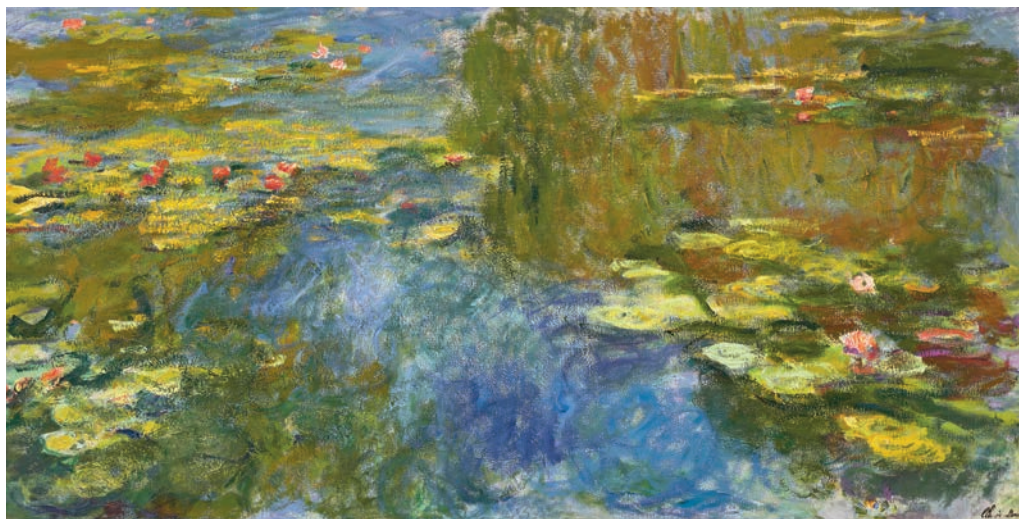
Francis Bacon, Figure in Movement, 1976

Sold for: US\$52mn
Bacon made Figure in Movement a few years after the death of his former partner, George Dyer, who was a recurring subject in his work. In November, after being held privately for five decades, the painting returned to public view, selling during a Christie's New York evening sale. Specialists expected the dark canvas to sell for US\$50mn.



Mark Rothko, Untitled (Yellow, Orange, Yellow, Light Orange), 1955

Sold for: US\$46.4mn
Rothko's Untitled (Yellow, Orange, Yellow, Light Orange) became one of the top lots of the November New York sales when it was auctioned by Christie's, even though just barely exceeded its estimate of US\$45mn. The painting stood out as one of the top sellers of its respective auction, increasing in value by 20% from 2014.



Claude Monet, Le bassin aux nymphéas, 1919

Sold for: US\$74mn
Le bassin aux nymphéas exceeded its estimate of US\$65mn when it went under the hammer at Christie's in New York in November, generating a total of US\$74mn with fees. That figure puts it among the most expensive Monet paintings ever auctioned.



Richard Diebenkorn, Recollections of a Visit to Leningrad, 1965

Sold for: US\$46.4mn
Critics have said this Diebenkorn painting can be related to his famed 'Ocean Park' series, and that may account for why it achieved a record for the American artist when it was sold in November during a Sotheby's evening sale, where it hammered for US\$40mn, far above its US\$25mn estimate.



Wassily Kandinsky, Murnau mit Kirche II (Murnau with Church II), 1910

Sold for: US\$44.8mn
In March, this early abstract painting by Kandinsky sold at Sotheby's London after being restituted to its original German-Jewish owners, Johanna Margarete Stern and Siegbert Samuel Stern. Kandinsky the painting during a period considered by researchers to be a seminal once for the Russian-born artist.



Henri Rousseau, Les Flamants, 1910

Sold for: US\$43.5mn
In May, when this painting sold for US\$43.5mn with fees during Christie's 20th-century evening sale, it generated a new record for Rousseau. The price far surpassed the artist's previous record of US\$4mn, set three decades ago, in 1993, by the sale of his painting Portrait of Joseph Brummer.



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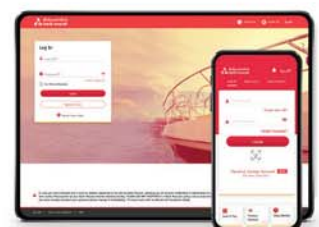
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The Classic and Innovative New Mercedes-Benz E-Class Promises a Personalised Performance

When purchasing a new luxury vehicle, one only deserves the best. The new 2024 Mercedes-Benz E-Class is an exemplary and re-designed version of its prestigious kind with its executive comfort, effortless style, new dimensions of digital customisation, mild-hybrid character and spaciousness.

From the outside, the all-new generation E-Class has an inviting silhouette with sleek aerodynamic lines: It has the proportions of a classic three-box saloon: the short front overhang and long bonnet are followed by a greenhouse which is set well back. The 'cab-backward' design is rounded off by the well-proportioned rear overhang. The connection between tradition and modernity is made clear by a black panel-like surface that connects the radiator grille with the headlamps.

One of the new E-Class' absolute



highlights is part of its interior design. The all-new Mercedes-Benz User Experience (MBUX) Super-screen with a large glass surface is a digital display providing drivers with an ultimate, responsive, individualised and immersive sensory experience. The upgraded MBUX is accompanied by a change in the presentation of the main icons on the displays, which are presented in

a simpler way, and based on the colours used for smartphone tiles. Meanwhile, listening to music, while driving will become a more all-sensory experience as well, thanks to sound visualisation.

Meanwhile, when it comes to spaciousness, the E-Class is one of the favourites in its segment as the driver enjoys five millimetres more headroom than in the preceding

model. The generous dimensions of the passenger compartment are partly due to the wheelbase, which is 22 millimetres longer than that of the preceding model (2961 millimetres).

The new E-Class is both particularly agile and highly stable with the optional rear-axle steering, the steering angle at the rear axle is 4.5 degrees, and the accompanying, more direct steering ratio at the front axle. The vehicle is available with the Technology package as an option, this includes the all-round AIRMATIC air suspension system with ADS+ continuously adjustable damping and rear-axle steering. Meanwhile, the latest generation of Driver Assistance Systems are available as well.

The E-Class points the way in the transition from the combustion engine to electric drive as the four-

and six-cylinder combustion engine models are now mild hybrids. The vehicle comes with familiar two engine options for 2024: an E 200 and an E 300 with a 2.0-liter turbocharged 4-cylinder petrol engine with mild hybrid and 48-volt on-board electrical system. In addition to turbocharging, the petrol engines feature intelligent support from an integrated starter-generator (ISG). Thanks to a new battery, the power of the electric motor has been increased from 15 to 17 kW and the boost torque to 205 Nm. In addition, both combustion engines are units from the current modular Mercedes-Benz engine family FAME (Family of Modular Engines).

The Mercedes-Benz E-Class line dates back to 1936 and epitomises a brand promise of effortless comfort and luxury and of continuity and innovation.

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Mercedes-Benz



Icon meets innovation: The BMW 7 Series takes centre stage in Oman

BMW's flagship full-size luxury sedan lives up to its legacy with a streamlined exterior, brilliant displays, and sophisticated interior



Luxury and sophistication take on a new form with the stunning new BMW 7 Series, packaged with cutting-edge technology. Showcasing an evolution in luxury sedans from its striking exterior to its opulent interior, the BMW 7 Series embodies the brand's landmark craftsmanship and design philosophy.

Heralded as the leader in luxury sedans, the BMW 7 Series captures sophistication without compromising on performance, driving dynamics or sheer comfort. The car's exterior design is alluringly modern, featuring iconic illuminated kidney grille and crystal headlights.

Inside the 7 Series, the BMW Curved Display takes centre stage, creating an immersive experience for drivers with its interactive and sleek design. Boasting a 12.3-inch



Digital Instrument Cluster and a 14.9-inch Central Information Display, the car is equipped with iDrive 8.5 – the advanced operating system. The 7 Series also offers

seamless connectivity, wireless Apple CarPlay®, Android Auto™ and Remote Software Upgrades, ensuring both entertainment and technology at your fingertips. All of

it seamlessly integrates with remote software upgrades to create an engaging experience.

Passengers enjoy a luxurious environment with 5.5" touchscreens and an optional 31" BMW Theatre Screen featuring 8K resolution, 5G connectivity, and Amazon Fire TV, ensuring an entertainment haven within the vehicle. The available Panoramic Sky Lounge LED Roof amplifies the luxurious ambience, offering multi-colour illumination for added accents.

The all-new BMW 7 Series offers an array of core models, plug-in hybrids, and electric variants that come in a number of engine and drivetrain options, reaffirming the brand's legacy as a pioneer in the realm of full-size luxury sedans.

BMW 7 Series and the ground-

breaking BMW i7 also showcase BMW Group's commitment to sustainability. By using sustainably-sourced aluminium produced in the UAE, the BMW Group reducing carbon dioxide emissions by approximately 2.5 million tonnes over the period of a decade, aligning with BMW's environmentally conscious approach.

Led by an open technology approach, the new BMW 7 Series is available in the Middle East either as a battery electric or a conventional vehicle. Whichever powertrain the customer chooses, they will experience the best in sophistication, comfort and performance that are the hallmarks of the BMW brand. For more information, contact Al Jenaibi International Automobiles LLC on 80050008 or visit www.bmw-oman.com.



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Oman records more than 57,000 new vehicle registrations in 2023



Our Correspondent Muscat

Oman recorded more than 57,000 new vehicle registrations during the first 11 months of 2023, according to the latest figures from the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

As of November this year, Oman recorded registration of total 1,660,803 vehicles compared

with 1,603,376 vehicles in December 2022, a growth of 3.6%, the NCSI data showed.

Private vehicles dominate the registrations, accounting for 79.5% or 1,321,213 of the total. This is followed by 243,834 commercial vehicles, the data showed.

Rental vehicles made up 2% of the total - 33,305. A total of 27,889 taxis were registered in this period. Government agencies maintain a fleet of 11,618 registered

Private vehicles dominate the registrations, accounting for 79.5% or 1,321,213 of the total. This is followed by 243,834 commercial vehicles

vehicles.

The number of motorcycles registered are 7,009, while driving instruction vehicles totalled 5,429. Temporary registrations, including those for inspection, export and import, accounted for 8,359 registrations.

Farming tractors - 1,271 units - and diplomatic vehicles - 876 - were the other categories of vehicles registered.

A breakdown by vehicle weight

shows the predominance of lighter vehicles, those weighing less than three tonnes totalled 1,503,627. In contrast, 71,280 vehicles exceeding ten tonnes were registered.

Vehicles in the three-seven and seven-ten tonnes categories totalled 48,450 and 37,446 vehicles respectively.

The data underscores the diverse range of vehicles operating in Oman and provides a window into the nation's transport trends.



Towell Auto-Centre LLC

Vehicles shown for illustrative purposes. Accessories shown not part of standard equipment. Specifications subject to change without notice. Conditions apply.

