

GCC unified visa next big thing for tourism

Our Correspondent
Muscat

A GCC ministerial panel has put the spotlight on the importance of inter-regional initiatives in elevating the GCC tourism industry to the next level. The planned GCC Unified Tourist Visa - called GCC Grand Tours visa - was cited as a key facilitator for the region in this direction.

Striking the right balance between collaboration and competition between destinations and nations was the key focal point of a panel discussion at 2024 Arabian Travel Market (ATM) in Dubai on Monday featuring H E Azzan al Busaidi, Undersecretary of Tourism in the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism in Oman; Khalid Jasim al Midfa, Chairman of Sharjah Commerce and Tourism Development Authority; Fahd Hamidaddin, CEO of Saudi Tourism Authority; and Sarah Buhijji, CEO of Bahrain Tourism and Exhibitions Authority.

During the in-depth discussion, the ministerial panellists cited the planned GCC Unified



H E Azzan al Busaidi (R) in a panel discussion at 2024 Arabian Travel Market in Dubai on Monday (Supplied photo)

Tourist Visa as a key facilitator for the region, alongside factors such as sustainability, infrastructure and culture.

Panellists said the unified visa would allow member states to present the GCC as a connected destination, boosting accessibility and driving key performance indicators such as length of stay,

average spend and employment. Speakers noted that these would continue to ensure that the travel industry positively impacts local businesses, communities and ecosystems, contributing to the long-term sustainability of tourism across the region.

Panelists also explained that current and future infrastructure

will complement the GCC Unified Tourist Visa by enhancing accessibility within and between Gulf states. In addition to ongoing investment in new and existing airports and cruise terminals, the speakers highlighted the central role of the upcoming GCC Railway in facilitating and optimising region-wide access for both do-

Hotel revenues up 8.3%

Muscat - Revenues of Oman's 3- to 5-star hotels rose 8.3% in 2024 till the end of March to RO71.907mn compared to RO66.395mn in the same period last year.

National Centre for Statistics and Information attributes this increase to a significant rise in the total number of hotel guests, which grew 12.1% to 598,128 till the end of March this year, up from 533,790 guests in March 2023.

Hotel occupancy increased 2.2% till the end of March

2024. Breaking down the demographics, Omani guests increased 2.3% to 189,275, while GCC guests decreased 2.7% to 32,283. European guest numbers registered a substantial growth of 23.9% to 217,284.

The number of guests from the Americas totalled 19,521 - up 13.4% - while African guests recorded a 7.7% decrease to 2,735. Asian guests surged 21.6% to 79,415, and those from Oceania totalled 8,661.

tourist arrivals, paving the way for 2024 to be another record year for tourism growth.

According to the first UNWTO World Tourism Barometer of the year, international tourism ended 2023 at 88% of pre-pandemic levels, with an estimated 1.3bn international arrivals. The unleashing of remaining pent-up demand, increased air connectivity and a stronger recovery of Asian markets and destinations are expected to underpin a full recovery by the end of 2024.

Danielle Curtis, ME Exhibition Director of ATM, said, "While it's clear that healthy competition will continue to play an important role in strengthening the GCC's world-class tourism offerings, it was also encouraging to hear how collaboration is enabling the region to become more than the sum of its parts in terms of attracting global travellers. We are immensely grateful to this year's ministerial participants, who provided a diverse range of valuable insights into the region's unified tourism future."

Sayyid Badr, Haniyeh discuss Gaza ceasefire proposal

Muscat - H E Sayyid Badr Hamad al Busaidi, Foreign Minister, discussed a Gaza ceasefire proposal in a phone call with Dr Ismail Haniyeh, Head of the Political Bureau of Hamas, on Tuesday.

Haniyeh affirmed Hamas' acceptance of the proposal and the Palestinian side's support for the ceasefire in an effort to ease ten-

sions, stop bloodshed and secure the return of displaced people to their residences. The proposal also provides for the release of prisoners and hostages, lifting the siege on the Gaza Strip and allowing supply of humanitarian and relief aid.

H E Sayyid Badr welcomed the proposal and expressed Oman's

appreciation of efforts exerted by Egypt and Qatar in association with the US administration.

On his part, Haniyeh thanked and appreciated Oman's support for the Palestinian cause.

Oman expresses deep concern

The sultanate has expressed

deep concern over Israeli forces' continued military escalation, war crimes and genocide against unarmed civilians in Gaza and occupied Palestinian territories.

In a statement issued by the Foreign Ministry, Oman cautioned against the dire consequences of the military operations which Israeli occupa-

tion forces intend to carry out by storming Rafah. 'Such action portends serious catastrophic impacts that may expand the conflict and tension in the region,' Oman added.

The sultanate urged the international community to immediately intervene to stop the war and end ongoing Israeli violations.



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Oman-Brazil event presents investment opportunities

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman and Brazil commemorated 50 years of diplomatic ties by hosting Omani-Brazilian Investment Forum in Muscat on Tuesday. The two-day event aims to bolster bilateral relations, foster cooperation and forge partnerships across various sectors between private entities of both nations.

Organised by Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) in collaboration with Ministry of Heritage and Tourism and Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI), the forum kicked off under the patronage of H E Salim Mohammed al Mahrouqi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism.

The event was graced by H E Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, Celso Sabino De Oliveira, Brazilian Minister of Tourism, Sheikh Ahmed bin Amer al Maslahi, Chairman of OCCI's Small and Medium Enterprises Committee, and representatives of various public sector entities.

The primary objective of the forum is to familiarise the two business communities with each



other's investment prospects, particularly in clean energy, re-exports, heavy industries, food security and information technology.

Additionally, the event seeks to facilitate exchange of expertise and experiences in research, innovation, agriculture, space and mining.

Pankaj Khimji, MoCIIP's Advisor for Foreign Trade and International Cooperation, emphasised the forum's signifi-

cance in reinforcing the long-standing diplomatic ties between Oman and Brazil while shedding light on the sultanate's business and investment environment.

H E Talal bin Sulaiman bin Habib al Rahbi, Oman's Ambassador to Brazil, described the forum as an avenue for companies and entrepreneurs from both countries to explore commercial and investment opportunities. He underscored the keen

interest of Brazilian officials, businessmen and companies in understanding Oman's investment potential and enhancing bilateral trade.

Alongside the forum, an exhibition titled 'Made in Brazil' is showcasing Brazilian products and services. Participating companies and factories aim to explore opportunities in the Omani market and leverage the sultanate's free zones for re-export to Asian and African countries.

New Hai al Luban Sorouh project unveiled in Nakhal

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning (MHUP), in cooperation with Al Badi Investment Group, unveiled a residential project called Hai al Luban in Nakhal on Monday. The project comprises 1,442 residential units in nine distinct architectural designs.

The unveiling event was attended by Masoud bin Saeed al Hashimi, Governor of South Batinah, with dignitaries and representatives from both the public and private sectors.

Wissama bin Nasser al Harbi, Director of Department of Residential Neighbourhoods (Sorouh) at MHUP, informed that the project is strategically located just 4km from Halban Bridge on Muscat Expressway, making it a 25-minute drive from Muscat International Airport. "This prime location offers convenience and accessibility to residents."

The project features 1,442



residential units of different size and layouts ensuring the privacy and comfort of Omani families. The project also includes a commercial area, essential facilities, services and green spaces to enhance quality of life for residents.

The initial phase of the project will see development of 270 housing units, expected to be completed within 36 months. Subsequent stages will span six years until the project is fully realised.

According to Harbi, the project's concept draws inspiration

from landmarks like forts, valleys, city centres and ancient artefacts. These features create a narrative of interconnectedness, adding historical and cultural significance to the project.

The Hai al Luban master plan includes three residential complexes - Al Hoojri, Al Najdi and Al Hasiki - centred around a green park. These complexes aim to foster a harmonious relationship between society and nature while promoting community cohesion.

Over 1,600 Omanis avail public transport on three open days

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology has announced that 1,684 Omanis participated in 'Public Transport Open Day', availing free bus services in Muscat and Salalah from May 2 to May 4.

Mwasalat highlighted the fact that the initiative was part of Logistics Day 2024 celebrations, aimed at promoting accessibility and convenience of public transportation. The event encouraged



Omanis to use public transport services, fostering a culture of sustainable commuting.

As part of ongoing efforts to enhance public transport accessibility, Mwasalat will provide two years of complimentary rides for college and university students in Muscat and Salalah. This initiative seeks to alleviate commuting challenges and incentivise young Omanis to embrace public transport.



Ministry of Health

ANNOUNCEMENT

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

Tender Ref.	Description	Last date for Collection of tenders Document	Last date for submission of tenders	Eligibility	Tender Fee (Non-Refundable)	Bidding Method
2022/2326 Retender	Renovation Works At Delivery Suite in Buraimi Hospital	Before 11AM On 16/05/2024	Before 11AM On 13/06/2024	Specialized companies and institutions registered with the Tender Board	R.O 25 Per set	Electronically via the Esnad system for electronic bidding

Please note the following:

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

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Special tourism packages launched for Sur - the Arab Tourism Capital

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MHT) has introduced special tourism packages for the wilayat of Sur, the Arab Tourism Capital 2024. The launch took place at the Arabian Travel Market 2024 exhibition in Dubai on Tuesday.

Dr Walid Ali al Hinnawi, assistant secretary-general for Events and Media at the Arab Tourism Organization, expressed optimism about Sur's success as a major destination for Arab and international tourism in 2024.

"Sur is distinguished by marine and environmental tourism," he noted.

Dr Hinnawi highlighted the significant development in tourism in Oman, attributed to efforts by those involved in the field.

"These efforts are expected to bring significant returns in the number of tourists during the coming period."

He explained that cities awarded the title of Arab Tourism Capital usually see a more than 50% increase in



tourist numbers compared to previous years.

"There is a cooperation programme between the organisation and MHT, with several activities to be implemented, including training courses, workshops, and various tourism activities," he added.

Sajida bint Rashid al Ghaithiya, Director of the Tourism Marketing Department in MHT, outlined the preparation

of tourism packages in cooperation with the national travel operator 'Visit Oman'.

"These packages are available on the Visit Oman website, offering a special system for booking accommodation and tourist trips in collaboration with the National Travel Operator," she said.

Sajida emphasised the diverse options available, allowing tourists to choose from several experiences.

Emirates to promote Oman's tourism

Visit Oman and Oman Airports signed a memorandum of understanding with Emirates Airlines at the ATM to promote Oman's tourism packages across its global destinations.

Shabib bin Mohammed al Mamari, Director General of Visit Oman, explained that the agreement aims to promote these packages and identify potential

markets interested in Omani tourism.

"The agreement will see the launch of specialised programmes with Emirates Airlines, including travel tickets, tourist experiences, and hotels in Oman. We will discuss the best marketing methods and launch a targeted marketing campaign to attract as many travellers and travel companies to Oman as possible," Mamari said.

Fak Kurbah secures release of 1,219 prisoners in 2024



Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Fak Kurbah initiative, involved in paying off the debts of those imprisoned for insolvency, successfully facilitated the release of 1,219 prisoners in its 11th edition in 2024.

This achievement was announced at a press conference held at the Crowne Plaza Muscat on Monday evening.

Dr Hamad bin Hamdan al Rubaie, Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Omani Lawyers Association, highlighted the widespread participation from governmental and private institutions, as well as individuals for the fund generation, which contributed to this year's success.

Among those released were

261 individuals from North Batinah, 202 from Muscat, 154 from Buraimi, 153 from Dhahirah, 128 from South Batinah, 98 from North Sharqiyah, 72 from Dakhiliyah, 67 from South Sharqiyah, 62 from Dhofar, 16 from Al Wusta, and six from Musandam.

Since its inception in 2012, the initiative has helped secure the release of 7,100 individuals.

Dr Mohammed al Zadjali, Chairman of the Omani Lawyers Association and overseer of the initiative, described it as an annual voluntary effort launched during Ramadan.

Its aim is to secure the release of insolvent individuals and detainees or those under a conditional detention order, provided they have not benefited from

previous editions of the initiative.

"There are a few conditions that we put forward to the 45 courts across the country," Dr Zadjali explained. "The debt must not exceed RO2,000, the case must not be criminal or repetitive, and the individual must be in prison or have an arrest warrant against them."

He recounted how the initiative began in 2012.

"It all started in one of the courts when a woman was in distress following her debt of just RO200. Out of pity, another woman present at the proceedings gave her the money to save her. That's how the idea germinated, and we have continued for 11 years now, seeking the relief of over 7,000 people, including Omanis and expatriates."

WEATHER WATCH

	Max	Min
Muscat	34	27
Abu Dhabi	40	26
Doha	38	26
Kuwait City	32	22
Manama	33	25
Riyadh	35	20

PRAYER TIMINGS

Fajr	4:07am
Sunrise	5:29am
Duhr	12:08pm
Asr	3:33pm
Maghrib	6:43pm
Isha	8:00pm

Oman Hockey Association to launch interschool tournament

Muscat - The Oman Hockey Association (OHA) has announced the launch of an interschool hockey tournament, set to begin in January next year. The announcement was made during a press conference on Tuesday.

OHA chairman Dr Marwan bin Juma al Juma stated that the tournament aligns with the achievements that Oman made in hockey, particularly the successful hosting of the FIH Hockey5s World Cup 2024, where the Oman national team secured a bronze medal. "This greatly confirms Oman's interest in hockey," he said.

OHA vice president Madian Ahmed Bait Habbha explained the purpose behind launching the tournament. "The association aims to promote the sport on a broader scale," he said.

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MARKET WATCH	
MSX30	4,778.59
Sensex	73,511.85
FOREX RATES (RO1 equals)	
India	216.90
Pakistan	722.58
Bangladesh	285.21
Philippines	148.56
Sri Lanka	778.86

*Rates as on May 07

Source: xe.com

BRIEFS

Oil prices rise amid Gaza ceasefire talks

Oil prices rose on Tuesday amid ongoing ceasefire negotiations for Gaza and the Israeli military's assault on the Palestinian side of the Rafah border crossing.

International benchmark Brent crude traded at \$83.42 per barrel in morning trade in London, an increase of 1.32% from the closing price of \$82.33 per barrel in the previous trading session.

US benchmark West Texas Intermediate traded at \$78.55 per barrel at the same time, a 0.09% rise from the previous session that closed at \$78.48 per barrel.

Oil prices surged with heightened geopolitical tensions due to the Israeli military assault on the Palestinian side of the Rafah border crossing.

The Palestinian news agency WAFA reported that the Israeli army targeted buildings in the region with rockets.

These attacks weakened the prospects of a cease-fire in Gaza and raised concerns that the conflict in the region, which is home to most of the global oil reserves in the in the Middle East, could escalate further, supporting higher oil prices.

On Monday, Hamas said that it had accepted a Qatari-Egyptian proposal for a Gaza cease-fire. Hamas chief Ismail Haniyeh conveyed his group's approval of the proposal during phone calls with Qatari Prime Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman al Thani and Egyptian Intelligence Chief Abbas Kamel.

After Hamas announced its approval of the Qatar and Egypt-brokered ceasefire proposal, the Israeli War Cabinet decided to continue attacks in Rafah.



OPAZ seeks to strengthen economic partnerships between Oman and China

Beijing, China - In an effort to further the objectives of the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ) and the sultanate's industrial estates in attracting and localising quality investments, the Omani embassy in China held a series of bilateral meetings with several large Chinese companies.

An Omani business delegation led by H E Eng Ahmed Hassan al Dheeb, Deputy Chairman of OPAZ, met with Chinese businessmen from various companies operating in targeted sectors, including green industries, iron, technology, modern information technology and

Omani delegation's visit to China is part of OPAZ's strategy to strengthen economic cooperation, attract international investment, create new strategic alliances, and share technology, expertise, and experiences

chemicals in Beijing.

The Omani delegation's visit to China is part of OPAZ's strategy to strengthen economic co-operation, attract international investment, create new strategic alliances, and share technology, expertise, and experiences.

H E Nasser bin Mohammed al Busaidi, Oman's Ambassador to China, also attended the meeting.

During these discussions, H E Dheeb elaborated on the infrastructure, incentives for investors, and investment prospects in the sultanate's industrial cities, free zones, and special economic zones. He emphasised the role that Oman's economic, free, and industrial zones play in attracting investments, localising industries, and fostering various forms

of economic growth.

The OPAZ delegation also participated in the Omani-Chinese Investment Forum organised by the Embassy of Oman in China to introduce the investment environment and opportunities in Oman. The agenda included visits to several specialised Chinese companies and factories to learn about the experiences of Chinese companies in the targeted fields.

Representatives from OPAZ, the Special Economic Zone at Duqm, the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn), and the Invest in Oman Hall were among the delegation.

ahlibank fund achieves 17.1% return in 2023

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Ahli Global Equity Fund, the flagship fund managed by ahlibank, reported outstanding returns of 17.1% for 2023 and 6.2% for the first quarter of 2024.

Regulated by the Financial Services Authority (FSA) and registered with the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX), Ahli Global Equity Fund provides a unique platform for investors to



gain exposure to the GCC and global markets, while also providing diverse investment opportunities for clients from different sectors.

The fund caters to investors

seeking long-term capital appreciation through investing in a diversified portfolio of high-quality businesses. Most notably, over the past three years, the fund has generated excellent returns without any losses, boasting a net asset value (NAV) of 851bz at the end of the first quarter of 2024.

The fund recorded a return rate from March 2023 to March 2024 of 22.1%, with a three-year average annualised return of 13%. The fund stands out as

the top performer among its peers. Moreover, its coverage extends to global markets, with a keen focus on the GCC region in particular. Investments include stocks of companies from the US and China.

Furthermore, Ahli Global Equity Fund covers various sectors, including manufacturing industry, banking and financial services, real estate, telecommunications, consumer sector, IT, energy sectors, and many more.

April storms will increase claims, costs for GCC insurers: Moody's



Our Correspondent
Muscat

Storms that hit the UAE, Oman, Saudi Arabia and other GCC countries in April 2024, causing heavy floods, will push up local insurers' claims and reinsurance costs, according to global credit rating agency Moody's.

Moody's expects that smaller insurers with more marginal profitability will be most impacted. 'While insurers will only bear a small fraction of the total economic loss for this event, increasing insurance penetration coupled with the rising frequency of severe weather events could over time pressure some companies' profitability and capital adequacy,' the rating agency said in a report.

The storms brought the GCC region's heaviest rainfall since records began 75 years ago, causing severe flooding and leading to about 20 deaths, according to media reports.

'The total economic cost is likely to be significant. The insurance claims bill, which the industry is still estimating, will span commercial and consumer lines including motor, property, business and travel interruption,' Moody's noted.

However, Moody's expects the total cost to the GCC insurers to amount to only a small proportion of the total economic loss caused by the storms. This is because insurance penetration is still relatively low in the GCC region, while compulsory insurance cover such as motor third party excludes damage to the policyholder's vehicle and thus also weather related losses.

The impact on insurers' profitability is also expected to be limited by the sector's generally strong reinsurance cover, including excess of loss protection,

which Moody's expects will be activated by this event.

The rating agency noted that larger insurers with a high degree of diversification by geography and business line will be least affected.

Reinsurance costs set to rise

As per Moody's observation, the April storm confirms a recent trend toward more frequent and severe weather events in the GCC region, which has experienced seven storms and cyclones over the past five years, up from four over the previous five year period.

Moody's expects GCC insurers to face higher reinsurance costs and more restrictive reinsurance policy terms as a result. It said, 'This will put financial pressure on the primary insurance sector, which operates in a competitive and price sensitive market, and has limited ability to pass on higher reinsurance costs to customers. In some cases, rising reinsurance costs have contributed to insurers shifting towards using lower quality, less expensive, reinsurers which increases counterparty risk.'

Reinsurance costs have already been rising globally and reinsurers have reduced their capacity to cover secondary perils such as floods, which contribute to earnings volatility. These floods, which also highlight rising water risk management challenges in otherwise arid areas that have urbanised quickly, could contribute to reinsurers reducing capacity and raising prices to the extent that GCC insurers will face greater risk of earnings volatility in the future.

Moody's pointed out that some small to medium-sized GCC insurers are at risk of capital erosion as a result of the April storms.

Saudi to host Global Project Management Forum in June

Riyadh, Saudi Arabia - The third Global Project Management Forum (GPMF) is set to kick off in Riyadh on June 2, 2024, focusing on the theme 'We Achieve the Dream: Leadership, Empowerment, Sustainability.'

The two-day event will be a pivotal platform for industry leaders, project managers, and decision-makers worldwide.

The GPMF will delve into a wide array of topics pertaining to project management across various sectors. It aims to foster collaboration, share insights, and devise innovative solutions to ensure the successful execution of major projects while addressing challenges and promoting sustainable economic development on both regional and global scales.

The forum is designed to cater to a diverse audience from various sectors, including public and

private enterprises, semi-governmental entities, engineering and contracting firms, procurement companies, startups, construction and infrastructure firms, and more. Its aim is to empower women, professionals, and youth by equipping them with the skills and knowledge necessary for project management excellence.

Key areas of focus include the economy, governance, work methods, value chain, large projects, sustainable social impact, digital transformation, artificial intelligence applications, and soft power skills.

These topics align with global sustainability goals and aim to empower leaders worldwide.

In addition to insightful discussions, the forum features an interactive exhibition with participation from local and international economic sectors.

ONA

Escalated ME conflict could result in \$150 oil: Report

Dubai, UAE - Thus far, the Israel-Hamas conflict has had limited impact on the global economy. However, an escalation to a direct war between Israel and Iran, could result in oil prices rising to \$150 a barrel and global output cut by \$1tn, according to a new analysis by Bloomberg Intelligence (BI) and Bloomberg Economics (BE).

The new study from BI and BE - Middle East Energy Scenarios-looks in detail at four broad scenarios and their potential impact on global GDP and inflation, from a sustained ceasefire to a confined conflict, a multi-front proxy war and a larger war involving direct conflict between Israel and Iran.

Ziad Daoud, Chief Emerging Markets Economist at Bloomberg Economics and co-author of the report said, "Our base case is that the war will remain largely confined, as it has been since October, with limited impact on the global economy. But this could change. A risk scenario involving



a prolonged conflict could result in a global recession that takes about \$1tn off global GDP, with surging oil prices and plummeting sentiment dropping growth to 1.7%.

"The world economy is still recovering from an inflationary cycle exacerbated by Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022, and another conflict in a critical energy-producing region could significantly recharge inflation to nearly 7% this year. The Fed's 2% target would then be far out of reach and costlier gasoline would be a hurdle for President Joe Biden's re-election campaign."

Significant disruption of production in the Persian Gulf region, which produces almost 20% of the world's oil, or to transport of

oil in the extreme case of a potential blockage of the Strait of Hormuz, could shift OPEC+ policy to maximum output, according to BI and BE. In this case the spare production capacity in Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Kuwait would become "irrelevant" if the strait is shuttered.

In a press release, Salih Yilmaz, Senior Oil Analyst at

Bloomberg Intelligence and co-author of the report, said, "OPEC+ members with spare capacity, like Russia and Kazakhstan, would benefit as they would have room to maximise production at higher prices to compensate for reduced output from the Gulf countries in the cartel. The US would likely have to tap its Strategic Petroleum Reserve to make up for some of the lost barrels and limit the impact on prices at the pump."

"In addition, a direct war in the Middle East could push prices for liquified natural gas up by at least 35% if a Gulf-region conflict disrupts flows from Qatar, which sends more than 10bn cubic feet of LNG through the Strait of Hormuz every day."

A proxy war, where Iran and Israel clash through proxies such as Lebanon and Syria, while less destructive than a direct war, may cost the global economy up to \$300bn, as prices jump up around \$10 a barrel and investor confidence subsides.

Aramco's Q1 profit drops 14.4% to \$27.3bn

Riyadh, Saudi Arabia - Saudi Arabia's national oil company, Aramco, posted a 14.4% drop in net profit during the first quarter of 2024 in line with analyst expectations, according to its financial results statement released on Tuesday.

The company earned around \$27.3bn in the first quarter of this year, compared to \$31.9bn in the same quarter last year.

The revenue for the January-March period reached around \$107.2bn, compared to \$111.3bn for the same quarter of 2023.

The fall in the company's profit was partially due to lower production royalties and an increase in crude oil prices compared to the same period last year.

Saudi Aramco's President and CEO, Amin H Nasser, said, "Our first quarter performance reflects the resilience and strength of Aramco, reinforcing our position as a leading supplier of energy to economies, industries, and people worldwide."



Our first quarter performance reflects the resilience and strength of Aramco, reinforcing our position as a leading supplier of energy to economies, industries, and people worldwide.

AMIN H NASSER



dustries, and people worldwide."

"We also continue to execute our long-term strategy, and in the first quarter we made significant progress on expanding our gas business and growing our globally integrated downstream value chain while maintaining our focus on consistently delivering value for our shareholders," he added.