[/geelyoman](https://www.youtube.com/geelyoman)

Passenger cars poised to lead through 2028

OMAN'S AUTOMOTIVE MARKET

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman's automotive market is anticipated to register a rapid growth in the upcoming years, thanks to the sultanate's growing economy, rising income level, and young population, according to a report released by research firm TechSci Research.

As per the report, the increasing adoption of electric vehicles and government initiatives are driving the growth of the Omani automotive market in the forecast period, 2024-2028.

The passenger car segment is anticipated to dominate the market in the vehicle type segment. The rising disposable income of consumers and demand for personal vehicles are increasing demand in the passenger car segment.

The report predicts that the increasing e-commerce and logistics in the country will increase the demand for two-wheelers. Thus, both, two-wheelers and commercial vehicles, have the potential to grow in the upcoming years in the Oman automotive market.

"There is numerous potential for the growth of the Oman automotive market. The government has taken initiatives related to the market. Furthermore, with the growing economy coupled with the high disposable income of consumers, the demand in the automotive sector has increased. Additionally, due to its strategic location, market players see Oman as an automotive manufacturing hub in the Middle East," said Karan Chechi, Research Director with TechSci Research.



TechSci Research report ranks Oman as the third-largest automotive market in the Middle East. It said the sultanate has a young and affluent population and there is an increasing passion for cars

The automotive industry is the fastest growing sector in the country. It is going into a transition phase, with the new technological change, aggressive competition, and increasing dealer and distribution network, the report noted.

As the sultanate's government focuses on stabilising the economy, this has created numerous opportunities for the automotive market,

the report noted.

It said construction and infrastructure development projects have directly increased the demand for commercial vehicles. 'Favourable foreign policies with neighbouring countries have positioned Oman as a hub for international shipping. Many market players are planning to invest in Oman, either by establishing man-

ufacturing plants or enhancing their dealer/distribution networks. This competitive rivalry in the automotive sector is driving market development, leading to improved vehicle designs and efficiency, which further benefits the Oman automotive market.'

TechSci Research report ranks Oman as the third-largest automotive market in the Middle East. It said the sultanate has a young and affluent population, and with growing consumer incomes, there is an increasing passion for cars, resulting in higher demand for the automobile industry.

Furthermore, the government's sustainability goals to reduce car-

bon emissions have led to awareness programmes and the adoption of electric vehicles gaining momentum in the country.

'The electric vehicle charging infrastructure is being built at a rapid rate. The penetration of electric and hybrid vehicles will also pave the way for autonomous vehicles in the country, further boosting the Oman automotive market,' the report said.

Moreover, the report said that the increasing demand for e-commerce and logistics companies has raised the need for an effective distribution vehicle network, which will further drive the demand for the Oman automobile sector.



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Oman accelerates EV adoption with net zero emissions goal

OMAN'S EV INFRASTRUCTURE

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman is actively advancing its electric vehicle (EV) infrastructure as part of its commitment to environmental sustainability and its goal to achieve net zero emissions by 2050. The sultanate's strategy includes phasing out fuel-operated vehicles, with plans to ensure that 79% of all vehicles in the country will be electric by 2035.

To facilitate this transition, the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MTCIT) has launched several initiatives. These include a special programme aimed at reducing carbon emissions in various sectors, particularly transport, which is responsible for nearly 20% of Oman's total carbon emissions.

As part of the government's support for EV adoption, incentives are being considered to make electric vehicles more affordable for the general population. This move aligns with the national objective of decarbonising the transport sector. In May, MTCIT introduced a programme focusing on reducing carbon emissions with a target of net zero by 2050.

Moreover, the Tax Authority recently announced exemptions for EVs and their parts from value-added tax (VAT), customs tax and registration fees. The Authority for Public Services Regulation (APSR) has also introduced new regulations for charging EVs.

To encourage the use of EVs



To encourage the use of EVs and reduce carbon emissions, MTCIT has already installed 100 charging stations across Oman and it is working on increasing the number to 300 in the next two years

and reduce carbon emissions, MTCIT has already installed 100 charging stations across Oman and it is working on increasing the number to 300 in the next two years.

Infrastructure development is a critical step in supporting the widespread adoption of EVs and underscores Oman's dedication to a sustainable and environmentally

friendly future.

In a decision taken in November, the ministry mandated all fuel stations to provide charging points for EVs within six months.

H E Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, has issued Ministerial Decision No 615/2023 amending some provisions of the regulations regarding

the 'Conditions and Controls for Issuing Licences for Establishing and Operating Fuel Filling Stations'.

The decision stipulates that owners of commercial fuel stations are obligated to provide an electric charging point for vehicles in accordance with the requirements and controls issued by APSR.

To boost EV infrastructure further in Oman, Oman Oil Marketing Company (OOMCO) in July announced the execution of a binding Heads of Terms with Synergy Investment LLC to establish Electric Vehicles One (EVO).

EVO will be tasked with developing Oman's electric vehicle infrastructure, OOMCO said in a

disclosure submitted to the Muscat Stock Exchange.

'The agreement was signed on July 3, 2023. A contribution of capital will be in kind and not cash, by way of asset transfer in accordance with an asset valuation report for both parties,' OOMCO said.

As per the company's disclosure, the Heads of Terms establishes EVO's business activities primarily in trading, installation, operation and maintenance of EV charging stations as well as other services and products that complement Oman's EV ecosystem.

'We aim to expand in the EV market and encourage the use of green energy,' OOMCO added.



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• Recently, the User Committee of the CAA (China Association for Quality) announced the results of the "2023 CACS" with the Tiggo 8 topping the sub-segment rankings. • Recently, Kantar and Google jointly released the 2023 Chinese Global Brand Builders Top 50. Chery is ranked as the best Chinese global brand builder in cars and 14th in the overall list and its brand power has achieved strong growth. For more details, please visit <https://china.jdpower.com/press-release/2023-10-25>.
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GCC electric car market grows over 10% annually

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The GCC electric car market size is projected to exhibit an annual growth rate of 10.4% during 2024-2032, according to the International Market Analysis Research and Consulting Group (IMARC Group).

The growing consumer awareness about environmental sustainability, rising demand for high performance and low fuel efficiency transportation solutions among in-

dividuals, and increasing development of charging infrastructure facilities represent some of the key factors driving the market.

'At present, the increasing consumer awareness about environmental sustainability and the need to curb carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions represent one of the major factors influencing the market positively in the GCC region,' IMARC Group said in a research report.

Moreover, the rising demand for electric vehicles (EV) due to their high performance and low fuel ef-

iciency of conventional cars is strengthening the growth of the market in the region.

'Apart from this, the growing demand for electric cars due to the increasing development of charging infrastructure facilities, such as charging stations and fast-charging networks, is offering a positive market outlook in the GCC region,' the report said.

IMARC Group's analysis indicated that the rising adoption of electric vehicles in the region, as there are abundant renewable energy resources, is offering lucrative

growth opportunities to industry investors. In line with this, increasing advancements in battery technology that provide improved range and performance of electric cars are impelling the growth of the market.

'Besides this, there is a rise in the demand for sustainable and eco-friendly transportation solutions among the masses. This, coupled with the increasing adoption of electric cars, as they offer soundless operations, is contributing to the growth of the market in the GCC region. In addition, gov-

erning agencies of the GCC region are encouraging the adoption of electric cars by providing various incentives, such as tax exemptions, subsidies, and infrastructure development,' the report noted.

As per the report, the UAE was the largest market for electric cars in the GCC region. Some of the factors driving the UAE electric car market included the growing demand for cost-effective and eco-friendly transportation solution, increasing number of charging infrastructure facilities, favourable government initiatives, etc.

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FOTON OMAN RELOCATES SHOWROOM TO AL QURUM FOR ENHANCED CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

MUSCAT: Gulf Great Sands LLC, the exclusive importer of Foton Commercial vehicles in Oman, has recently relocated the Foton Oman showroom to Al Qurum. This move is part of a strategic initiative to enhance customer convenience and improve service quality. The new showroom is spacious and situated in a prime location, making it easier for customers to explore Foton's range of vehicles.

Commenting on the move, a spokesperson for Gulf Great Sands LLC stated, "The relocation of our showroom to Al Qurum is a significant step in our ongoing effort to enhance the customer experience. Our new, larger facility enables us to showcase our vehicles more effectively and allows customers to explore our range in a comfortable and welcoming environment. We believe this move will bring us closer to our customers and help us serve them better."

Foton Commercial Vehicles are renowned for their exceptional quality and design, a result of partnerships with industry leaders such as Daimler and Cummins. The brand's commitment to incorporating cutting-edge technology and state-of-the-art manufacturing practices ensures that each vehicle meets the highest standards of innovation and performance.

Customers are invited to visit the new showroom from Sunday to Thursday, between 8:30 am and 1:30 pm, and again from 4:00 pm to 7:00 pm. In addition to exploring the vehicle range, customers can also take advantage of test drives, allowing them to experience the quality and performance of Foton vehicles firsthand.

This relocation reaffirms Foton Oman's commitment to providing an unparalleled customer experience and further solidifies its position in the Omani automotive market.

Among Foton models available in Oman are the Foton Aumark S Light Truck, the Foton Tunland Single Cabin Pickup, the Foton Toano 18 Seater Mini Bus, the Foton Auman



EST Medium Duty Truck, the Foton Tunland G7 Double Cabin Pickup and the Foton View CS2 Cargo Van

Foton Aumark S Light Truck

Foton Aumark S, the popular Light Duty Truck is a preferred choice for the customers in Oman and has a strong value proposition. The Aumark is designed to meet Oman users' pursuit of efficient and worry-free logistics. The truck which is powered by legendary Cummins 3.8L turbo diesel engine, ZF Transmission and DANA Axles is known for its excellent fuel economy, safety, and top-quality performance in the logistics and cargo industry.

Foton Tunland Single Cabin Pickup

Foton Tunland Single Cabin (2WD) which is powered by a 2.4-litre engine combines the original, robust design with the power, performance and reliability of established, globally reputed brands for its major drivetrain features. It is powered by the new generation 2.4 Litre Turbo TGD1 gasoline engine making it the most powerful pickup in its class. Features of the Tunland include Bosch electronics and ABS + EBD, ESC, On-Board Diagnostics (OBD, TPMS), dual airbag, Bluetooth and Parking sensors.

Foton Toano 18-Seater Minibus and Cargo van

The Foton Toano 18-Seater Minibus stands out as a versatile and high-performing van. Its design, crafted by a German team from Mercedes, blends advanced technology with meticulous craftsmanship, offering users exceptional comfort and de-

pendability. The interior of the Foton Toano is notably roomy, featuring a flexible seating arrangement to accommodate various needs. It comes equipped with a state-of-the-art safety system and an eco-friendly, energy-efficient power system, ensuring both secure and efficient travel. This minibus is an ideal choice for both business and family purposes, catering to a wide range of transportation needs.

Foton Auman EST Medium Duty Truck

Foton Auman EST Medium Duty Truck boasts a 6.7L Engine with 245 horsepower. Its Cummins ISF engine features high burst pressure and strong power, with the maximum power output at 245hp and an 8-speed Manual Transmission. This 1,000,000km overhaul-free Cummins engine is manufactured strictly in accordance with the Cummins global quality system and manufacturing standard and passed the 2,000,000km stringent road reliability and durability test. The vehicle took the lead to pass the stringent German DEKRA test, with the accumulative test mileage.

Foton Tunland G7 Double Cabin Diesel Pickup

The Foton Tunland G7 Diesel 4WD pickup, renowned for delivering maximum power, promises impressive performance. With its 2.0-litre turbo engine generating 163 horsepower and 380 torque, this remarkable pickup is well-equipped for any task. The engine is paired with a six-speed manual transmission. The dynamic pickup has dimensions of 5340mm in length, 1940mm in width and 1870mm in height. Its

cargo area measures 1520mm by 1580mm by 440mm.

Foton View CS2 Cargo Van

The innovative and fuel-efficient Foton View CS2 Cargo Van offers power and a larger space for cargo loading and safety. As per customer needs and usage, the Foton View CS2 Cargo Van offers a collection of smart functionality, performance and safety features. Foton View CS2 Cargo Van provides excellent utility thanks to outstanding features and technologies. The 2-seater Foton View CS2 Cargo Van with a wide body and high roof is powered by a 2.7 litre engine (2693cc). It has a max power of 147/4800 (Hp/rpm), max torque of 260/3600 (N•m/rpm) and a 5-speed MT Transmission and single sliding door.

Partnering with Foton Motor Group, one of the world's largest manufacturers of commercial vehicles, Gulf Great Sands LLC (GGS) launched a full range of commercial vehicles in Oman.

Value for customers

Since its foundation, Foton has aimed to create value for customers by producing reliable, affordable vehicles through innovative and high-quality products and services. Founded in 1996, Foton is an established automotive leader with a history in the manufacturing of commercial vehicles and heavy-duty commercial including trucks, buses and agricultural equipment.

Foton: Cumulative Sales volume of 10 million vehicles since inception

With a business scope covering a full series of commercial vehicles, Foton

has a record of an accumulative production and sales volume of approximately 10 million vehicles since being established in 1996. With a brand value which has been evaluated as about US\$ 16.6 billion, Foton has been ranked number one for 13 consecutive years in China's commercial vehicle arena. Foton, which has a partnership with Daimler of Germany, ZF and Cummins of USA, is eyeing a significant share of the Oman market through this partnership. Daimler provides technology supremacy in Medium and Heavy-duty Trucks. Cummins Diesel Engines are renowned for their longevity, performance and economy. Foton is also partnered with Getrag (Germany), Aisin (Japan) and BorgWarner (USA) for transmissions, Bosch (Germany) for electronics and Dana (USA) for axles and differentials.

Foton products and services are available in 110 countries all over the world. Foton has five major warehouses internationally, including a regional parts centre in Dubai. Foton has joined hands with several well-known worldwide enterprises such as Cummins, ZF, CEVA Logistics, Faurecia, Wabco, Continental Electron, TUV Rheinland and others to establish "Foton Global Innovating Alliance", aiming to make breakthroughs in science and technology, and produce energy-saving, environmentally friendly and intelligently interconnected automobile products.

Gulf Great Sands has a state-of-the-art service centre in Azaiba, Muscat to provide aftersales services to customers. GGS has already tied up for Periodic Maintenance in Sohar and Salalah.

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S&P Global Mobility forecasts

'CAGEY RECOVERY'

As 2024 approaches, S&P Global Mobility forecasts 88.3mn new vehicle sales worldwide next year as the recovery rolls on. With the brakes off the supply chain, the risk to further growth is that demand momentum fades as consumer uncertainty overtakes pent-up demand.

Global new light vehicle sales in 2024 will see a 2.8% increase year-over-year, according to a new forecast by S&P Global Mobility. The light vehicle output recovery continues to feed inventory restocking efforts across many regions, as supply chain and demand is further recovering, supported by lingering pent-up consumer demand.

However, S&P Global Mobility remains wary of recovery prospects with consumer demand challenged by elevated vehicle pricing alongside challenging credit and lending conditions. The forecast outlook incorporates stickier interest rates, improving supply chains, the affordability squeeze, lofty new vehicle prices, patchy consumer confidence, energy price/supply concerns, auto lending risks, and ongoing electrification growing pains.

"2024 is expected to be another year of cagey recovery, with the auto industry moving beyond clear supply-side risks, into a murkier macro-led demand environment," said Colin Couchman, executive director of global light vehicle forecasting for S&P Global Mobility. "A major concern is how 'natural' EV demand will fare as governments consider scaling back interventionist policy support - especially for incentives and subsidies, industrial policy, and OEM (Original Equipment Manufacturer) planning targets."

Full-year 2023 global light vehicle sales - projected to reach nearly 86mn units by S&P Global Mobility



- represent a 8.9% increase from 2022 levels, with new auto demand benefiting from ongoing output gains from restocking inventories as supply chains normalise.

Market-by-market forecasts

Wrapping up 2023, solid Western/Central European market momentum should deliver 14.7mn units (+12.8% growth year-on-year), as improved vehicle production levels help delivery times and inventory recovery. For 2024, S&P Global Mobility forecasts 15.1mn

Global new light vehicle sales in 2024 will see a 2.8% increase year-over-year. The light vehicle output recovery continues to feed inventory restocking efforts across many regions

units, up by 2.9% year-on-year - reflecting economic recession risks, tighter credit conditions, easing pent-up demand, still-high car prices, and tapering EV subsidies.

"Key challenges for Europe include the dynamic electrification transition, alongside wait-and-see

customers, lurking Chinese OEMs, energy woes, and looming EU elections," Couchman said.

US sales volumes are expected to reach 15.9mn units in 2024, an estimated increase of 2.0% from the projected 2023 level of 15.5mn units.

"Just when the auto industry is looking to return to a sense of normalcy from the supply side of the equation, US consumers in the market for new vehicle in 2024 will continue to face affordability issues by way of high interest rates, tight credit conditions and slow-to-recede new vehicle prices," said Chris Hopson, manager of North American light vehicle sales forecasting for S&P Global Mobility.

With the rollout of several highly anticipated models, US BEV (battery electric vehicles) sales will continue to develop in the new

88.3mn auto sales in 2024



year. By the end of 2024, there will be nearly 100 BEV models available, double the number there were in 2022, covering several more segments and providing consumers interested in an electric vehicle even more choice.

For the year ending, the 100bn yuan extension of New Energy Vehicle (NEV) incentives and recovering local vehicle production supporting domestic sales, 2023 should see a recovery to 25.3mn units (+4.9% year-on-year growth), according to S&P Global Mobility.

For 2024, the Chinese market will continue to be supported by pent-up demand with gradual improvement of consumer confidence - which has not fully recovered to pre-pandemic levels. 2024 demand is forecasted at 26.4mn units, up a further 4.2%.

Mainland China NEV affordability is likely to further improve in 2024 with local battery cell prices already declining significantly through 2023. Coupled with NEV tax exemption into 2024-2025, NEV penetration (as percentage of passenger vehicles) is projected to further increase to 44% in 2024, from 36% in 2023.

2024 production outlook

On the manufacturing side, global

light vehicle production in 2023 is expected to finish at 89.8mn units - a healthy 9.0% improvement over 2022 levels that exceeds expectations in several regions, further building on implied inventory restocking. This marks a welcome return to pre-pandemic levels of production on a global basis, powered by gains in mainland China and India.

S&P Global Mobility continues to see a general production outlook that is reliant on a more traditional demand-driven model. As we transition to 2024, with inventories reaching equilibrium in many markets, global production growth is expected to slip into a mild reverse as the industry navigates recovery after a tumultuous several years.

With inventories reaching equilibrium in many markets, global production growth is expected to slip into a mild reverse as the industry navigates recovery after a tumultuous several years

levels to decline by 0.4%, to 89.4mn units.

"Vehicle output levels are flirting with the top of the current cycle, with faster-than-expected inventory restocking potentially colliding with real-world consumer demand levels," said Mark Fulthorpe, executive director of global light vehicle forecasting for S&P Global Mobility. "During 2023, vehicle production has benefited from a virtuous cycle of improving supply chains and strong order backlogs. As these conditions recede, manufacturing will have less support."

In mainland China, S&P Global Mobility forecasts effectively flat production levels for 2024, down 0.1%, at 28.3mn units. With inventories largely restored to pre-crisis levels and fragile domestic demand, further export gains are expected to provide the main positive effect.

Europe is expected to produce 17.4mn units in 2024, off by 1.8% from an estimated 17.8mn this year. Like in mainland China, inventory levels are estimated to be restored close to pre-crisis levels and will provide little upside in an environment marked by diminishing backlogs and weaker incoming demand. Growing imports from China are also expected to be felt.

For the North American region, overall production is expected to

make a small gain, 0.5%, at 15.7mn units - boosted by 3.9% growth in US activity. Inventory restocking continues to provide an upside, but it is not uniform, with pockets of the Detroit-3's lineup overstocked while Japanese and Korean brands still have a pipeline to fill.

While supply chain conditions have undoubtedly improved since 2022, S&P Global Mobility continues to warn of a structural deficit in capacity for semiconductors, notably older mature nodes. There was theoretical overcapacity in 2023 as demand from other industries eased, but there remains a risk that constraints could resurface once demand from other sectors recovers.

"We do not foresee chip supply problems in 2024 as allocation for automotive is robust and is bolstered by recent stockpiling of chips by the vehicle makers," said Jeremie Bouchaud, director, semiconductor, E/E and autonomy practice, S&P Global Mobility. "But 2025 could be a bottleneck if non-automotive demand comes back strongly."

Electrification shift looks unstoppable

The past few years have seen many OEMs reaffirming electrification ambitions for the coming five to 15 years. More recently the narrative has shifted, with some automakers highlighting the twin challenges of the electrification transition—scaling output of sellable BEVs and finding willing customers to buy them.

Beyond 2024, many questions remain in the electrification space, especially regarding charging infrastructure, grid power, battery supply chains, global sourcing patterns, a swath of newly arriving EVs, and the appropriate level of policymaker support to help smooth the transition from fossil fuel to electric. For the time being, China's NEV policy, Europe's "Fit for 55," and the IRA in the US are the key mile markers for policymakers' visions for a greener mobility future.