He also stated that the company's portfolio would evolve with the aim of contributing to the energy transition while recognising the need for affordable, reliable and flexible energy supplies.

The decline in Aramco's profit came despite an increase in crude oil prices as well as lower taxes and zakat.

Oil prices have traded higher during the quarter, with Brent crude rising 14% amid fading hopes of a ceasefire in Gaza along fears of the war spilling over into a broader regional conflict.

WTI, the US oil benchmark, rose 17% in the first quarter.

Cash flow from operations - a closely-watched metric measuring the cash a company generates from normal business operations - declined to \$33.59bn from \$39.64bn, missing a forecast of \$33.94bn, due to lower earnings and a higher working capital.

On Monday, Aramco increased its June prices for its flagship Arab Light for customers in Asia, northwest Europe and the Mediterranean - although not US - in what was taken as a sign of confidence in the demand outlook.

Improving demand looks likely to help push oil markets into a deficit in the second and third quarter, boosting prices to a peak around \$95 a barrel this summer, Bank of America said in a note last month. Brent crude oil currently sits around \$83.50 a barrel.

Agencies

Eurozone retail sales for March see biggest surge in 18 months

Piero Cingari

Eurozone retail sales in March surged, marking the highest increase since September 2022. European stocks reacted positively, buoyed by better-than-expected corporate earnings and hopes of an ECB interest rate cut.

Eurozone retail sales witnessed their sharpest monthly increase since September 2022, displaying promising signs of economic recovery in household consumption.

Data released by Eurostat on Tuesday revealed retail sales in the euro area advanced by 0.8% month-on-month in March. The rebound came after an upwardly revised decline of 0.3% in February and exceeded market expectations of a 0.6% increase.

Annually, sales grew by 0.7%,

reversing a 0.5% contraction in February and marking the first positive annual rate since September 2022, the highest since May 2022.

In the euro area, March's data showed a 1.2% rise in sales of food, drinks, and tobacco, while non-food products (excluding motor fuel) remained stable. Sales of such fuel in specialised stores saw a 2.0% increase. Across the broader European Union, food, drinks, and tobacco sales rose by 0.8%, non-food products (except motor fuel) by 0.5%, and motor fuel in specialised stores by 1.5%.

Among the member states with available data, Poland, Cyprus, and Hungary posted the most significant monthly increases in total retail trade volume at 7.3%, 4.8%, and 2.0%

respectively. In contrast, Sweden, Malta, and Austria saw the largest declines at 1.8%, 1.0%, and 0.8% respectively.

This robust performance within the euro area starkly contrasts with the situation in the United Kingdom, where retail sales in April 2024 plummeted by 4.4% year-on-year, defying expectations for a 1.6% growth. The downturn was attributed to poor weather and the early timing of Easter.

Helen Dickinson, chief executive at the British Retail Consortium, noted that dismal weather and disappointing sales contributed to a bleak start to spring, particularly affecting sectors like clothing and footwear, especially outdoor sportswear, as well as garden furniture. (Source: Euroneews.com)

UAE's DAMAC Properties announces aggressive global expansion plan

Dubai, UAE - UAE-founded real estate developer with global aspirations, DAMAC Properties, has announced brand-new office openings in Beijing and Singapore. With its sights firmly set on global expansion, the office openings signal the brand's push and significant investment and commitment to APAC.

As UAE's largest private real estate developer with headquarters in Dubai since 1982, DAMAC has grown exponentially to an impressive diverse portfolio, including luxury real estate developments, hospitality experiences, data centres, retail, fashion, and capital markets.

In December 2023, DAMAC announced plans to enter the Chinese market with its entry into Shanghai, capitalising on the growing demand for the UAE and DAMAC's portfolio from Chinese investors.

In a press release, Abbas Sajwani, Board Member,



DAMAC Properties, commented, "Since 2002, DAMAC Properties has been synonymous with redefining luxury. We are excited as we expand our footprint further into APAC with our recent office openings in Beijing and Singapore. With excellence in our DNA, today we create products of the highest international standards. Across APAC, we see discerning, seasoned, high-value individuals who are

looking to buy premium and quality developments for investments and as a home alike. We look forward to working with our partners in bringing DAMAC's acclaimed global portfolio to APAC markets."

Today, DAMAC's total portfolio comprises over 75 towers, multiple branded residences, large communities, hotels and hotel apartments across 12 global cities such as Dubai, London, Toronto and Riyadh.

Anson Tay, Managing Partner, SRI, "Dubai's property market and the city continue to be attractive for investors and residents from Singapore and across APAC. Dubai's leading developers know and understand luxury craftsmanship in real estate developments well. DAMAC is one example that has delivered on promises with a whole range of luxury developments and investment opportunities."

Michael Long, CEO, Senturion Real Estate, said, "A TrendLens report in 2023 from luxury consulting firm Agility revealed that more than 20% of Chinese millionaires were planning to visit the Middle East in 2024 with consumers having accumulated capital to invest in international real estate. Dubai and the UAE offer high yields, safety, speed, stability and an opportunity to own true luxury and quality with a developer like DAMAC."

Rapid expansion of storage batteries crucial to meet 2030 climate goals: IEA

Paris, France - After their deployment in the power sector more than doubled last year, batteries need to lead a six-fold increase in global energy storage to enable the world to meet 2030 targets.

Growth in batteries outpaced almost all other clean energy technologies in 2023 as falling costs, advancing innovation and supportive industrial policies helped drive up demand for a technology that will be critical to delivering the climate and energy targets outlined at the COP28 climate conference in Dubai, according to a new International Energy Agency (IEA) report.

In the first comprehensive analysis of the entire battery ecosystem, the IEA's Special Report on Batteries and Secure Energy Transitions sets out the role that batteries can play alongside renewables as a competitive, secure and sustainable alternative to electricity generation from fossil fuels - while also underpinning the decarbonisation of road transport by powering electric vehicles.

In less than 15 years, battery costs have fallen by more than 90%, one of the fastest declines ever seen in clean energy tech-



IEA says battery costs have fallen by more than 90% in less than 15 years

nologies. The most common type of batteries, those based on lithium-ion, have typically been associated with consumer electronics. But today, the energy sector accounts for over 90% of overall battery demand.

In 2023 alone, battery deployment in the power sector increased by more than 130% year-on-year, adding a total of 42 gigawatts to electricity systems around the world. In the transport sector, batteries have enabled electric car sales to surge from 3mn in 2020 to almost 14mn last year, with further strong growth expected in the coming years.

"The electricity and transport sectors are two key pillars for bringing down emissions quickly

enough to meet the targets agreed at COP28 and keep open the possibility of limiting global warming to 1.5 °C," said IEA Executive Director Fatih Birol.

"Batteries will provide the foundations in both areas, playing an invaluable role in scaling up renewables and electrifying transport while delivering secure and sustainable energy for businesses and households. The combination of solar PV and batteries is today competitive with new coal plants in India. And just in the next few years, it will be cheaper than new coal in China and gas-fired power in the United States. Batteries are changing the game before our eyes."

Battery deployment will need

to scale up significantly between now and the end of the decade to enable the world to get on track for its energy and climate goals, according to the report. In this scenario, overall energy storage capacity increases sixfold by 2030 worldwide, with batteries accounting for 90% of the increase and pumped hydropower for most of the rest.

By enabling greater shares of renewables in the power system and shifting electricity supply to when it's most needed, batteries will help advance progress on the goals set at COP28. These include tripling renewable energy capacity by 2030, doubling the pace of energy efficiency improvements and transitioning away from fossil fuels.

To triple global renewable energy capacity by 2030, 1 500 GW of energy storage, of which 1200 GW from batteries, will be required. A shortfall in deploying enough batteries would risk stalling clean energy transitions in the power sector.

To scale up batteries globally, the report found that costs need to come down further without compromising quality and technology. WAM



شركة مسندم للطاقة ش.م.ع ع
Musandam Power Company SAOG

ص ب ٢٢٨، الزوم البريدي ١٢، القرم، جوهرة النشاط، مسقط، سلطنة عمان.
P.O. Box 228, PC 134, Al Qurum, Jawharat Al Shatti, Muscat, Sultanate of Oman.
www.musandampower.com

INVITATION TO GENERAL MEETING OF MUSANDAM POWER COMPANY SAOG

Abu Timam Grant Thornton the statutory auditor of Musandam Power Company SAOG (the "Company") is pleased to invite its respected shareholders to attend the Ordinary General Meeting ("OGM") to be held at 3 p.m., on Tuesday, 28th May 2024, on the e-portal for convening general meetings through Muscat Clearing and Depository (SAOC) ("MCD") website (www.mcd.gov.om).

Failing quorum of the OGM, a second OGM shall be convened on Monday, at 3 p.m., 03 June 2024, on the e-portal for convening general meetings through Muscat Clearing and Depository (SAOC) ("MCD") website (www.mcd.gov.om). The agenda include the following:

- To elect a new Board of Directors from the shareholders or others.

Any person who wishes to nominate himself/herself to the Board of Directors should complete a nomination form available in the Company's head office. The completed forms should be delivered to the Company at least five (5) days prior to the OGM date. Nomination forms received after 5pm on Thursday, 23rd May 2024, shall not be accepted.

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

- only a corporate person may authorize a natural person to attend and vote on its behalf on decisions/resolutions of the OGM through electronic means, provided such natural person has an investor number with the MCD.
- voting on any item of the agenda shall commence prior to the convention of the OGM at a maximum of three (3) days and ends on the day of the OGM. If a shareholder's balance is changed either by increase or decrease, the voting process shall stand cancelled and must re-vote at the OGM.

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

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

Abu Timam Grant Thornton
Company Statutory Auditor

Saud Bahwan gets Toyota awards as best distributor in ME region, Central Asia

Toyota Motor Corporation bestowed upon Saud Bahwan Automotive the esteemed 'Gold Award' for their exceptional performance as the 'Distributor in the Middle East & Central Asia'.

This recognition underscores Saud Bahwan Automotive's commitment to excellence across various domains such as Sales & After-Sales, Customer Centric Initiatives, Carbon Neutrality, and Best-in-Town Activities, among others.

The award was presented by Masaru Shimada, General Manager, Middle East and Central Asia Division, Toyota Motor Corporation.

Accepting this prestigious accolade, Abdullah Mohamed Bahwan, Managing Director - Corporate, Saud Bahwan Group, expressed profound gratitude, stating, "We are delighted to receive the Gold Award for being the Best Distributor in the Middle East. It is an honour for which we are grateful to our valuable customers who have always patronised us.

"Without them, an achievement like this wouldn't be possible. We will continue to do our best in all our endeavours and offer distinctive experiences that customers will cherish for long."

Extending his appreciation to Toyota Motor Corporation for



Abdullah Mohamed Bahwan receiving the prestigious award



Toyota's 'Gold Award'

this esteemed recognition, he added, "We would like to thank Toyota Motor Corporation for their unwavering support and invaluable guidance. Thank you for being there at every step of our journey."

Toyota holds a special place in the hearts of the people of Oman, becoming a household name over the years due to its inspiring Japanese quality and advanced engineering prowess.

At Saud Bahwan Automotive,

customer satisfaction has always been paramount. Significant investments have been made in state-of-the-art facilities across the country and a nationwide network of branches, ensuring that Toyota customers in Oman are always in close proximity to a Saud Bahwan Automotive facility. This commitment is bolstered by innovative marketing strategies, robust after-sales support, and extensive customer care activities.



NBO, ROP unite to combat financial fraud

In its ongoing commitment to serve the community, National Bank of Oman (NBO) collaborated with the Royal Oman Police and recently organised a workshop series on 'Financial Crimes'.

These workshops enhanced awareness among the public and furnished vital information to combat financial fraud and crime within society, underscoring NBO's commitment to promoting financial literacy and security within the community.

"Safeguarding our community against financial crimes is a collective responsibility," said Sulaiman Said al Lamki, General Manager and Chief Risk Officer, at NBO.

"We are delighted to reaffirm our partnership with the Royal

Oman Police for the 'Financial Crimes' workshop series. Through these workshops, we aim to empower individuals with the knowledge and awareness needed to mitigate risks and protect themselves from falling victim to fraudsters and criminals. These workshops play a pivotal role in teaching best practices, empowering individuals with essential understanding, and enhancing security measures to combat financial fraud effectively."

The workshop series, hosted at the NBO Head Office, attracted a diverse audience comprising students, bankers, and members of the public eager to acquire the essential tools to identify and prevent financial scams, frauds, and blackmail at-

tempts. These series follow the successful completion of similar workshops at several institutions such as Sultan Qaboos University and A'Sharqiyah University in 2023.