Sayyarati Auto finance from Bank Muscat Receives Big Turnout



Muscat, December 2023 –

"Sayyarati" Auto loan by Bank Muscat continues to attract attentions of customers wishing to purchase their dream car. Offering a competitive interest rate, the product can be availed by visiting the nearest Bank Muscat branch or through Internet and Mobile Banking, to make it easier for customers to take advantage of the benefits offered.

On this special occasion, Abdulah Tamman Al Mashani, General Manager – Products, Bank Muscat, said: "Bank Muscat products are designed to cater customers' various needs. "Sayyarati" is one of the popular financing products that always witness great turnout among



customers for its exceptional and exclusive features on new and pre-owned vehicles. We are glad that this product is well-received by cus-

tomers who are benefiting from exclusive deals by auto agents and showrooms. This reflects Bank Muscat's keenness to provide unique products with new features and competitive interest rates on ongoing basis. I would like to thank all customers for their continued confidence in the services and products of the bank. I also urge everyone to take advantage of this opportunity and enjoy a distinctive banking experience."

With a fast turnaround time and absolutely no need for post-dated cheques, the feature-rich auto finance can be obtained within the shortest possible time through Mobile Banking or the Internet banking. The service is also available in Say-

yarati Centres in Salalah and Watayah as well as Bank Muscat branches located across Oman. Loans will be offered for both new and pre-owned cars. The documents needed to process the loan facility are minimal and include the buyer's ID card, salary assignment letter, quotation / car valuation from the approved values, driving license, Mulkiya (for pre-owned cars only) and seller's ID card (for pre-owned cars only). The Monthly loan installments for Sayyarati are automatically deducted from the customer's account once the mandate to do so is provided to the bank by the customer. All customers wishing to own their dream car can take advantage of the fast transaction

processing, as the transaction is completed within 24 hours, provided all the required documents are available.

As the leading financial institution in the Sultanate for the past four decades, Bank Muscat has the largest banking network in Oman with 180 branches and service centers, in addition to more than 850 ATMs, CDMs and multi-use machines, as well as Internet and Mobile Banking platforms offering round-the-clock banking services. For more information about the "Sayyarati" product, please visit the website through the following link: <https://www.bankmuscat.com/en/loans/Pages/details.aspx#say-yarti>.

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Oman's used car market

MARKET FORECAST

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman's used car market is expected to register a compounded annual growth rate (CAGR) of more than 4% in the next five years, according to a latest research report.

The sultanate's used car market, valued at US\$980mn in 2023, is forecast to surpass the market value of US\$1.25bn by 2028, according to the report published by market research firm Mordor Intelligence. Over the long-term forecast period, factors including economical cost and variety in the fleet are expected to boost the used car demand in Oman.

Demand for pre-owned cars for family, personal use among residents, and partial economic disruption with the new car segment alongside value-for-money have cumulatively driven the market into immersive growth in Oman, the report said.

Moreover, due to increasing digitisation and the ability of companies to provide immersive purchase experiences remotely, the used car market is expected to witness significant growth.

'Furthermore, the rise in value-added service offerings and the variety of finance providers offering credit for used cars will also contribute to the growth of the used car market across Oman. However, higher interest rates may discourage some potential customers, slowing the market's growth,' the report said.

It further said that the market for used cars in Oman is continuously expanding. 'Factors such as a rise in income levels, increasing demand for luxury cars, shorter car ownership periods, booming import-export, and a growing preference for two-wheeler owners to



to see 4% annual growth



The sultanate's used car market, valued at US\$980mn in 2023, is forecast to surpass the market value of US\$1.25bn by 2028, according to a report published by market research firm Mordor Intelligence

upgrade to small and compact cars drive the growth of the market.'

Financing options

The Mordor Intelligence report acknowledged that Oman's financial institutions offer various options to support individuals in buying used cars.

'In Oman, several dealerships partner with financial institutions

like banks to provide on-site financing options. Banks and credit unions offer auto loans that allow one to borrow money to purchase a pre-owned car. A few of the leading financial service providers are engaging with used car dealers to provide financial support for the purchaser. Popular banking firms are actively collaborating in order to boost used car sales in Oman,' the report said.

Moreover, used car dealers are enhancing their market presence and providing various financial options in the sultanate through strategic initiatives, the report added.

Mordor Intelligence noted that the unavailability of new car models with the local automobile dealers in the country has had a knock-on effect in the form of a huge surge in the used car businesses. 'Owing to such factors, the demand for pre-owned cars will remain in a growth trajectory over the coming years and will have a subsequent positive impact on the used car market.'

Online distribution channels

Oman's e-government initiative, with its emphasis on electronic payments and online services, has also had a significant impact on the

growth of the used car online marketplace. The national ePayment Gateway portal, which facilitates secure online transactions, has played a crucial role in enabling the expansion of e-commerce, including the sale and purchase of used cars.

There were 4.44mn internet users in Oman at the beginning of 2023, while the internet penetration rate stands at 96.4%. Additionally, Oman had 4.17mn social media users as of January 2023 or 90.5% of the total population, according to the Mordor Intelligence report.

'A total of 6.29mn mobile connections were active in Oman at the beginning of 2023. This instance is likely contributing to the increased popularity and growth of online used car marketplaces. This digital transformation has made it more convenient and accessible for both, buyers and sellers, in the used car market, potentially leading to its continued expansion in Oman,' the report stated.

There are currently three main kinds of players in the used car market in Oman. A growing number of online-focused players with various business models have emerged alongside independent used car dealers and franchise-based dealers. These business ideas include online marketplaces, auction-based transactions, and classified/listing websites.

Mordor Intelligence said, 'The used car industry is making a determined effort to streamline the used car buying process by providing appealing and simple financing choices as well as value-added services like doorstep test drives and delivery options.'

The report stated that the majority of used car dealers in Oman have started to provide thorough certification reports along with extended aftersales and warranty packages in an effort to boost consumer confidence in used cars. These factors are anticipated to increase demand for used cars in Oman.



Changan Oman announces attractive low EMI offer on popular its models

MUSCAT: Arabian Gulf Automobiles and Equipment (AGAE) has announced low EMI options for its top car range in Oman. The offer includes the Changan CS95, CS35 Plus, CS75 Plus, Alsvin, and EADO Plus models, each with specific engine configurations and horsepower. The EMIs range from OMR 65 to OMR 187 over six years, depending on the model. This promotion, available until the end of December 2023 or while stocks last, also features Changan's "super warranty" of up to six years or 250,000 km. The EMI calculation is based on a 20% down payment and a six-year loan tenure, subject to bank credit approval and applicable only for personal use vehicles valid till 31Dec'2023.

A spokesperson for AGAE said, "This unique low EMI offer is our way of showing gratitude to our esteemed customers for their continued trust in our brand. As we mark our third anniversary in Oman, we are delighted to present our clients with the finest offerings. Complementing this is Changan's 'super warranty', covering up to six years or 250,000 km, highlighting the exceptional quality of our product range."

The Changan CS95, featuring a 2.0L Turbo Engine, 224 hp, eight-speed AT, 4WD, and a seven-

seater configuration, is available at an EMI of OMR 187 for six years. The Changan CS35 Plus, with its 1.4L Turbo Engine and 156 hp, is offered at an EMI of OMR 109 for the same duration. For the Changan CS75 Plus, which also has a 2.0L Turbo Engine and 224 hp but with an eight-speed AT, the EMI is OMR 139 for six years. The more compact Changan Alsvin, with a 1.5L Engine and 105 hp, is available for an EMI of OMR 65 for six years. Lastly, the Changan EADO Plus, featuring a 1.4L Turbo Engine and 155 hp, can be owned at an EMI of OMR 94 for a six-year period.

Changan CS95

Touted as the pinnacle of luxury and ideal for families, the Changan CS95 seven-seater 4WD is transforming the driving experience in the country. This 2024 model, equipped with an AISIN eight AT transmission, guarantees reliable quality, smooth shifting, and excellent fuel economy. Featuring a range of updates, the latest CS95 provides an improved driving experience that is bound to captivate. Merging luxury with family-oriented design, the new Changan CS95 is a perfect mix of sophistication and functionality, appealing to both discerning individuals and families.

Changan CS35 Plus

Capturing the essence of the new generation's vitality, the Changan CS35 Plus showcases its vigour with a lively 1.4-litre turbocharged engine. Delivering a robust 156 hp and 260 Nm of torque, this crossover is engineered for thrilling performance, propelling drivers with impressive force. Fitted with a 7-speed Dual Clutch Transmission (DCT), the CS35 Plus offers smooth gear transitions, giving its drivers a competitive edge in its class. The model is crafted with precision to exude unmatched confidence and style. Its striking muscular fender flanges, elegant roof rails, and eye-catching LED Headlamps ensure it stands out on any road.

Changan CS75 Plus

Changan CS75 Plus is a crossover that showcases the height of luxury with its opulent design, luxurious interiors, and cutting-edge features. The impressive model features an upscale design, comfortable interior, and sophisticated technology. This compact crossover comes in luxury and sport editions, each with unique characteristics. The luxury version, in particular, includes a fully automatic parking system. The popular crossover boasts a more streamlined roof and increased power. It houses a strong 2.0-litre

turbocharged 4-cylinder engine, combined with an 8-speed automatic transmission.

Changan Alsvin

This remarkable Changan Alsvin boasts an energy-efficient 1.5 Litre Engine combined with a 5-speed dual clutch transmission. It brings an array of key features and cutting-edge technology to customers in the entry-level segment, fulfilling their long-awaited desires. Furthermore, the Changan Alsvin offers additional features comparable to any C-segment sedan, including a Sunroof, Touchscreen, Rear View Camera, Bluetooth, Cruise control, TPMS, Push start button, and daytime running lights. With its sleek body design, refined interior, and exceptional energy-efficient engine, Changan Alsvin surpasses everyday expectations. This 1.5L engine vehicle truly delivers unmatched value to customers, providing an outstanding fuel economy of 18.3 kilometres per litre. The Changan Alsvin presents a contemporary styling in the entry-level four-door segment, characterized by sleek and swoopy lines. It offers ample boot capacity of 390 litres.

Changan EADO Plus

Changan EADO Plus stands out as a remarkable sedan, captivating

users with its stunning design. The spacious and luxurious interior elevates it to a unique position in the market. More than just visually appealing, the EADO Plus reshapes expectations as a compact yet potent family car. Its premium styling exudes elegance, and the combination of a lavish interior with extensive safety features delivers an unmatched driving experience. The EADO Plus from Changan captivates with its design and impresses with its performance. Equipped with a powerful 1.4 Turbo engine and a smooth seven-speed dual-clutch transmission, this sedan offers a driving experience that is both dynamic and extraordinary.