Financial crimes pose significant threats to individuals, businesses, and the economy at large. The workshops played a crucial role in educating participants on identifying various financial fraud schemes, understanding cybersecurity threats, and implementing best practices to safeguard personal and financial information.

By collaborating with the Royal Oman Police, NBO aims to strengthen the collective resilience against financial crimes and create a safer financial environment for all.

Tanjore artist paints portrait of Family Development DG

Dr Kavitha Ramakrishna - a keen practitioner of the ancient art form of Tanjore paintings - painted a portrait of Maani bint Abdullah bin Hamad al Busaidi, Director General of Family Development at the Ministry of Social Development, and presented the same to Maani, who is also a member of the Executive Council of the Arab Women Organization.

Being involved with and influenced by various styles of Indian art has enabled Dr Kavitha to perfect the art of Tanjore paintings, a style that uses gold and semi-precious stones.

Apart from being an artist, Dr Kavitha Ramakrishna is a regular practitioner of yoga, a specialist in the language of Sanskrit, an author, dedicated educator and a committed cultural ambassador and used every opportunity to create people to people connections between Oman and India.



Sayyid Kamil Fahad al Said initiates ROHM's collaboration with La Fenice

In accordance with its mission, Royal Opera House Muscat (ROHM) endeavours to enrich the global cultural landscape through creative collaboration and fruitful exchange with other leading cultural institutions.

To further this aim, H H Sayyid Dr Kamil Fahad al Said, Secretary General of the Council of Ministers and Member of the Board of Directors of ROHM, recently visited Teatro La Fenice in Venice, Italy.

In the company of H H Sayyid Nazar al Julanda al Said, Ambassador of Oman to Italy, H H Sayyid Dr Kamil Fahad met in Venice with Fortunato Ortombina, General Manager and Artistic Director of La Fenice to enhance collaborative ties and explore possibilities for developing specific projects.

During the meeting, H H Sayyid Kamil Fahad set out the current objectives of ROHM in



the context of the institution's overall vision.

Ortombina took special interest in Royal Opera House Muscat's innovative marketing initiatives, especially the creation of new scents by the renowned perfumer Roja Dove that are redolent of important operas in the performance history of Royal Opera House Muscat, such as

Lakmé and Turandot.

New audience development strategies especially designed to engage youth including targeted community and educational outreach programmes were of mutual interest for collaboration.

The two opera houses also shared innovative best practices in the technical domain such as cutting-edge stage technologies.

Building on the previous Teatro La Fenice tour in Oman of L'Elisir d'Amore in 2016, the discussion included a focus on future possibilities such as ROHM hosting another opera title or an orchestra and chorus concert from Teatro La Fenice in the 2025-26 season. The visit featured a tour of La Fenice, about which H H Sayyid Kamil Fahad said, "Expressing the grandeur of the palatial architecture of Venice, La Fenice is among the world's most famous and magnificent opera houses. Dating from 1792, a sense of timeless beauty and splendour pervades the interior with its intricately artistry and gilded adornment. This wonderful tour set the stage for collaborative discussion and exciting plans for the future. On behalf of ROHM, I would like to express my grateful thanks for this wonderful opportunity to further ties between our two opera houses."

Mövenpick introduces new culinary adventures for guests in Muscat

Mövenpick Hotel & Apartments Ghala Muscat marked the brand's debut in Oman with a contemporary five-star property strategically located in Ghala Heights.

Besides being a preferred stopover for domestic and international travellers to experience the renowned Swiss hospitality in a genuinely Omani setting, Mövenpick also promises to soon become a must-visit destination for all types of culinary adventurers and foodies, with the opening of three outstanding F&B outlets - Amoun, The Butcher House and Dates & Co and The Watchtower which is yet to open.

"These outlets blend Mövenpick's own 70+ years tradition of Swiss hospitality with inspirations from the Sultanate's rich

culture and heritage," said Arshad Mahmood, Mövenpick general manager.

"I'm convinced that our guests will keep coming back for more, once they get a taste of the variety of classic and foodie-fusion culinary journeys we have prepared for them."

The hotel's flagship outlet, Amoun, is an all-day dining destination. The international menu consist of classic unpretentious tastes, like slow-roasted meats, authentic sourdough pizzas, succulent cheese boards, all topped-off with chocolates and ice cream for dessert.

With its name itself derived from the word: Oman, the ambience at Amoun is an inspired homage to the nation's heritage with hints of local history - Arabian pottery, Portuguese tiles,



and a vibrant Zanzibari colour palette punctuating the dine-in space. Other welcome surprise were the shelves of expertly cu-

rated Omani cookbooks, locally-sourced honey, dates, and handmade baskets that act as conversation-starters. These

shelves invite patrons to indulge in some authentic curio-shopping following a soul-satisfying meal. "Amoun is a place for fa-

miliarity and togetherness, where conversations can take centre-stage. It can also be an inspiring backdrop for celebrations and thematic parties as well," Arshad opined.

The Butcher House is a unique interpretation of a classic steakhouse. It is a truly experiential space, with table-side theatrics by culinary artists, skilfully blended beverages to complement each dish, and even a music playlist curated for its eclectic taste. The outlet prides itself on sourcing only the freshest, most wholesome produce. Here, patrons can acquire the chef's own Butcher House custom-made ingredients if they wish to.

The Butcher House's earthy ambience is accentuated by a medley of aromas and flavour-some energy, making it a great

spot for solo dining as well as special occasions.

Rounding off the trio is, Dates & Co, offering a truly intimate space for conversations, with its playful & informal cafe ambience, and discreetly attentive service. This F&B outlet - serving a range of coffees and fresh mixers, indulgent Omani dates-inspired pastries and mouth-watering desserts - exemplifies Mövenpick's flair for delivering both memorable moments and culinary excellence.

Mövenpick Hotel & Apartments Ghala Muscat has recently introduced its ice creams and signature coffee and will shortly also implement its world famous 'Chocolate Hour' with Swiss chocolate treats for guests to complete the spectrum of one-of-a-kind F&B experiences.

be'ah launches 3rd Eco-Innovate Oman event

Oman Environmental Services Holding Company (be'ah), is proud to announce the launch of the highly anticipated third edition of Eco-Innovate Oman (EIO).

EIO, the pioneering small business boot camp and accelerator programme, is dedicated to nurturing and supporting the brightest Omani eco-preneurs in transforming their innovative green ideas into successful businesses. The announcement was made during a press conference held at be'ah's headquarters.

As Oman's premier platform for eco-conscious innovators, EIO empowers Omani startups to bring their sustainable visions to life. Through a two-week intensive Boot Camp and three months of personalized coaching, EIO equips entrepreneurs with the essential skills and knowledge to thrive in the green, circular economy. Most importantly, EIO prepares the startups to attract the investment funding



necessary to bring their commercial visions to the market.

"Upon completion of EIO these Omani startups will know exactly what investors are looking for-they will be 100% investment ready," said William Crew, founder of Inspired Solutions and EIO trainer. "EIO will make introductions with local investors-we open the door; the startups are trained to walk through it."

With the guidance of local and international business



dreams into profitable realities.

"We are thrilled to launch the third edition of Eco-Innovate Oman," said Dr Farah al Barwani, Senior Manager - Research & Development at be'ah. "By providing a nurturing ecosystem for Omani eco-preneurs, EIO unlocks transformative opportunities and drives positive change in our society." Eco-Innovate Oman -launched in 2020 - aims to support and empower eco-preneurs in bringing their green, eco-conscious products and services to market. By offering intensive training, personalized coaching, and access to expertise and funding, EIO paves the way for sustainable entrepreneurship and a greener future.



Leadership, patient experience workshop kicks off in Muscat

A three-day workshop on 'Leadership and Patient Experience' commenced at the Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque Auditorium, in Muscat on Tuesday.

Represented by the Ministry of Health (MoH), Oman is hosting the workshop that is being organised by the Arab Administrative Development Organization of the League of Arab States in cooperation with the Saudi Commission for Health Specialties. The opening of the workshop was patronised by H E Dr Ahmed al Mandhari, Under-

secretary for Planning and Health Regulation in MoH, in the presence of Dr Abeer al Maamari, Director of Patient and Clients Services Department, and a number of officials from the ministry.

The three-day workshop aims to develop the skills of workers and leaders in the healthcare field to enhance and improve healthcare services provided to beneficiaries by identifying patient experience standards and measures to enhance trust and cooperation between service providers and patients, involving

healthcare leaders, service providers, and patients in improving the level and outcomes of the experience, deepening the use of healthcare service governance mechanisms based on patient experience, and presenting best practices and successful international models in this field.

An introduction to patient experience, the impact of patient experience in the healthcare organisation were among the first-day topics of the workshop, in addition to measuring patient experience and the roadmap to pa-

tient experience. The 2nd day of the workshop will focus on care providers in a patient-centred environment, covering several topics including human communication, effective teams, excellence in service, satisfaction recovery, and educational reflection. A theme on transmitting to a patient-centred organisation will be outlined on the third day, focusing on two main aspects: Organisational transformation leadership and the experience of Oman's Ministry of Health and the role of leadership.

Oasis Water Company, OAB join hands for payment solutions

Oasis Water Company and Oman Arab Bank are proud to announce the formalisation of a strategic partnership aimed at reshaping the landscape of payment solutions.

The momentous signing ceremony occurred at the prestigious OAB Corporate Office, symbolising a transformative step forward for both organisations within the rapidly evolving financial technology sector.



This ground-breaking partnership heralds a new era of enhanced payment experiences for Oasis Water customers through the integration of Oman Arab Bank's cutting-edge payment gateway solutions.

By leveraging Oman Arab Bank's advanced expertise in financial technology and robust payment infrastructure, Oasis Water Company is poised to streamline transactions, amplify efficiency, and deliver a secure and seamless payment journey to its clientele.

The collaboration between Oman Arab Bank and Oasis Water Company underscores a shared commitment to customer satisfaction and innovation. Together, they aim to introduce a range of new features and functionalities that optimise the entire payment process, reaffirming their dedication to delivering excellence in service.

"Our partnership with Oman Arab Bank marks a significant

milestone for Oasis Water Company. By integrating OAB's cutting-edge payment gateway, we are poised to revolutionise our payment processes, offering our customers a more convenient and secure method of conducting transactions," said N S S Subramanian, Chief Operating Officer of Oasis Water.

"We believe this collaboration will reinforce our position as the leader in the Bottled Water Industry within the Sultanate of Oman," he added.

Commenting on the partnership, Khalid al Amri, Chief Retail Banking Officer from Oman Arab Bank expressed excitement, stating, "We are delighted to embark on this strategic journey with Oasis Water. As a leading financial institution, Oman Arab Bank is steadfast in providing innova-

tive solutions that empower businesses and individuals alike. Through this collaboration, we extend our state-of-the-art payment gateway services to Oasis Water's esteemed customers, ensuring a seamless and secure transactional experience."

Oman Oasis has been serving the Oman market for many years, and the brand has gained a reputation for providing pure, high-quality drinking water that is essential for a healthy lifestyle. The company continues to invest in technology and innovation to improve its products and services. It offers a portfolio of three premium drinking water products, including Oman Oasis - Balanced Drinking Water, Mai Alkaline - Alkaline Ionized Drinking Water, and Sifr - Sodium Free Drinking Water.

SAS certified for manufacturing and repair of boilers

Seeh Al Surya Engineering LLC's (SAS) has been awarded the U Stamp by the American Society of Mechanical Engineers (ASME) and the R Stamp by the National Board of Boiler and Pressure Vessel Inspectors (NBBI).

This recognition highlights SAS's commitment to quality and safety in pressure vessel manufacturing and repair.

These prestigious certifications demonstrate Seeh Al Surya's Quality Control program meets the rigorous stan-

dards set by both ASME and NBBI.

The official presentation of the certificates took place at a special ceremony on April 25.

CEO Said al Asmi received the certifications from Wadie Derbel, Country Manager, the

accredited Authorised Inspection Agency (AIA).

This achievement signifies Seeh Al Surya's dedication to providing its customers with pressure vessels that are built and maintained to the highest safety standards.

WHO's collaborating centre in Muscat celebrates World Asthma Day

The Collaborating Centre of the World Health Organization (WHO) for Research and Training in Chronic Respiratory Diseases celebrated World Asthma Day, which is observed on the first Tuesday of the month of May.

The celebration was held under the auspices of H E Dr Said bin Harib al Lamki, Undersecretary for Health Affairs in the Ministry of Health, with the presence of representatives from the WHO country office in Oman, and the Oman Respiratory Society.