About AGAE

Arabian Gulf Automobiles and Equipment has set up a spacious and state-of-the-art showroom in Al Qurum and service centre in Ghala, Muscat. AGAE has already tied up for Periodic Maintenance Services in many cities including Salalah, Sohar, Sur, Nizwa, Ibra and Barka etc.

For more information, call CHANGAN OMAN Toll free number 80050800, WhatsApp on 94641010 or visit our showroom in Al Qurum. You can also visit and register at www.changanoman.com to book test drives and call back.



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224 hp, 8-speed AT,
4WD, 7 Seater



EMI
OMR **187***
for 6 years



CS35 PLUS

1.4L Turbo Engine,
156 hp, 7-speed DCT

EMI
OMR **109***
for 6 years



EMI
OMR **139***
for 6 years

CS75 PLUS

2.0L Turbo Engine,
224 hp, 8-speed AT



ALSVIN

1.5L Engine, 105 hp,
5-speed DCT

EMI
OMR **65***
for 6 years



EMI
OMR **94***
for 6 years

EADO PLUS

1.4L Turbo Engine,
155 hp, 7-speed DCT

CHANGAN The Premium Range

Super Warranty up to 6 years / 250,000 Km[#]

*Easy Monthly Installment is calculated based on 20% down payment, for 6 years loan tenure. Subject to credit approvals from banks only. Applicable on vehicles purchased for personal use. LOW EMI is valid till 31st Dec. 2023 or till stock last. Images shown are for illustrative purpose only. Specification may vary as per the model variant. #Whichever is earlier. For more information, please visit the Changan Showroom.

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Annual Day event

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Enhance
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MINISTRY OF CULTURE, SPORTS
AND RECREATION

Under-17 constitute 44% of Omani population

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The population of Omani children, in the age group of 0-17 years, increased by 16 per cent between 2017 to 2021. This resulted in the group's population to go up to 1,221,751, constituting 44 per cent of the total Omani population of 2,804,117 until the end of 2021.

The highest percentage of children was registered in the governorate of North Batinah, which is 44 per cent of the total number of Omani children, according to the Special Categories Bulletin for the year 2022 issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

The bulletin stated that the number of Omani youth, in the age group of 18 to 29 years, was 544,983, representing 19.4 per cent of the total Omani population. Fifty-one per cent of the youth are male and 60 per cent of



Jan
22

them are employed in the private, household and civil sectors.

The statistics reveal that the number of Omani elderly - 60 years and above - increased from 149,824 in 2017 to 154,405 in 2021, constituting 5.5 per cent of the Omani population.

While the total number of Omani women by the end of 2021 was 1,391,609, representing 49.6 per cent of the Omani population. As for the age-related fertility rates for Omani females, it decreased from 4 births per 1,000 women of childbearing age (15-49 years) in 2017 to 3.4 births per 1,000 women in 2021.

The bulletin showed that 60 per cent of the holders of a bachelor's degree or higher are females, while the illiteracy rate for Omani females decreased to 6.3 per cent in 2021, from 6.8 per cent in 2017.

The number of persons with disabilities reached 42,613 in 2021 - 1.5 per cent of Omanis.

Oman to have first space rocket launch pad in Duqm

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Jan
10

Oman on Monday entered into an agreement with the National Aerospace Services Company (NASCOM) to use its space launch complex Etlag for multiple rocket launches, utilising the latitude efficient location in the wilayat of Duqm.

The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MTCIT), the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning and NASCOM, signed the contract on Monday to use Etlag for building a space rocket launch platform for amateurs and researchers in Oman.

Etlag space launch complex is a project which NASCOM began last year as the company felt the need for having a facility for testing their prototype hybrid-solid rockets in a safe area that could be used for future launches.

The company's main focus is to boost the country's capacity in scientific research and promote global partnerships in the space sector. Etlag will be offering space for assembling and labs for testing along with control rooms, and launch pads. 'The project will attract global companies to utilise the sultanate's ideal location and global standard facilities for space launch operations,' the company stated on its website.

CBO approves merger of HSBC Oman with Sohar International

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Central Bank of Oman (CBO) has approved the proposed merger between Sohar International Bank and HSBC Bank Oman, the two lenders informed the Muscat Stock Exchange on Sunday.

Earlier in November 2022, Sohar International and HSBC Oman entered into a binding merger agreement, under which the two banks agreed to take necessary steps to implement the merger by incorporation.

'Sohar International Bank would like to announce that it has received the approval from the Central Bank of Oman for its proposed merger with HSBC Oman,' Sohar International said in its disclosure to the Muscat



Feb
06

Stock Exchange.

In a separate disclosure to the local bourse, HSBC Oman on Sunday also confirmed receiving central bank's approval for its

proposed merger with Sohar International. The merger - which is still subject to approval from other relevant regulatory bodies as well as from the respective

shareholders of the two entities at their extraordinary general meetings - is expected to complete in the second half of 2023, Sohar International and HSBC Oman said.

'Further announcements on any material developments will be made as required,' the banks informed in their disclosures.

As per the banks' previous announcement and pursuant to their binding merger agreement, the two banks will merge and all of the assets and liabilities of HSBC Oman will be transferred to Sohar International. On completion of the merger, HSBC Oman will cease to exist as a legal entity and its shares will be cancelled.

Earlier both banks clarified that they will remain independent and continue to operate a business as usual service until the merger.

Symposium on Omani space sector

With an aim to develop and enable the space sector to contribute to social, scientific and economic development, MTCIT on Monday organised a symposium on the Omani space sector, titled 'Future Trends and Investment Opportunities'.

The symposium aimed to achieve the objectives of the Digital Economy Programme and Oman Vision 2040, and to raise awareness of the importance of the space sector and its technologies, in addition to identifying current and future opportunities for cooperation and partnerships in this sector.

During the symposium, two important agreements were signed. While the first one was for Etlag's use for launches, the other one was for establishing a special corner for space science and technology in the Children's Museum in Muscat. This agreement was signed between MTCIT, the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, and Oman LNG.

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Muscat - His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik presided over the official inauguration of Royal Academy of Management in the Ministries' District in Al Khuwayr on Monday.

Upon his arrival at the Royal Academy of Management's headquarters, His Majesty the Sultan was received by Sayyid Khalid bin Hilal al Busaidi, Minister of Diwan of Royal Court and Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the academy, Dr Ali bin Qassim Jawad al Lawati, President of the academy, and members of its Board of Trustees.

As a gesture marking the opening of the academy, His Majesty the Sultan placed a symbolic key in the gate of a scale model of the academy.

After that, His Majesty toured the Royal Academy of Management's facilities. The five-storey building has multiple spaces that are designed to enhance collaboration, efficiency and inspiration among the various teams at the academy. The building was modelled to offer an interactive, functional and smart user experience for both employees and the academy's wider community.

Focusing on creating an enabling environment for both working and learning, natural light and green spaces offer a healthy work environment, while smart systems and meeting capsules create an ideal space to facilitate virtual meetings. The building also has joint workspaces and community areas



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07

H M inaugurates Royal Academy of Management

as against traditional fixed workstations.

During the tour, His Majesty the Sultan met members of the Interna-

tional Advisory Board of the academy. At the conclusion of his visit, His Majesty received a commemorative gift from the Royal

Academy of Management, which was presented by Lawati.

The design of the gift was inspired by the inaugural event and

embodies the academy's official opening gate. It conveys openness to the world while maintaining Oman's originality.

Decree issued on marriage of Omanis with foreigners

Muscat - His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik issued Royal Decree No 23/2023 on Omanis' marriage to foreigners on Sunday.

Article 1 cancels Royal Decree No 58/93 and annuls all decisions issued in implementation of its provisions.

Article 2 states that the provisions of this decree will not prejudice the provisions of the Islamic Sharia or public order or any provision cited in the laws, Royal Decrees or applicable systems stipulating non-marriage to a foreigner as a condition for occupying or continuing to occupy certain public jobs of significance or special nature.

Article 3 stipulates that documents proving the cases of mar-

riage of Omanis to foreigners within the Sultanate of Oman will be documented in accordance with the provisions of the relevant laws and Royal Decrees. Foreign documents proving these cases of marriage are treated as official Omani documents after being authenticated by the competent authorities in the respective foreign country/countries, as well as the Omani Foreign Ministry.

Article 4 validates the documents evidencing the marriage of Omanis to foreigners that are issued by foreign official authorities prior to the date of entry into force of this decree - even though they might be in violation of the provisions regulating the marriage.

Apr
17

UAE astronaut first Arab in space

Our Correspondent
Muscat

UAE astronaut Sultan al Neyadi made history by becoming the first Arab to perform a spacewalk on Friday.

He completed a seven-hour spacewalk, after exiting the International Space Station with his American colleague Stephen Bowen.

The duo carried out two crucial tasks during their maintenance assignment, including preparing a structure on the station's exterior for a future solar array installation. Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid al Maktoum, Vice President and Prime Minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai, hailed the historic week the UAE has had in space exploration.



Apr
30

"With this week's new discoveries by the Hope probe, the achievements of the Rashid rover mission, and Sultan al Neyadi's first ever spacewalk by an Arab astronaut,

the UAE continues to make a meaningful contribution to space exploration and advancements in science," Sheikh Mohammed tweeted.

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Omani writer wins Arabic Booker

Muscat - Omani writer and poet Zahran al Qasimi has won the 16th International Prize for Arabic Fiction for his novel *The Water Diviner*. Results of the competition were announced on Sunday in Abu Dhabi, the UAE.

Qasimi won a cash prize of US\$50,000 and funding for translation of the novel into English, an initiative intended to promote the book on a global scale and boost its sales.

Qasimi was born in 1974 in Dima Wa al Taein. His previous works include *Mountain of the Horseradish Tree* (2013), *The Sniper* (2014) and *Hunger for Honey* (2017), alongside published collections of poetry, short stories and nonfiction.

The *Water Diviner* tells the story of a man who travels to a remote village in search of his missing son. Along the way, he learns about the importance of water and the power of women.

The novel was praised by the jury for its "perfect structure", "fine poetic language" and "exciting characters". The jury also said that the novel "sculpted an unfamiliar theatre of narratives circulating in the Arab world".

In a statement, Qasimi said that he was "humbled and honoured" to win the prize. He said that he wrote the novel to "explore the relationship between humans and water", and that he was "grateful to the jury for recognising the novel's importance".

Head of Jury Mohammed al Ash'ari said that the novel was chosen because it tackled a new domain in modern fictional writing.



He explained that the writer focused on the topic of water due to its significance to the natural environment and human life, notably in difficult areas.

He added that the writer presented this topic by harmonising reality and myth.

About the novel, Qasimi said, "Human beings throughout history have had a strong connection with water. For this reason, we find that great civilisations grew up on riverbanks, and anthropologists affirm that the beginning of life on the face of the Earth commenced with water. But what happens when this substance which gives life also becomes the cause of death through scarcity or flood-

ing? How does water become a killer?"