Through celebrating World Asthma Day, the centre aimed to shed light on the importance of awareness efforts for controlling and managing asthma and highlight the centre's efforts in addressing the challenges of asthma on both the global and regional levels.



Dr Shadha al Raisi, the Director of the WHO Collaborating Centre, stressed the centre's commitment to advocating for the improvement and development of therapeutic and preventive services for asthma, as well as raising awareness globally and regionally.

In addition, Raisi highlighted the importance of integrating asthma treatment through a primary care approach, which has led to a reduction in asthma hospitalisation rates in several countries worldwide, including Oman.

Dr Raisi further added that asthma can be controlled and

deaths due to this disease can be prevented through educating policymakers, healthcare providers, patients, and their families.

Additionally, Dr Alaa Hashish, Public Health Officer in the WHO Country Office in Oman, pointed out the global burden of asthma

and the interventions currently undertaken by the World Health Organization (WHO).

It's worth mentioning that the Non-Communicable Diseases Department at the Directorate General of Health Services and Programmes has been appointed as a collaborating centre for

training and research in the field of chronic respiratory diseases.

This came as a result of the methodology adopted by the Ministry of Health in collaboration with the Omani Respiratory Society to integrate asthma treatment into primary healthcare institutions, along with in-

vestment in inhalation medications and training healthcare personnel. This effort has led to positive health indicators in reducing the burden of asthma.

In line with the global dialogue, the center collaborating with the World Health Organization emphasises the importance of raising awareness among all stakeholders involved in treating and preventing asthma, including healthcare providers, decision-makers, patients, and their families. The centre also calls for investment in providing inhalation medications through easily accessible services.

Additionally, it underscores the importance of training all healthcare providers, including pharmacists and nurses, to ensure optimal use of inhalation medications and to educate patients and their families about asthma treatment plans.

Caught in storm: 5 killed, 6 others missing as boat capsizes in Tanzania

Dar es Salaam, Tanzania - Five people drowned and six others went missing after their boat capsized on Monday while en route from Zanzibar to the Pangani district of Tanzania's Tanga region.

Local authorities said five bodies have been discovered in Mombasa, Kenya.

Pangani District Commissioner Musa Kilakala confirmed the tragic incident and said police have launched investigations into the incident.

"Our security forces are collaborating with their counterparts in Kenya to gather information. We will provide up-

dates in due course," Kilakala told Anadolu by phone.

The marine vessel, carrying a mix of ordinary citizens, entrepreneurs, and traders, was caught in a storm and lost in the deluge.

"We are actively working to locate the missing passengers along the Tanzania-Kenya border," Kilakala added.

In a separate development, relentless heavy rains continue to afflict southern Tanzania, particularly the Kilwa district of the Lindi region, causing widespread destruction of farms, homes, and roads.

Selemani Mnonya, a local



leader in Kilwa's Makangaga village, reported heavy flooding that has rendered homes uninhabitable. "Hundreds of people have evacuated their homes and are now seeking shelter in schools and public buildings. Urgent assistance is needed," Mnonya told Anadolu.

Janet Mrosso, a Makaganga resident whose house was also destroyed, spoke about her family's dire situation.

"Everything is gone. I don't know what we can do. We urgently need food and medicine," Mrosso appealed.

Local authorities have reported extensive damage across

the rural Lindi region, with efforts underway to evacuate residents from hazardous areas and assess the full extent of the devastation.

Drone footage broadcast by local media showed the massive devastation caused by Cyclone Hidaya, including numerous collapsed houses and coconut trees, exacerbated by heavy rainfall and strong winds that disrupted ferry services between Zanzibar and Dar es Salaam.

Tanzania remains besieged by nature's fury, with severe floods wreaking havoc across the country.

Anadolu Agency

Germany warns Russia against using nuke weapons in Ukraine

Berlin, Germany - Following Russia's announcement of drills involving the use of tactical nuclear weapons, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz warned Moscow on Monday against deploying atomic weapons in the Ukraine war.

"It is always important to say loudly that nuclear weapons must not be used in this war," Scholz said at a press briefing in Riga, Latvia's capital, attended by the prime ministers of the three Baltic states - Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia.

According to Scholz, work is underway to organise a peace conference in Switzerland, which must be one of the clear messages to Russia.

Scholz arrived in Latvia on Monday for his first official visit as chancellor, as part of a tour of the three Baltic states, all of which are also NATO partners.

He said Russia's aggression against Ukraine was a mistake, and that instead of dividing Europe and weakening NATO, it strengthened their unity.

Earlier in the day, Russia announced that it will conduct drills involving the use of tactical nuclear weapons in response to top European leaders expressing stronger military support for



German Chancellor Olaf Scholz

Germany stands unwaveringly on the side of the Baltic states. And that means that we protect each other and that all states can rely on us to defend every inch of their territory

OLAF SCHOLZ

Ukraine.

According to the Kremlin, President Vladimir Putin ordered the military exercises in response

to Western and NATO member countries' statements about sending troops into Ukraine.

Earlier, Scholz assured NATO

partners in the Baltic Sea region that Germany would provide reliable military support.

"Germany stands unwaveringly on the side of the Baltic states," said the chancellor in the Lithuanian city of Pabrade, where he visited German soldiers.

"And that means that we protect each other and that all states can rely on us to defend every inch of their territory," Scholz added.

In response to the changed security situation following Russia's war in Ukraine, Germany has begun to station a brigade of approximately 4,800 soldiers in Lithuania. Furthermore, German soldiers from the 10th Armoured Division are currently taking part in a major NATO military exercise in Lithuania.

'Irresponsible rhetoric'

Meanwhile, the US slammed Moscow's 'irresponsible rhetoric' on Monday after Russia announced nuclear weapon drills near Ukraine.

"This is an example of the kind of irresponsible rhetoric that we've seen from Russia in the past. It's completely inappropriate, given the current security situation," Pentagon Press Secretary Air Force Major General Pat Ryder told reporters.

"And, you know, we've not seen any change in their strategic force posture. Obviously, we'll continue to monitor. But it's just, yes, irresponsible rhetoric," Ryder added.

Besides, Ukraine and the US held a fourth round of talks on devising a final security agreement between the two countries.

Agencies



Japan: 5th round of treated water released from Fukushima plant

Tokyo, Japan - Japan on Tuesday concluded the discharge of the fifth round of treated radioactive water into the sea from the crippled Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant.

The operators Tokyo Electric Power Company Holdings Inc. (TEPCO) said the latest discharge since April 19 included 7,800 tonnes of processed water, the Tokyo-based Kyodo News reported.

TEPCO plans to release a total of about 54,600 tonnes in the ongoing fiscal year which ends next March, with six more rounds expected to be conducted. "Abnormal tritium levels have not been detected in nearby waters," TEPCO said.

The operator released around 31,200 tonnes in four

batches from last August until March this year.

Japan began releasing treated radioactive wastewater from the plant last August, triggering a strong reaction from China and opposition parties in South Korea and the Solomon Islands.

Beijing banned seafood imports from Japan after Tokyo went ahead with plans to release the water.

The plant has more than one million tonnes of treated wastewater to release in a 30-year process.

The plant was forced to shut down after facing the largest nuclear accident since 1986 in Chernobyl, following an earthquake and tsunami in 2011.

Anadolu Agency

DEBUT FLIGHT



A Long March-6C carrier rocket carrying four satellites, in its debut flight, blasts off from the Taiyuan Satellite Launch Center in north China's Shanxi Province, on Tuesday (Xinhua)

A young researcher's quest for greener world

Tianjin, China - It has long been Jeffrey Dankwa Ampah's dream to build a green and sustainable world.

"My primary objective is to formulate viable pathways for the world to transition away from polluting fossil fuels and eventually help to realise our climate goals," said Ampah, a doctoral candidate from the Republic of Ghana, studying at Tianjin University in north China's Tianjin Municipality.

Ampah's PhD centres on global climate challenges, specifically how to minimise the use of carbon to achieve global decarbonisation goals, and reduce the negative impact of carbon removal on global energy, land, water and food systems.

When he was in primary school, Ampah was irritated by frequent power outages. "Back then in my country, electricity was expensive and unstable. At one of those blackout moments, as a young inquisitive kid, I looked up at the blazing sun and wondered when my country would start generating electricity from the sun as the western world did since it is free, clean, and inexhaustible."

This burgeoning thought led him to study renewable energy engineering at the University of



Jeffrey Dankwa Ampah poses with his mother at his bachelor graduation ceremony in Ghana on August 12, 2017 (Xinhua)

Energy and Natural Resources (UENR) in Ghana for his bachelor's degree.

"UENR is a publicly funded national institution seeking excellence in energy and natural resource sciences. That's where my quest for cleaner energy to benefit the world began," Ampah recalled.

In 2019, two years after he finished his undergraduate studies and two years into a teaching assistant role at UENR, he decided to further his studies abroad and

chose China.

"The remarkable advancements China made in the development of renewable energy sources and its commitment to combating climate change are the main reasons why I chose to study in China," Ampah said. He learned from a report by the International Energy Agency that China is at the forefront of the renewable energy globally.

"In 2015, China set the goal of peaking carbon dioxide emissions around 2030 and has

taken many effective measures," he said. These achievements and commitments deeply attract Ampah as a renewable energy researcher.

What made the choice to study in China even more appealing was the availability of a full scholarship if he applied to a Chinese university thanks to the Belt and Road Initiative.

"A number of Ghanaian students have been awarded scholarships since our country joined the initiative in 2018. I think it really helps cultivate the talents needed for Ghana's development," he said.

Ampah embarked on the journey to study in China in 2019. He owes much of his academic success to the excellent environment Tianjin university provides. "The research environment here is very superior. Our university boasts excellent facilities, a superb faculty and inspiring learning vibes."

He said in particular that the personal traits he observed in most of his lab peers have significantly influenced his work ethic and approaches. "Most of my Chinese friends are self-disciplined, persistent, and steadfast with their research. Together they make good researchers."

Xinhua

Israeli army takes ‘operational control’ of Palestinian side of Rafah border crossing

Israeli forces are carrying out a ‘sweep operation’ in the areas of eastern Rafah

Istanbul, Turkey - The Israeli army on Tuesday said that its forces have seized control of the Palestinian side of the Rafah border crossing with Egypt.

In a statement, the Israeli army said its 401st armoured brigade took ‘operational control’ of the Rafah crossing from the Palestinian side. Israeli forces are conducting a ‘sweep operation’ in the areas of eastern Rafah it seized, it added, claiming to kill 20 Palestinian gunmen.

The spokesman of the Palestinian border crossing authority confirmed earlier that the border was closed from the Palestinian side. Video footage shared by Israeli media outlets, including the *Times of Israel*, showed an Israeli tank at the Rafah crossing.

Following the Palestinian Hamas group announcement of accepting a Qatari-Egyptian proposal for a ceasefire in Gaza, Israel’s war cabinet decided to push ahead with an operation in Rafah in order to apply what it



said ‘military pressure on Hamas with the goal of making progress on freeing the hostages and the other war aims’.

The Israeli army issued immediate evacuation orders early on Monday for Palestinians in the eastern neighbourhoods of Rafah and called on them to move to the town of Al-Mawasi in south-

ern Gaza. Rafah is home to more than 1.5mn displaced Palestinians who have taken refuge from the war launched by Israel following the October 7 attack by Hamas that killed nearly 1,200 people.

‘A dangerous escalation’

The Egyptian Foreign Ministry on

Tuesday condemned the Israeli military control of the Palestinian side of the Rafah border crossing, describing the move as ‘a dangerous escalation’. In a statement, the ministry strongly condemned ‘the Israeli military operations in the Palestinian Rafah city, and what resulted of an Israeli control of the Palestinian side of the

Rafah crossing’.

The statement considered the Israeli military operations in Rafah ‘a dangerous escalation that threatens the lives of more than one million Palestinians who primarily rely on the crossing which is considered as the main lifeline to the Gaza Strip’.

Egypt called on Israel to prac-

tice ‘maximum restraint’ and for the international parties to intervene ‘to defuse the current crisis’.

‘No safe zones in Gaza’

Meanwhile, the EU foreign policy chief on Tuesday voiced his concern over the situation in Rafah, southern Gaza Strip city, saying

the Israeli military offensive will again cause a lot of civilian casualties. “The Rafah offensive has started again, in spite of all the requests of the international community, the US, the European Union member states, everybody asking (Israel’s Prime Minister Benjamin) Netanyahu not to attack,” Josep Borrell said at the doorstep of the Foreign Affairs Council meeting in Brussels.