Qasimi added, "The other symbolic connotation is that water is a natural resource and frittering it or not using it properly will lead to its depletion. This is a very important message: To look at natural resources upon which life is based, and upon which the stability of many countries depends."

The International Prize for Arabic Fiction, also known as the Arabic Booker, is regarded as the most prestigious and important literary prize in the Arab world.

It was established in 2007 to promote Arabic literature and to encourage the translation of Arabic novels into other languages.

Oman – Rising star for Middle East travellers

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The sultanate's popularity as a tourist destination among Middle Eastern travellers is growing. Oman has jumped four places to rank 12th in the 'Top 50 Destinations Globally for Middle East Travellers' list.

Developed by Wego, the largest online travel marketplace and travel app for flight bookings and searches in the Middle East and North Africa, the 'Middle East Traveller Destination Leaderboard' for the first quarter of 2023 showcases the relative popularity of global destinations with Middle East travellers.

The data to determine the destination rankings was compiled from tens of millions of searches made in the first quarter of 2023 by Wego users.

The biggest climbers among top 20 are Oman (+4 for the 12th spot) and Sudan (+5 for the 20th spot), the travel company stated.

Oman has done even better when comparing the current destination trends to pre-COVID times. 'Several Asian countries lost positions as they faced stricter COVID policies. These are mostly countries in Asia such as China (-11 spots), Japan and Vietnam (each -9 spots), Philippines (-8 spots), Malaysia (-7 spots) and Indonesia and Singapore (each -4 spots).

'On the other end were countries within GCC who had more accommodating social and travel policies during the pandemic. Qatar and Oman, each went up by +8 spots and Bahrain by +5 spots among others.'

Egypt retained its position as the top destination for international travel for MENA travellers in Q1 2023, followed by Saudi Arabia.

Rounding out the top three is India.

Looking at a decade worth of travel data, regional travel destinations are growing faster than long-haul. Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines and USA dropped out as top ten destinations while Kuwait, Pakistan and Jordan are now among the top ten destinations for MENA travellers.

The UK remains the dominant European destination for Middle East travellers. This summer, Georgia and Azerbaijan are expected to challenge the UK once again as Arab travellers look to replace the Gulf summer heat with a more moderate summer.

'One dynamic change we have seen among European markets has been Italy, which has steadily climbed up through the ranks from No 8 spot in early 2022 to currently battle with Germany for the No 2.'

Among the ME destinations, most countries have retained their rankings during the second quarter of 2023. KSA and Egypt continue to dominate the top two spots with UAE firmly in third.

While most Asian destinations retained their relative positions among each other, Asia's drop in popularity versus the rest of the world continues to be the most noteworthy affect of the pandemic. 'As China and the rest of Asia finally ease social and travel restrictions, Wego projects that Asian countries are going to bounce back and reclaim their 2019 positions.'

Mamoun Hmedan, CCO and MD for MENA and India at Wego, said, "We're excited to share our MENA destination report for this quarter. Our data shows that Egypt remains the top destination of choice for MENA travellers for what the country offers."

Penalties for parents failing to enrol children in schools

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Parents who fail to register their children in school will now face penalties under the new School Education Law. They may be subjected to fines of up to RO1,000 or imprisonment for a period of up to three months.

The law, issued by Royal Decree

No 31/2023 last week, includes 97 articles divided into ten chapters covering various topics related to education.

According to the law, education is mandatory for all children starting at the age of six, and Arabic is the official medium of instruction in all schools.

The law strictly prohibits members of teaching staff from using

corporal punishment on students for disciplinary violations.

In cases where circumstances demand it, the Ministry of Education may allow home study or distance learning for students who cannot attend regular classes.

Any student who disrupts public order in a school or hinders its educational activities may face imprisonment of up to one month and/or

a fine ranging from RO100 to RO500.

Parents who fail to present valid reasons for not registering their children within 14 days of the last date of registration may face imprisonment for a minimum of one month and a maximum of three months and/or a fine of no less than RO500 and not exceeding RO1,000.

The law emphasises the obligation of educational staff to promptly report any crime committed on school premises to the school principal or their representative. The incident should be reported in writing to the nearest police station within 24 hours of coming to notice. Violators of this article may face imprisonment for a period of no less than 24 hours.



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Sultan Haitham City launched

Muscat - His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik presided over the launch ceremony of Sultan Haitham City held at Al Baraka Palace on Wednesday.

Upon arrival at the launch ceremony hall, His Majesty the Sultan was received by Dr Khalfan bin Said al Shu'aيلي, Minister of Housing and Urban Planning.

During the ceremony, His Majesty witnessed a descriptive account of the smart and futuristic city. The presentation showcased a model of the city, which will be developed in the wilayat of Seeb.

Sultan Haitham City represents a new model for development of sustainable cities, and fulfilling the aspirations of Oman's youth.

His Majesty the Sultan took note of the remarkable facilities within Sultan Haitham City. He viewed display panels outlining a diverse range of structures, including prototypes of residences that harmoniously blend with a modern setting, while epitomising the cultural heritage of the country.

Furthermore, His Majesty the Sultan was briefed on the brand identity and message of Sultan Haitham City, billed as 'Treasure the Future'. This brand identity reflects a visionary approach to building a unique and dazzling city in the sultanate. The logo of the city draws inspiration from the purity of



Jun
01

nature, accentuated by golden flourishes symbolising luxury and power.

A visual presentation on the model of the city's masterplan, residential quarters, facilities and amenities captivated His Majesty's attention. The presentation included details of the various struc-

tures within the city, such as schools, hospitals and mosques.

To conclude the ceremony, His Majesty the Sultan perused a book describing the project of Sultan Haitham City, which is set to become an icon for smart cities. The event was attended by members of the Royal family and high-ranking

officials.

During the ceremony, His Majesty the Sultan affirmed that what he has seen of the modern planning of the city is heartening. His Majesty saw it as the foundation for future initiatives, and congratulated the talented young minds of Oman, including design-

ers and thinkers, and encouraged them to make their mark in every corner of the sultanate.

His Majesty regarded this occasion as just the beginning of a series of visionary developments, as more cities will emerge, keeping pace with the ever-evolving world.

ONA

World's 1st safe CO2 removal project kicks off

Muscat - 44.01 - a company engaged in removing CO2 from the atmosphere safely, efficiently and permanently by turning it into rock deep inside the earth - and the Ministry of Energy and Minerals have signed a concession agreement for the world's first commercial-scale peridotite mineralisation project.

The project, which will begin in 2024 in the Hajar Mountains, will be the largest peridotite mineralisation activity in the world, and the first commercial demonstration to mineralise multiple tonnes of CO2 per day.

The project will take place at a site in Al Qabil, where 44.01 has already completed a successful pilot project to prove that its process is effective, safe and permanent. The



Jun
01

company will take CO2 captured from the atmosphere or from industrial processes, dissolve it in water and then inject it into peridotite formations deep underground, where it will mineralise, or turn into rock, meaning it can never escape back into the atmosphere.

Peridotite, an ultramafic rock found in abundance across Oman, mineralises CO2 naturally, but this usually takes decades. 44.01's technology accelerates the process, offering a safe, permanent and scalable way of eliminating CO2 in less than a year.

On the occasion, H E Salim bin Nasser bin Said al Aufi, Minister of Energy and Minerals, said, "44.01's mineralisation technology, developed here in Oman, has the potential to help our country meet its net

zero targets and decarbonise vital Omani industries in line with Oman Vision 2040. We are pleased to support 44.01 in its largest project so far and we look forward to seeing what this technology can achieve in the future."

Talal Hasan, founder and CEO of 44.01, said, "We are delighted to have agreed this concession with the Ministry of Energy and Minerals. We hope this project paves the way for Oman to become a world leader in permanent CO2 removal."

Peridotite mineralisation is a natural process, which 44.01 accelerates by injecting carbonated fluid into peridotite formations deep underground. Also, 44.01 won the Earthshot Prize and an XPrize Milestone Award in 2022.

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Groundbreaking

Oman first in GCC to establish social insurance for maternity/paternity, PF for migrants: ILO

Our Correspondent
Muscat

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik issued Royal Decree No 52/2023 on July 19 promulgating the Social Protection Law, after presenting the same before the Council of Oman.

The new Social Protection Law radically reshapes the social protection system in the sultanate and is set to become a reference for countries in the region, the International Labour Organization (ILO) has stated.

Promulgation of the law marks the culmination of an ambitious reform process led by Tawazun, the high-level government programme for fiscal balance (now Estidamah), with the close support of ILO.

The comprehensive reforms entail a complete restructuring of the contributory pension system, with the integration of 11 pension funds into one single national scheme to cater for all workers in the private and public sector.

Oman is also the first country in the GCC to establish a social insurance scheme for maternity and paternity, and sickness cash benefits, ILO stated.

Among groundbreaking features, the new law introduces government-funded universal social



Jul
23

protection benefits, including a cash benefit for all children under the age of 18, a universal old age pension for senior citizens over the age of 60, and a universal disability allowance. In a bid to increase efficiency and coherence, all government and contribution funded social protection benefits will be

administered by Social Protection Fund, a newly established unified social protection agency.

The new law also significantly expands protection to migrant workers in Oman, who represent over three quarters of the country's working population. Migrant workers will be covered for employment

injury, maternity and sickness under the same terms as national workers. For the first time in the region, a national provident fund will also be established to administer end-of-service benefits to migrant workers.

The reforms set a new regional benchmark for alignment with in-

ternational labour standards in the area of social security, and the progressive realisation of a rights-based universal social protection framework, in line with ILO Social Protection Floors Recommendation, 2012 (No 202).

"Inspired by principles enshrined in the Omani Constitution and the goals expressed in its Vision 2040, the government has embraced improving well-being and social protection as a central strategic priority. As Oman strives towards a more diversified and productive economy, protecting people remains at the core of its commitments. Rights-based and inclusive social protection are essential pillars for fostering sustainable economic progress, ensuring that no-one is left behind," said Nasser al Jashmi, Secretary-General of Ministry of Finance and Supervisor of the National Programme for Fiscal Sustainability and Financial Sector Development or Estidamah.

"We congratulate the government, employers and workers in Oman for achieving this major milestone," said Ruba Jaradat, ILO's Regional Director for the Arab States. "The new legislation sets a new vision for social protection in Oman and paves the way towards universal social protection in the sultanate.

Royal Decree promulgates Labour Law

Future-proof Labour Law to develop Omanis' capabilities, foster dynamic work environment

Muscat - His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik issued Royal Decree No 53/2023 on July 25 promulgating the Labour Law after presenting the same before the Council of Oman.

The decree seeks to align Oman's labour market with Oman Vision 2040. The legislation aims to foster a dynamic, resilient work environment capable of adapting to current and future challenges.

The new law prioritises the development of national capabilities, preparing citizens to spearhead institutional growth in the private sector. It asserts employment as an inherent right for Omanis, defining clear conditions under which non-Omanis may work within the sul-



Jul
26

tanate.

The law stipulates that businesses must disclose their annual plan for localisation and workforce

replacement, detailing the number of Omani workers, their salaries, gender and potential job vacancies. Additionally, it mandates busi-

nesses to create and implement plans for the appointment and training of Omanis for leadership roles, as well as strategies to retain them.

Formulated through a nationwide initiative involving various stakeholders and specialised entities, the Labour Law paves the way for a Joint Dialogue Committee. This body will assess proposals to regulate the labour market, promote relationships between stakeholders and ensure harmony between the interests of workers and employers.

The legislation, divided into ten sections, comprehensively covers employment regulations, contracts and mutual obligations between employers and workers. It outlines

specifics relating to working hours, leave allowance, remuneration, employment of young individuals, occupational health and safety, and labour unions. It also delves into the settlement of labour disputes and corresponding punitive measures.

The law extends several benefits to working women, including an hour each day for childcare, 98-day maternity leave, and provisions to take up to a year of unpaid leave for childcare. Firms with more than 25 female workers are also required to provide a designated rest area.

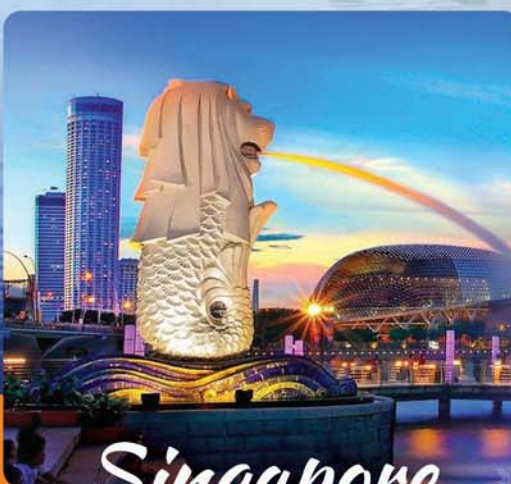
It also allows sector-specific work regulations, and temporary employment of workers for another employer with ministry approval.

CELEBRATE THE NEW YEAR IN STYLE

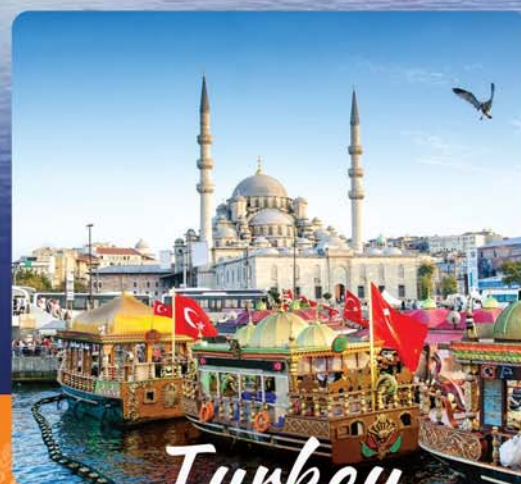
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Religion, language define our identity: youth



Our Correspondent
Muscat

Omani youth say their religion and language are most important to their personal identity, with an overwhelming majority (95%) also saying preserving their religious and cultural identity is more important to them than creating a more liberal and globalised society.

This is one of the key findings of the 15th annual ASDA'A BCW Arab Youth Survey under the theme 'My Identity', the most comprehensive study of its kind of the Arab world's largest demographic - its over 200mn youth. The survey is conducted by ASDA'A BCW, a communications consultancy in Middle East and North Africa.

When asked what defines their personal identity, 52% of Omani respondents said, "my religion" followed by "my language" (40%). Across all respondents in the survey, "my religion" and "my family/tribe" were each named by 27% of respondents, followed by "my nationality" (15%), "my language" (11%), "my Arabic heritage" (8%), "my gender" (7%) and "my political beliefs" (4%).

Religion was named as most important to personal identity by 30% of the respondents in Levant, 27% in North Africa and 25% in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states, while family/tribe was deemed most important by 37% of youth in North Africa, 21% in Levant and 20% in the GCC.

Over three-quarters (76%) of Arab youth said they are concerned about the loss of traditional values

and culture, the highest percentage saying so in five years, while nearly two-thirds (65%) said preserving their religious and cultural identity is more important to them than creating a more tolerant, liberal and globalised society. This sentiment rises to nearly 74% in Levant, 72% in the

GCC states and 68% in North Africa.

Interestingly, while 11% said language is most important to their identity, over half (54%) of the respondents said the Arabic language is less important to them than it is to their parents. This trend is seen across the three regions surveyed, with 59% of GCC youth, 51% in North Africa and 52% in Levant all saying it is less important to them.

Interestingly, in Oman, nearly two-thirds (64%) of youth said the Arabic language is more important to them than it is to their parents.

Reflecting the importance they place on their faith, a majority (73%) disagreed that religious values are holding the Arab world back, but nearly two-thirds (65%) said religion plays too big a role in the Middle East. Fewer Arab youth than in previous years feel the region needs to reform its religious institutions - down to 58% this year from 77% last year. This year, the face-to-face interviews with Arab youth were conducted from March 27 to April 12, coinciding with Ramadan.

Also, nearly two-thirds (62%) say the laws of their country should be based on Sharia standards and not civil or common law.

Aug
10

First H2 refueling station expected in 2024

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Hydrogen Systems - an innovation-driven leader in the hydrogen technology sector based in Saudi Arabia - has announced that it was awarded a contract by Shell Development Oman (Oman Shell) to design, develop and instal Oman's first hydrogen refueling station.

Under the contract, Hydrogen Systems will be responsible for the detailed engineering, procurement,

quality assurance and control (Factory Acceptance Test) of electrolyzers, compression, storage, chilling and dispensing. It will also be responsible for all associated subsystems - utilities, interconnecting piping, safety, communications, electrical, control and instrumentation - for a green hydrogen generation and refueling station in Muscat.

"This collaboration with a leading global energy company like Shell further consolidates Hydrogen Systems' position as a leader in the hy-

drogen technology sector, leveraging its expertise and innovative solutions to advance the adoption of hydrogen as a clean and sustainable energy source," said Sattam Al-suwailem, CEO of Hydrogen Systems.

Commenting on the milestone, Walid Hadi, VP and Country Chairman of Oman Shell, said, "We are excited to get to yet another tangible step in realising Oman's first hydrogen station.

This station will become the first Shell station worldwide to have the

hydrogen production plant on site. This will allow for maximum energy efficiency and for us in Oman Shell to be a pace setter in the hydrogen industry in Oman."

Earlier in March, Oman Shell and Oman Airports announced land allocation for Shell's Green Hydrogen for Mobility project.

The land assigned for the project is owned by Civil Aviation Authority and is located near Muscat International Airport.

At the time, Hadi informed that the station will be partially solar-

powered and include multiple mobility solutions, including electric vehicle charging units, hydrogen fuelling units as well as other fuelling products and non-fuel retail products and services.

The station is expected to be on stream in 2024, it was announced in March. In Phase 1 of Green Hydrogen for Mobility, Oman Shell signed an agreement with Oman Airports in 2022 to give 15 hydrogen cars to Oman Airports and to build a hydrogen station near the airport.

Aug
09

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Oman at G20

‘Oman believes in spirit of global cooperation’

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Sayyid Asaad bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for International Relations and Cooperation Affairs and Special Representative of His Majesty the Sultan, represented Oman at the 18th G20 Summit in New Delhi. Inaugurated on Saturday, the summit witnessed the presence of prominent global leaders and heads of government.

Upon arrival, Sayyid Asaad was welcomed by India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi. In his keynote address, Sayyid Asaad conveyed greetings from His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, and expressed gratitude for the achievements under the Indian presidency.

“We welcome the Indian presidency's theme for this year's edition of the G20, ‘One Earth, One Family, One Future’, and stress the importance of joint action, not only for the preservation and protection of the Earth, but for the progress and prosperity of all humanity,” he said.

“The Sultanate of Oman believes



in the spirit of cooperation and shared responsibility, and is committed to these in pursuit of public benefit.

“Therefore, we in Oman realise

our role and responsibility, and affirm our commitment to the visions of the international community and its many initiatives in order to achieve the 2030 Sustainable De-

velopment Goals and the Paris Climate Agreement, to name a few.

“In conclusion, we look forward to continuing and strengthening cooperation and partnership with all

G20 countries in all fields that benefit everyone.

“We cannot fail to express our thanks and appreciation to the Republic of India, its efforts to prepare well for this summit and for the warm reception and hospitality.”

This year's G20 discussions revolve around sustainable development and means to distribute economic growth equitably between nations. Key topics include green development, climate change impacts and the European Union's environmental initiatives. Discussions on loans for developing nations, debt restructuring, cryptocurrency regulations and geopolitical concerns are also on the agenda.

The summit will culminate with a declaration from G20 leaders, reflecting their dedication to the priorities deliberated during various ministerial and working group sessions.

The special invitation for Oman to participate in the G20 meet reaffirms the depth of relations and strong bond between India and Oman.

Omani sailors bag Oman's first Asian Games silver



Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman Sail's 49er team of Musab al Hadi and Walid al Kindi created history for the sultanate on Tuesday by winning Oman's first-ever silver medal at the Asian Games.

The pair sailed excellently throughout the week in Ningbo, China and kept their composure in the final intense races to take silver.

This achievement means the team has secured automatic qualification to the Asian Qualification Regatta in Chon Buri, Thailand in December where they will look to confirm their place in the Paris 2024 Olympic Games.

Speaking about the historic feat, Hashim bin Hamad al Rashidi, Head Coach of Oman Sail, said, “This achievement came as a result of the intense preparations and continuous training that preceded the tournament.

“The team was able to maintain focus and perform well throughout the competition. It was a tough test for the sailors against the most prominent professionals from across the Asian continent.”

He added that the next step will be the quest to qualify for the Paris 2024 Olympics.

After the race, Hadi said, “We are very happy to represent Oman in this major continental event, and we are delighted to win a silver medal for our nation. We dedicate this achievement to our dear homeland and to all those who supported us on this journey, the technical staff and our colleagues at Oman Sail.”

An Omani delegation of 75, including 44 male and female athletes, is participating in the 19th Asian Games in Hangzhou, China, in seven sports - athletics, weightlifting, water sports, shooting, sailing, beach volleyball and hockey.



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Clashes put Arab peace on the brink

Sderot, Israel - Palestinian group Hamas launched a large-scale surprise attack against Israel on Saturday, firing thousands of rockets from Gaza and sending ground units, as Israel retaliated with air strikes.