Expressing his concerns, he said this is going to cause again a lot of civilian casualties, whatever they say. There are 600,000 children in Gaza, Borrell said, noting that they will be pushed to the ‘so-called safe zones’, but he stressed that there are ‘no safe zones in Gaza’.

When he touched on the situation on the ground, Borrell said the UN has the capacity to evaluate the situation there, criticising Israel’s attacks on journalists and the closure of Al Jazeera channel’s offices. “Sooner or later, the International Criminal Court (ICC) will have to say something,” said Borrell, reacting to the statements about the ICC if the court will issue Israel arrest warrants.

‘I fully condemn any kind of intimidation to the International Criminal Court. Enough is enough, threatening the International Criminal Court ... fully rejectable,’ he noted.

Anadolu Agency

Gaza death toll rises to 34,789 as Israeli onslaught continues, more detained

Gaza City, Palestine - At least 34,789 Palestinians have so far been killed in Israel’s ongoing offensive on the Gaza Strip since last October, Gaza’s Health Ministry said on Tuesday.

“The Israeli occupation (forces) committed six massacres against families in the Gaza Strip, leaving 54 martyrs and 96 injured during the past 24 hours,” a ministry statement said as Israel’s deadly onslaught against Gaza enters its 214th day.

The statement said that 78,204 other people have also been injured in the ongoing onslaught. “Many people are still trapped under rubble and on the roads as rescuers are unable to reach them,” it added.

Israel has waged an unrelenting offensive on the Gaza Strip



since a cross-border attack by the Palestinian group Hamas last October 7 which killed some 1,200 people.

Tel Aviv has also imposed a crippling blockade on the Gaza Strip, leaving its population, particularly residents of northern Gaza, on the verge of starvation.

More than six months into the Israeli war, vast swathes of Gaza lay in ruins, pushing 85 per cent of the enclave’s population into internal displacement amid a crippling blockade of food, clean water and medicine, according to the UN.

Israel stands accused of

genocide at the International Court of Justice. An interim ruling in January said it is ‘plausible’ that Israel is committing genocide in Gaza and ordered Tel Aviv to stop such acts and take measures to guarantee that humanitarian assistance is provided to civilians there.

22 more detained in West Bank

The Israeli army on Tuesday detained 22 more Palestinians in military raids across the occupied West Bank, according to prisoners’ affairs groups.

The arrests took place in the cities of Bethlehem, Ramallah, Nablus, Tubas, and Jericho, the Commission of Detainees’ Affairs and the Palestinian Prisoner Society said in a joint statement.

The arrests included an injured 8-year-old boy, a girl, and former detainees, the statement also said.

The new arrests brought the number of Palestinians detained by the Israeli army in the West Bank since last October to 8,610, according to Palestinian figures.

Anadolu Agency

Iran welcomes Hamas’ approval of proposal

Tehran, Iran - Iran on Tuesday welcomed Hamas’ approval of a proposal drawn by Qatar and Egypt for a Gaza ceasefire and hostage swap with Israel.

Foreign Ministry spokesman Nasser Kanaani termed Hamas’ response to the proposed ceasefire as ‘another manifestation of the resistance’s political intelligence’ and ‘its field strength’.

Iran ‘supports the plan that has been presented for the realisation of the rights of the Palestinian people, including the immediate and permanent cessation of the attacks and crimes of the Zionist (Israeli) regime, the lifting of the cruel blockade on Gaza, the release of Palestinian prisoners, and the complete and uncondi-

tional withdrawal of the Israeli occupying forces from the Strip as well as the reconstruction of war ruins’, he added in a statement.

Hamas said on Monday evening that it has accepted a Gaza ceasefire proposal drawn by Qatar and Egypt.

A Palestinian source told Anadolu that the ceasefire proposal includes a three-stage truce.

The first stage will last 40 days and includes a temporary cessation of military operations and Israeli troop withdrawal to the eastern areas of the Gaza Strip except for the Wadi Gaza area, which separates the territory’s north from its south, the source said.

Anadolu Agency

Ready to sign peace deal with Azerbaijan, says Armenian PM

Istanbul, Turkey - Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan said on Tuesday that Yerevan is ready to sign a peace deal with neighbouring Azerbaijan by November.

“I agree with the idea of signing a peace agreement by November, and for this to happen, all agreed-upon principles must be enshrined in the agreement,” Pashinyan told a news conference in Yerevan.

Pashinyan further said he hopes that progress will be made in this regard at the upcoming meeting of the Azerbaijani and Armenian foreign ministers in Kazakhstan.

On Monday, Kazakh Foreign Ministry spokesman Aybek Smadiyarov confirmed during a press briefing in the capital Astana that Azerbaijan and Arme-



nia’s top diplomats will hold talks on a peace deal on May 10 in the city of Almaty.

Relations between Baku and Yerevan have remained tense since 1991, when the Armenian military occupied Karabakh, a territory internationally recognized as part of Azerbaijan, and seven adjacent regions.

Anadolu Agency

‘City of children’, Rafah, ‘must not be invaded’: UNICEF

Geneva, Switzerland - UNICEF on Tuesday said the city of children, Rafah, ‘must not be invaded’, urging the continuation of humanitarian aid flow into Gaza.

“Our worst fear - Gazans’ nightmare - appears to be a reality. A reality that those holding power have the ability to prevent,” spokesperson James Elder told a UN press briefing in Geneva. Elder noted that every warning and every ‘mind-boggling piece of data’ on the number of children and mothers killed and of homes and hospitals destroyed ‘are all ignored’.

Underlining that Rafah is a city of children as more than half of the children in Gaza live in Rafah, he said: “This past weekend’s events in Gaza - the continued killing of children, more attacks from the warring parties, and now evacuation orders - yet again expose how parties to this conflict continue to utterly disregard the lives and protection of



children and civilians.”

“That has to change. Indeed, this is the last chance for this to change,” he urged, and added: “Aid must flow. Hostages must be freed. Rafah must not be invaded. And children must no longer be killed.”

He reiterated UNICEF’s call for

cessation of hostilities, saying: “For the children of Rafah, we need a ceasefire, now.”

The spokesperson underlined that Rafah is the entry point for most of the aid entering Gaza.

“A military assault will, at best, greatly complicate aid delivery. If Rafah gate closes for an extended

period, it’s hard to see how famine in Gaza can be averted,” Elder warned. He also said Rafah is home to what is now Gaza’s ‘largest remaining hospital’, the European Hospital, and said: “Amid the systematic devastation of Gaza’s health system, Rafah’s European Hospital is one

Our worst fear appears to be a reality. A reality that those holding power have the ability to prevent

JAMES ELDER

of civilians’ last lifelines.”

The situation in Rafah is also not bright and ‘staggeringly much worse’, as there is about one toilet for every 850 people and one shower for every 3,500 people, and now that families have been told to move, Elder noted.

He added that hundreds of thousands of children in Rafah have a disability, medical condition, or vulnerability that puts them in even ‘greater jeopardy’, and makes it much more difficult for them to relocate.

Anadolu Agency

INDIA

SC defers order on Kejriwal's plea

The Delhi CM had sought interim bail in Excise Policy case for election campaigning

New Delhi, India - The Supreme Court on Tuesday did not pass any order on interim bail for Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal in the Delhi Excise Policy case.

A bench of Justices Sanjiv Khanna and Dipankar Datta, which during the hearing said that it will pass an order on interim bail, rose without passing any order.

The apex court is likely to hear the case on Thursday or next week.

Hearing arguments on interim bail for Kejriwal for election campaigning, the bench told senior advocate Abhishek Manu Singhvi, representing the chief minister, that Kejriwal cannot perform official duties as the apex court does not want interference at all in the working of the government. The top court noted this while hearing the plea on Tuesday morning.

The court also told Kejriwal's lawyer that if it gives interim bail to the chief minister, it does not want him to perform official duties as somewhere it will lead to conflict.

The court said that if had there been no elections, then it would not have given any interim relief, adding: "We do not want interference at all in the working of the government."

The top court also said that Arvind Kejriwal is the elected chief minister of Delhi and the current circumstances are extraordinary, given the ongoing Lok Sabha elections.

Meanwhile, Solicitor General



A poster of Delhi CM Arvind Kejriwal is seen hanging on a residential building, at the Kondli area in New Delhi (ANI)

A bench of Justices Sanjiv Khanna and Dipankar Datta, which during the hearing said that it will pass an order, is likely to hear the case on Thursday or next week

Tushar Mehta appearing for ED objected to the Supreme Court hearing arguments on interim bail to Kejriwal and said: "What example are we setting? Are

other people less important than the chief minister?"

Mehta further said that there can't be any deviation only because Kejriwal is the chief min-

ister and asked if the Supreme Court is carving out exceptions for politicians? "How can a chief minister be treated differently than an 'Aam Aadmi'? There can't be any deviation only because he is a chief minister," Mehta added.

Mehta argued that Kejriwal evaded the summons for six months and said: "Please do not make an exception as it would demoralise a real common man

and it shows that if you are holding a position, then you will get benefit."

ED also informed the apex court that Kejriwal stayed at the 7-star Grand Hyatt hotel during the 2022 Goa Assembly election and its bill was paid by Chanpreet Singh, who allegedly accepted cash funds for the AAP's campaign.

The ED also told the Supreme Court that this is not a politically

motivated case. "We are not concerned with politics, we are concerned with evidence and we have it," said Additional Solicitor General S V Raju who is appearing for ED.

Kejriwal was arrested by the ED on March 21 in connection with a money laundering probe relating to alleged irregularities in the now cancelled Delhi excise policy.

ANI

Fifth suspect held in Khan residence firing case

Mumbai, India - In the latest development surrounding the shooting incident outside actor Salman Khan's residence, Mumbai Crime Branch has apprehended a fifth suspect.

The individual, identified as Mohammad Chaudhary, was arrested in Rajasthan for his alleged involvement in aiding the shooters, Sagar Pal and Vicky Gupta.

Chaudhary facilitated financial assistance and reconnaissance for the assailants, as confirmed by Mumbai Crime Branch officials.

The arrest of Chaudhary comes amidst the ongoing investigation into the firing incident that rattled the Bandra area of Mumbai.

This arrest adds another layer to the complex web of individuals linked to the attack on Salman Khan's residence.

Tragically, the case took a grim turn with the demise of Anuj Thapan, one of the arms suppliers involved. Thapan was found dead in his cell on May 1, reportedly by suicide.

ANI

India firm and fair, says Jaishankar

New Delhi, India - External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Tuesday emphasised India's stance as a principled yet robust nation highlighting the country's evolving approach towards challenges such as terrorism and border disputes.

In his address, the minister also underscored the nation's commitment to integrity and resilience. "The image of India is of friendly but fair... If you look at a challenge like terrorism, the world recognises that today's India deals with terrorism very differently from how it used to," remarked Jaishankar at the Viksit Bharat 2047 programme held at Hansraj College in the national capital.

"The comparison is very simple. What happened in the Mumbai attacks and what happened in Uri and Balakot... That's a comparison they make. We have a challenge at our China border. They look at



External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar (ANI)

these people (India) standing up and sending the troops. They are staying firm... We came under pressure not to buy oil from Russia... India said my interests require that I buy oil and I am not hiding it... We were very open and honest about it... We were very courageous about it. The sense today is that India is a firm country but it is also a fair country," he added drawing a juxtaposition between past and present responses to security threats.

Touching upon India's technological advancements, Jaishankar lauded the nation's rapid digital transformation. "Today if you look at the range, how digitised India has become. How many of you today anymore use cash?" he queried, pointing out India's dominance in cashless transactions compared to global counterparts.

"We think it is normal, but others don't think that. In India, we do 10-11bn cashless transactions per month. America does four billion in a year... China does a maximum of 20bn in a year... People today get their income tax, housing allotments and driving licenses faster... We give passports faster... Digital has cut down corruption because everything is digitally recorded... With transparency, honesty also comes," Jaishankar said.

Discussing the future trajec-

tory, Jaishankar envisioned India as a formidable economic force, poised to surpass the five trillion-dollar mark and emerge as the world's third-largest economy. "By the time we reach Amrit Kal, we are confident of minimum being a US\$30tn economy," he declared, outlining ambitious growth targets.

Urging the audience to recognise the significance of the Viksit Bharat initiative, Jaishankar emphasised its pragmatic implications. "Please don't think it is a slogan... It is something very serious," he affirmed, urging the youth to actively engage in shaping India's trajectory towards development.

Jaishankar also encapsulated the essence of the programme's theme, urging collective effort towards realising the vision of a prosperous and advanced India.