At least 70 people were reported killed in Israel, while Gaza authorities released a death toll of 198 in the bloodiest escalation in the wider conflict since May 2021, with hundreds more wounded on both sides.

"We are at war," said Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu as the military launched a series of air strikes against targets of Iran-backed Hamas in the blockaded coastal enclave where black smoke billowed into the sky.

"The enemy will pay an unprecedented price," the right-wing veteran Israeli premier vowed after Hamas launched its first such combined air, sea and ground offensive, half a century after the outbreak of the 1973 Arab-Israeli war.

The Islamist group started the surprise attack at around 6:30am (0330 GMT) with thousands of rockets aimed as far as Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, some bypassing the Iron Dome defence system and hitting buildings.

Hamas fighters - travelling in vehicles, boats and even using motorised paragliders - breached Gaza's security barrier and attacked nearby Israeli towns and military



A man carries a crying child as he walks in front of a building destroyed in an Israeli air strike in Gaza City on Saturday

posts, sparking gun battles as panicked residents hid out in bunkers.

Bodies were seen lying on the streets of the town of Sderot near Gaza.

AFP journalists witnessed armed Palestinians gathered around an Israeli tank that was on fire, and others

driving a seized Israeli Humvee into Gaza.

Israeli army Maj Gen Ghasan Alyan warned Hamas had "opened the gates of hell" and would "pay for its deeds".

The army said its forces were battling Palestinian fighters on the

ground in several locations near the Gaza Strip, in an operation labelled 'Swords of Iron'.

Hamas claimed to have captured several Israelis - raising the spectre of a far wider escalation in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as international concern mounted. The group

Oman urges Palestine, Israel to show restraint

Muscat - Oman has called on Palestine and Israel to exercise utmost restraint, stressing the importance of protecting civilians.

A statement issued by the Foreign Ministry said, 'The Sultanate of Oman has been following with great concern the ongoing escalation between the Palestinian and Israeli sides as a result of continued illegal Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories and the constant Israeli aggressions in Palestinian cities and villages, which portend serious repercussions and an escalation in intensity of violence'.

released a video showing its fighters holding three men dressed in civilian clothes who were labelled 'enemy soldiers' in the video caption. The escalation follows months of rising bloodshed, mostly in the occupied West Bank, and tensions around Gaza's border.

'Intikhab' revolutionises first app-based elections

Our Correspondent
Muscat

A milestone election of the Majlis A'Shura came to an end on Sunday night with 65.8% voters casting their ballot to choose 90 members for the tenth term of the Shura.

According to the Ministry of Interior, 496,279 of the 753,260 registered voters - 65.8% - exercised their franchise for the tenth term.

Voter turnout was 16% more than the last shura elections.

These elections saw the second highest voter turnout. Elections for the seventh term in 2011 had 76% turnout.

The vote was to elect 90 members from 843 candidates, of which



32 were women. Voting started at 8am via the Intikhab app and concluded at 7pm. Results were announced within an hour.

The election was historic as it was the first time in the Arab world that a mobile app was used for the electoral process, serving as a

blueprint for other nations seeking to modernise their electoral systems.

Continuing the abyssal representation of women in the shura, no female candidate was elected.

H E Sayyid Hamoud Faisal al-Busaidi, Minister of Interior, accompanied by members of the Main Committee of the Majlis A'Shura's tenth term elections, visited the operations centre to oversee the election process.

H E Sayyid Hamoud described the modernisation of the electoral process as "unprecedented".

"I congratulate all those who were elected to the Majlis A'Shura and wish them success in performing their duties in order to achieve the national goals."

He lauded the efforts made to

provide communications services in all niyabats, wilayats and governorates. "The services enabled citizens to cast their vote electronically, wherever they were," he added

Talal Said al Ma'amari, CEO of Omantel, informed that the security systems operated efficiently and there were no reports of cyberattacks.

"This exercise proves that technology can be utilised in complex and sensitive operations like the electoral process, which promises to bring about fruitful outcomes," said Ma'amari. He praised the efforts of the government and private entities to streamline the process.

A Oman Human Rights Commission (OHRC) team monitored the main operations centre of the elections at the Ministry of Interior.

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GCC ministers clear Unified Gulf Visa

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Interior ministers of Gulf Cooperation Council countries have approved the unified Gulf tourist visa and launched the first phase of a project to electronically link traffic violations between the GCC states.

The decisions were taken at the 40th meeting of the interior ministers of GCC held in Muscat on

Wednesday. In a meeting on October 7, the GCC tourism ministers unanimously approved the unified Gulf visa and forwarded the file to the ministers of interior.

In March, a working group tasked with linking traffic violations in the GCC countries announced the project and its impending implementation.

The launch of the system is expected to bring about easier coordi-

nation and traffic violations data exchange and related matters under the proposed GCC Unified Traffic System.

In his speech, H E Sayyid Hamoud bin Faisal al Busaidi, Oman's Minister of Interior, said that security challenges and the accompanying rapid changes in the methods of committing crimes and exploiting technical progress require continued

strengthening of coordination among the member states and consultations to confront the perpetrators.

Jassim Mohammed al Budaiwi, Secretary-General of GCC, praised the multiple national campaigns undertaken by the member states, in addition to the great efforts exerted by security personnel in combating drugs in the GCC. He hailed the important role in protecting their

countries from the danger of this scourge.

Budaiwi said that the region is going through a crisis with the continuation of the "sinful Israeli aggression in Gaza and its dangerous security repercussions on the region and the world".

He added that the interior ministers discussed ways to jointly confront these consequences, stressing on continued communication.

Nov 09

Aman-1, Oman's first satellite launched



California, US - Oman's ETCO SPACE launched its first satellite - Aman-1 - on Saturday from Space Launch Complex 4E in Vandenberg, California. The satellite set off on a historic mission aboard Falcon 9, the first orbital class rocket capable of reflight.

The sultanate, represented by ETCO SPACE, an emerging technology innovator; SpaceX, a US aerospace manufacturer and space transport services company; SatRev, Polish nanosatellite manufacturer and operator; and TUATARA, specialists in advanced artificial intelligence, data analytics and cognitive technology solutions, have collaborated to launch nanosatellite into space. This project started in October 2021 when a document on strategic cooperation was initially signed, establishing this groundbreaking Middle East space programme.

Nov 14

The successful launch of Aman-1 by SpaceX, included CubeSats and MicroSats for a variety of commercial and government customers. Transporter 9 lifted off from the Vandenberg space base to place the satellites into a 500km orbit.

"We are honoured to have played a role in the success of this remarkable mission. Today marks an extraordinary day, not only for Oman but for all the companies involved in this historic endeavour. We firmly believe that the valuable scientific data obtained through satellite imagery analysis will be instrumental in advancing various fields of research and will further Oman's journey towards becoming a space-faring nation," said Krzysztof Goworek, CEO of TUATARA.

The Aman-1 mission encompasses a range of goals aimed at promoting Oman's growth.

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HM in Singapore to enhance ties

Singapore - His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik arrived in the Republic of Singapore on

Wednesday on a three-day state visit.

His Majesty the Sultan was received upon arrival at Singapore Changi Airport by Dr Mohamad

Maliki bin Osman, Minister in Prime Minister's Office and Head of the Mission of Honour, several Singaporean officials and members of the Sultanate of Oman's Embassy in Singapore.

The first country in southeast Asia to be visited by His Majesty the Sultan, Singapore and Oman seek to maximise the benefits of their close relations, including initiatives taken by both sides in various economic, political and cultural areas.

According to ONA, statistics indicate total Omani exports to Singapore in 2023 until the end of September was RO521.7mn, while imports amounted to

RO54.6mn.

A high-ranking delegation is accompanying His Majesty the Sultan on the visit, including Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs, Sayyid Khalid bin Hilal al-Busaidi, Minister of Diwan of Royal Court, Gen Sultan Mohammed al Nu'amani, Minister of Royal Office, Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al-Busaidi, Foreign Minister, Dr Hamad bin Said al Aufi, Head of Private Office, Abdulsalam bin Mohammed al Murshidi, Chairman of Oman Investment Authority, Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, Salim bin Nasser al Aufi, Minister of Energy and Minerals, Pankaj Khimji, Advisor for Foreign Trade and International Cooperation in the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, Sheikh Abdulaziz bin Abdullah al Hinai, Ambassador-at-Large in Foreign.

Dec
14



Oman to develop world's first liquid hydrogen corridor to Europe

Muscat - Oman has signed an agreement to pave the way for development of the world's first commercial scale liquid hydrogen corridor. The corridor will facilitate the export of green hydrogen produced in Oman to the Netherlands and onwards to Europe, leveraging the sultanate's abundant natural resources and strategic geographical location.

The Ministry of Energy and Minerals and Hydrogen Oman (Hydrom) signed a joint study agreement on Sunday with Port of Amsterdam, Zenith Energy Terminals and GasLog to collaborate on

the development of a liquid hydrogen route to market green hydrogen produced in Oman.

The agreement underscores the clear ambitions of the partners to make the world's first commercial scale liquid hydrogen corridor a reality. The agreement was signed at the Omani Pavilion during COP28 in Dubai with H E Salim bin Nasser al Aufi, Minister of Energy and Minerals, and Prince Jaime de Bourbon de Parme, Climate Envoy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, as official witnesses.

The agreement entails conducting a detailed assessment of the requirements to develop an

open-access hydrogen liquefaction, storage and export facility in Oman, along with the provision of specialised vessels for the transportation of liquid hydrogen, currently under development by GasLog.

The primary aim of the agreement is to establish a green hydrogen corridor between Oman and the Netherlands, with the terminal of Zenith Energy as the destination for import, regasification and further distribution of the Oman-produced hydrogen to both local offtakers within the port of Amsterdam, as well as large industries in the European hinterland.

Dec
04

Oman mourns Emir of Kuwait's demise

Oman has suspended all work in public and private sectors for a period of three days from Saturday, December 16 till Monday, December 18 to mourn the death of Sheikh Nawaf al

Ahmad al Jaber al Sabah of Kuwait.

In a statement, Diwan of Royal Court said, 'With full faith in the Almighty Allah's divine destiny and judgment, and with profound sorrow and grief, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin

Tarik has received news of the death of his brother, the forgiven by the will of Allah, Emir Sheikh Nawaf al Ahmad al Jaber al Sabah of Kuwait.

'The deceased was one of the Arab leaders who served the Arab and Islamic nations. He also



contributed to the prosperity and development of the State of Kuwait.' 'His Majesty the Sultan has issued Royal orders announcing a State of Mourning and to fly flags at half-mast for three days. 'While sharing the Kuwaiti leadership, government and people's

sorrow and grief over this immense loss, Oman prays to the Almighty Allah to rest the deceased in peace in paradise in heavens, along with the devout and the faithful, and to grant his family and the brotherly people of Kuwait fortitude to bear the loss.

Dec
17

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