ANI

BY THE PEOPLE



Elderly voters show their ink-marked fingers after casting their vote for the third phase of Lok Sabha elections, at a polling station in Kamrup, India on Tuesday (ANI)

South Africa: 5 dead, dozens trapped in building collapse

Johannesburg, SA - At least five people have died and dozens remain trapped in the rubble after a five-story building at a construction site collapsed in South Africa's city of George in Western Cape Province, emergency officials said on Tuesday.

The building that was under construction collapsed on Monday afternoon, trapping over 70 workers but 24 have so far been pulled out of the rubble.

Local television showed rescue workers digging

through the rubble with hopes of pulling out more workers alive.

Western Cape Premier Alan Winde said: "All the necessary support has been offered to emergency personnel to expedite their response. At the moment, officials are focused on saving lives. This is our top priority at this stage."

President Cyril Ramaphosa offered his condolences to the relatives and friends of the five people who died in the building collapse.

Anadolu Agency

Vladimir Putin sworn in as Russia's president for record 5th term

Moscow, Russia - Vladimir Putin took oath for a new term of six years as the President of Russia on Tuesday. He took oath for a record fifth presidential term at an inauguration ceremony held in Kremlin.

Constitutional Court Chairman Valery Zorkin announced that Putin has formally taken office as Russian president for another six-year term, TASS reported.

After Putin took the oath to the people, Zorkin handed him the symbols of presidential power including the presidential insignia, that is, the golden cross of St George, depicting the Russian coat of arms and a gold chain with the words 'Virtue, Honesty



and Glory'.

Following the oath-taking ceremony, the head of state delivered a speech.

The ceremony marks the start of Putin's fifth presidential term,

reported TASS.

Moreover, his first two terms in office lasted four years. However, the presidential term was later extended to six years based on constitutional amendments.

Putin won the presidential elections in March, receiving 87.17 per cent of the votes based on the result of processing 70 per cent of the electoral protocols.

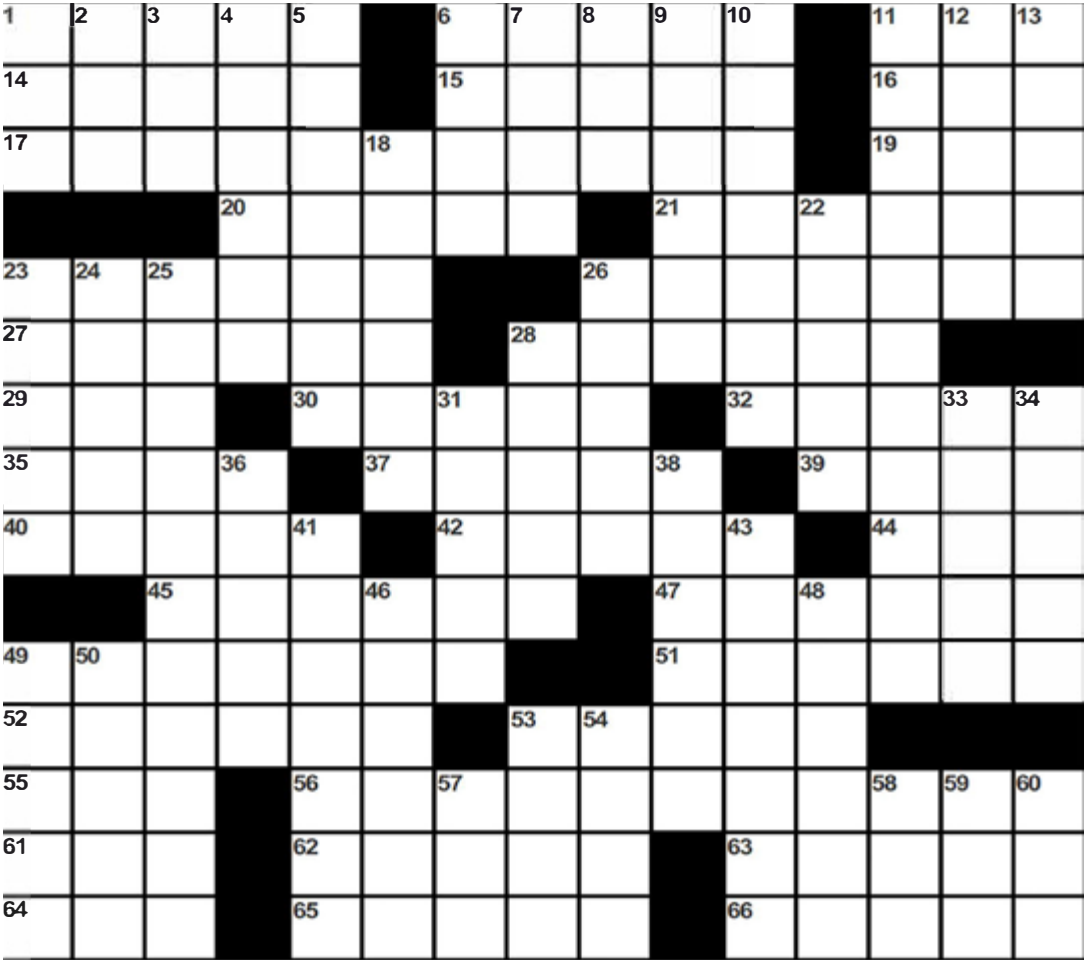
Putin's first six-year presi-

dential term began in 2012 and the second one in 2018. In 2020, the Constitution was changed to make it possible for him to run for president in 2024, TASS reported.

The Communist Party of the Russian Federation candidate Nikolai Kharitonov secured the second spot with 4.1 per cent of the votes while New People Party candidate Vladislav Davankov stood third with 4.8 per cent votes. According to preliminary data as of 6pm (Moscow time) on Sunday, the voter turnout in the presidential elections, which for the first time took place over three days from March 15-17, stood at 74.22 per cent.

ANI

DAILY CROSSWORD



ACROSS

- 1) At a good clip, poetically
6) Belinda Carlisle's all-girl group
11) White House URL suffix
14) Hurlled entangling weapons
15) Apt rhyme for "anticipate"
16) Feeling of rage
17) Noisemaking bug
19) Common soccer score
20) Works the soil
21) Mooched
23) Job hunter's handout
26) Some large wine containers
27) "The Wizard of Menlo Park"
28) Sit-down affair
29) Put two and two together
30) Emergency paper money
32) Native of Israel
35) Mortgage, for instance
3 7) It's wreaked
39) Sweetheart
40) Butte relatives
42) San Diego athlete
44) Conclude
45) Husband and brother of Isis

- 4 7) Main course in a restaurant
49) Not upset
51) Selected
52) Small hand-drums
53) "Balderdash!"
55) Make a sheepshank
56) Give in to decay
61) The first to hear "Madam, I'm Adam"
62) Fine with the Stooges
63) Mourning band
64) Make calls on the court, briefly
65) Bring joy to
66) Flanges

DOWN

- 1) Major broadcaster
2) Campaign pro
3) Ryan's "Love Story" co-star
4) Desert growth
5) Mukluk wearers
6) Highlander
7) Has a payment booklet
8) B-movie shooter
9) Container with a spout
10) The "S" in T.S. Eliot
11) Some spicy drinks
12) Corbeled bay window
13) South African grass-

- land
18) Flinch or cringe
22) View with anxiety
23) The sea, to Poseidon
24) The youngest Munster
25) What Rocky sparred with
26) Certain rifle stand
28) Many opera headliners
31) Like rushing white water
33) One spelling for a Hindu princess
34) Beauty expert Elizabeth
36) Like some voices
38) Nativity representation
41) Pretty big
43) Add some pizzazz to
46) Cap again
48) Not away from
49) Complete and total
50) Green, so to speak
53) Role
54) Eyelid problem
57) Part of history
58) Move one's tail, as a dog
59) Orangutan, for one
60) Positive answer

NOTE PAD



YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE



ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

Seeking guidance is tough for you now, because you know you can do this on your own. But did you ever think that the act of asking is more valuable to the other person than to you? Think about it. When people ask for your advice, it's flattering. By asking someone to help you, you'll give them a huge thrill and put them in a great mood. You don't have to do what they say. In fact, they probably won't even care if you do what they say.



LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

Feeling good about who you are and where you are in life will go a long way toward helping your body work at its peak. Sure, positive thinking alone can't help you lose ten pounds or heal scrape, but it can go a long way toward helping you keep up with good eating habits and a workout regimen. You don't know what the future holds. Don't assume it's full of bad things. Make your future what you want it to be.



SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

Your energy level is high today. You're eager to rush ahead and climb quickly up the next mountain, but you can't just yet. Wait for the rest of your people to catch up to you. After all, you want some company on that climb, don't you? Just try to go with the flow and keep yourself busy while the people you care about take care of a few things. Knowing how to drift along in life is an underrated skill. You owe it to yourself to work on perfecting it today.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

1. What field of work is Alessandro Volta (1745-1827) best known for?

- A. Study of rivers
B. Electricity
C. Sports science
D. Theory of evolution

2. Where are the Balearic Islands?

- A. Caspian Sea
B. Caribbean Sea
C. Tasman Sea
D. Mediterranean Sea

3. Who would use an inkblot or Rorschach Test?

- A. Chemist
B. Butcher
C. Psychologist
D. Astronomer

Answers: 1. B 2. D 3. C



TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

Seeking guidance is tough for you now, because you know you can do this on your own. But did you ever think that the act of asking is more valuable to the other person than to you? Think about it. When people ask for your advice, it's flattering. By asking someone to help you, you'll give them a huge thrill and put them in a great mood. You don't have to do what they say. In fact, they probably won't even care if you do what they say.



VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

Statistics can be persuasive, but they can also be misleading. Look carefully at any numbers you're reviewing today, from something as important as your bank account to something as trivial as quick-pick lottery numbers. The first impression you get of things probably won't be correct. Your fiscal health is not merely all about luck; it requires hard work too. Put extra effort into determining how much you can afford to lose (or spend) today.



CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

Get ready to have a great day with your friends. There is a blast of high energy coming into your social circle now, and you will be loving all the good vibes bouncing around. Take advantage of any social invitations. Sharing small talk with people you know well will leave everyone in the room laughing and smiling. This is a period of bright opportunity for you, so it's a great time for a job interview or any other situation where you want to make a good impression.



GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

Seeking guidance is tough for you now, because you know you can do this on your own. But did you ever think that the act of asking is more valuable to the other person than to you? Think about it. When people ask for your advice, it's flattering. By asking someone to help you, you'll give them a huge thrill and put them in a great mood. You don't have to do what they say. In fact, they probably won't even care if you do what they say.



LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

Next time you're frustrated because you can't find something, try to remember that sometimes being forgetful can be a blessing. The same brain that makes you lose your keys or forget your password is the same brain that erases hurtful episodes from your life. The pain you experienced in your life recently is fading slowly, and each day you feel it less than the previous day. Keep moving forward and leave the past behind.



AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

Sometimes when you plan too much in your life, you can suck all the fun right out of it. To avoid this downside, you have to let go of time and order today. Just think about what you want to do and go about doing it. Don't schedule things or get too obsessed with watching the clock. You have enough discipline in your life, and you certainly don't need any more. But what you could use is a giant dose of spontaneity. Loosen things up.



CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

There's a big challenge impeding your progress, and you need to start working on it today. It could be a really bad habit you need to break, a relationship that needs to end, or a person you need to set straight. Whatever is blocking you right now cannot (and should not) be ignored or it will grow into an uncontrollable mess. Your first instinct may be to attack it head-on, but a constant quiet offensive is the best way to go. Just keep chipping away!



SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

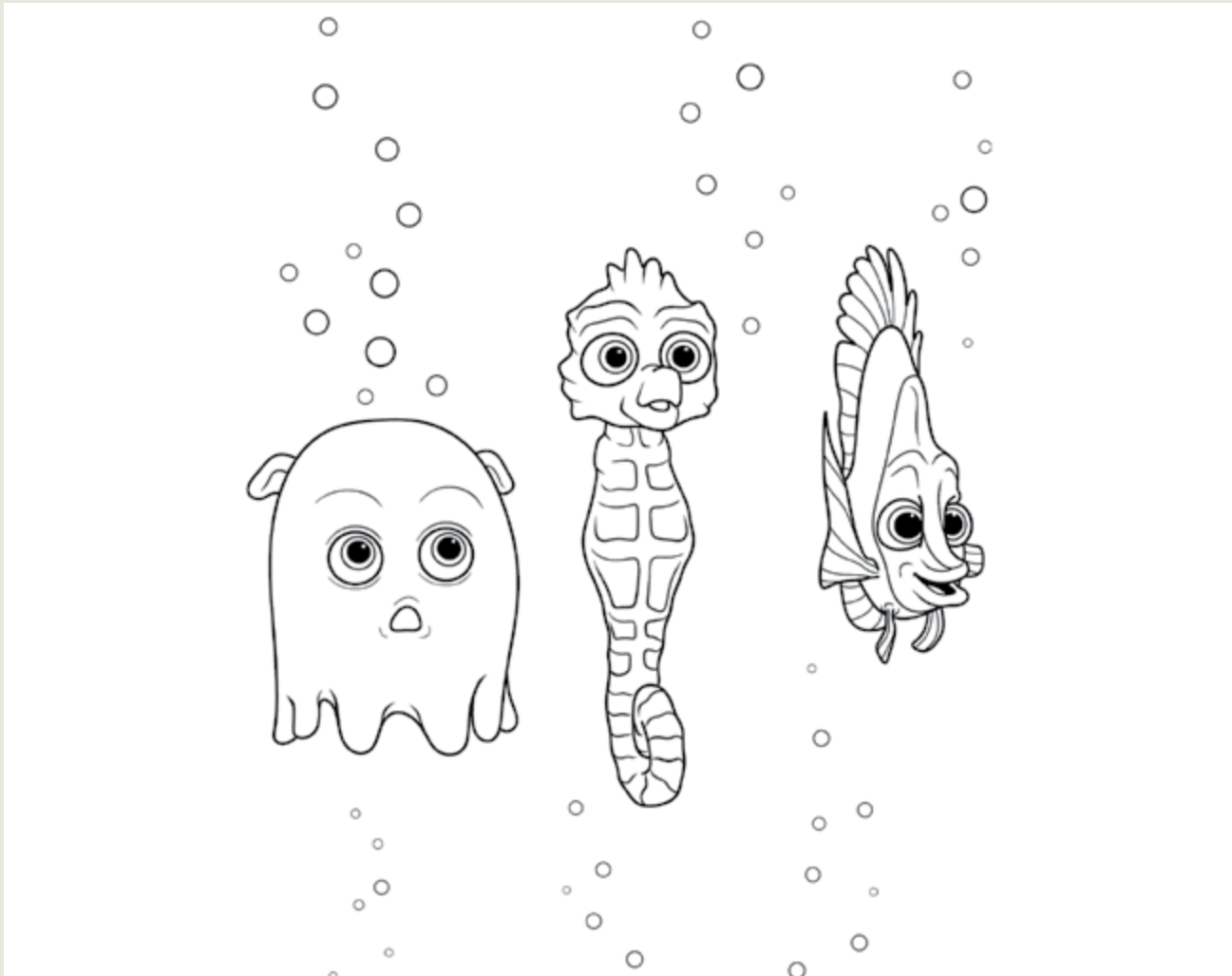
You just hit a nice home run at work, which should keep your competitive streak satisfied for a while, so turn off your fiery ambition today and just try to be content with where you are in life now. After all, it's a pretty great spot. If you focus too much on what you want to do next, you will deprive yourself of the wonderful feeling of enjoying all the things you've worked so hard to achieve. Everything in your life is never going to be totally perfect, and that's okay.



PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

Everyone you'll be dealing with today is on the same page as you, which means that there will be minimal conflict and maximum productivity. While sometimes you have trouble working in a group, today you should find it rewarding and fun. It's easy to work with people who see the world the same way you do, so you should try to stick with like-minded people today. You're not in the mood to argue your points, so avoid naysayers.

KIDS COLOURING



BOGGLER

A	S	D	E
A	A	K	E
O	N	H	N
M	Y	S	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	2		8	9	7	
8				9		1		
6	9							2
2			9		4			6
	5			3			4	
3			5		6			8
4						1	7	
		9		4				3
	1	3	6		7	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

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

ALL AT SEA

Pressure mounts on Ten Hag as Manchester United humiliated by Crystal Palace

London, England - Michael Olise scored a brace of goals as Crystal Palace completed a league double over Manchester United for the first time in their history with a thumping 4-0 victory at Selhurst Park on Monday that will add to the pressure on Erik ten Hag.

A makeshift United defence that included Casemiro at centre-back was easily picked apart by Palace on several occasions as Jean-Philippe Mateta and Tyrick Mitchell were also on the score-sheet in the impressive win.

United remain in eighth place with 54 points from 35 games, two points behind Newcastle United in sixth, with their hopes of European football next season fading fast. Palace are still in 14th with 43 points from 36 matches.

United had several injury absentees and were without Bruno Fernandes, the first time in his 230-game Old Trafford career he has missed a match with injury, but the ease with which they were beaten will be a huge concern for everyone at the club.

"A big disappointment. We just had an off-day and we weren't in it," midfielder Christian



Tyrick Mitchell (C) of Crystal Palace scores against Manchester United

Eriksen told BBC. "It is what it is. We can't really change the injury things. We have to do what we can on the pitch to change it.

"Today it didn't matter who we played. Everyone could have done better. We tried to do what we could but we were not good enough. We'll take the blame as

players."

It is the first time in the Premier League era United have lost 13 games in a season and the scoreline might have been worse.

The home side took the lead inside 12 minutes as Olise collected a throw and evaded a limp challenge from Casemiro. With

no United player attempting to close him down, he was able to unleash a low shot from just inside the box.

It was 2-0 five minutes before the break as Mateta breezed past United defender Jonny Evans and thrashed the ball into the net for a ninth goal in 11 games since the



A big disappointment. We just had an off-day and we weren't in it. It is what it is. We can't really change the injury things. We have to do what we can on the pitch to change it.

CHRISTIAN ERIKSEN

arrival of Glasner in February. The striker had scored 11 goals in his previous 80 games for Palace before that.

United's makeshift defence was struggling to contain the

movement of their hosts and when Diogo Dalot failed to deal with a ball to the back post, Mitchell had a tap-in.

Olise's second goal added more salt to the wound and it

could have been worse for the visitors as Odsonne Edouard saw his shot come back off the woodwork late on.

"I think we could have got a few more. That shows the potential we have to play against any team in the league," Palace defender Chris Richards said.

Ten Hag 'simply cannot manage the team next season'

London, England - Erik ten Hag has run out of time at Manchester United and is unlikely to be given another year at the helm, former United players said in the wake of Monday's 4-0 Premier League loss at Crystal Palace.

United's record 13th league defeat of the campaign left them eighth and facing the prospect of having no European football next season. They have conceded 81 goals in all competitions, their worst showing since the 1976-

77 season.

"Tonight felt like the final nail in the coffin," ex-United midfielder Paul Scholes told Premier League Productions.

"There was a lack of know-how from the team, a lack of effort which is the big disappointing thing.

"I've felt he might get another year and work for a club that has calmed down a little bit by the new owners but it just doesn't feel like it now. It's quite plain to



Erik ten Hag

see it feels like borrowed time."

Michael Owen, who played for United from 2009-12, said the club's board should cut their losses and sack Ten Hag before the end of the season, with an FA Cup final against Manchester City still to play for.

"He cannot, simply cannot, manage the team next season," Owen said.

"I just wonder, there's just so much at stake, even if it's only for four games, I wonder

whether the board might just have to try to do something here and now and be quite radical about it."

United have three league games left, hosting leaders Arsenal and sixth-placed Newcastle United in their next two matches before winding up the campaign at Brighton & Hove Albion.

Ex-United defender Ashley Young said the club might fail to win any of their remaining games.



David Moyes

Moyes to leave West Ham

London, England - West Ham United manager David Moyes will leave the club by mutual consent upon the expiry of his contract at the end of the season, the Premier League club said on Monday.

The 61-year-old former Manchester United and Everton coach, who returned for a second spell at the London Stadium in 2019, guided West Ham to their first major trophy since the FA Cup in 1980 when they won the Europa Conference League last season.

Spanish manager Julen Lopetegui has been heavily linked to replace Moyes at West Ham. Lopetegui, 57, last managed Wolverhampton Wanderers, while previously having taken charge of Sevilla, Real Madrid and the Spain national team, among others.

"On behalf of everyone at West Ham United, I would like to offer our sincere thanks and gratitude to David for the contribution he has made to the football club during his time as manager," Joint-Chairman David Sullivan said in a statement. "David has been responsible for a period of great progress and success in our history, and we are extremely grateful for all of his hard work, commitment and dedication to the role."



Virgil van Dijk (R) with Jurgen Klopp

Captain Van Dijk wants to be part of Liverpool's post-Klopp transition

Liverpool, England - Liverpool captain Virgil van Dijk said he is happy at the Premier League club and wants to be part of the transition once manager Jurgen Klopp departs.

The 32-year-old's contract runs out at the end of the 2024-25 season, with British media reporting that the Dutch international is a target for Bundesliga side Borussia Dortmund.

After Klopp announced his departure in January, Van Dijk said he was unsure about his future but the defender now looks set to remain at the club, who are expected to name Arne Slot as their next manager.

"The focus is now on the last

two games and then the club will focus on who the new manager is and there will be a big transition and I am part of that," Van Dijk told British media.

"There is nothing for me to discuss (regarding my future) because there is no news. Like I said, I am very happy here, I love the club and you can see that as well. It's a big part of my life already.

"There will be a lot of changes happening and I wouldn't say scary is the right word, but it is quite interesting and exciting what will happen now. So let's see."

Liverpool, third with 78 points from 36 matches, next travel to Aston Villa on Monday.

Success strikes late as Udinese hold Napoli

Udine, Italy - Napoli were held to a 1-1 draw at lowly Udinese in Serie A on Monday after a stoppage-time goal by forward Isaac Success cancelled out a Victor Osimhen header.

Napoli, now winless in four games, moved up to eighth on 51 points from 35 games and are nine points behind both fifth-placed Atalanta and AS Roma, in sixth.

Last year's champions have only managed one victory in their last eight Serie A games.

After a first half to forget, in which none of the teams managed a shot on target, Osimhen nodded home to give Napoli the lead in the 51st minute.

Matteo Politano sent a lofted cross from the right into the middle of the box and the Nigerian striker headed the ball in off the left post for his 15th league goal of the season.

He was then close to adding a second when Stanislav Lobotka fed him a neat low pass into the box but Udinese keeper Maduka Okoye was a step quicker to the ball.

Osimhen thought he eventually doubled the advantage in the 80th minute but his effort was ruled out for offside.

Udinese, led by new coach Fabio Cannavaro who was ap-



Isaac Success of Udinese celebrates after scoring against Napoli

pointed two weeks ago, were under pressure for most of the game and only crafted two shots on goal.

This, however, turned out to be enough to rescue a point as Success bundled in the leveller in stoppage time, netting from a

Thomas Kristensen header.

Udinese only picked up two points across their previous 15 Serie A matches against last year's champions Napoli.

They remained 18th in the standings with 30 points and are two points away from the

We have to ask the management about the future of Napoli, it's clear that we have the qualities to do better.

FRANCESCO CALZONA

safety zone.

Though Napoli extended their winless Serie A streak to four games, coach Francesco Calzona was optimistic.

"Clearly I thought we could do better, without a doubt. Unfortunately that wasn't the case," Calzona told DAZN.

"We have to ask the management about the future of Napoli, it's clear that we have the qualities to do better. It was a disappointing and unfortunate year, but we absolutely must finish this championship on a high note."

This may be challenging as Napoli sit eighth on 51 points after 35 games, with nine points separating them from both fifth-placed Atalanta and AS Roma, in sixth.

They had earned 50 points halfway through their winning 2022-23 campaign.

AL HARTHY EYES SPARKLING SHOW

Spa-Francorchamps challenge next up for FIA WEC podium finisher

Muscat - Just a couple of weeks since a star FIA World Endurance Championship performance at Imola delivered the first LMGT3 podium for Oman's Ahmad al Harthy, the BMW racer is aiming to keep up the sparkling momentum this weekend as the 2024 season arrives at Spa-Francorchamps.

Not only one of Al Harthy's favourite tracks, the Ardennes venue is a circuit where the Omani has enjoyed outstanding success in the past in GT3 racing with class victory at the Total 24 Hours of Spa as well as securing numerous other podiums and wins in GT World Challenge Europe Endurance Cup.

Fresh from a memorable second-place finish last month in Italy with teammates Maxime Martin and Valentino Rossi, where the buzz in the Team WRT garage and the Imola grandstands was absolutely electrifying, Al Harthy is determined to keep the impetus and challenge for more silverware at Spa.

Going into race three of the FIA WEC season on Saturday, the BMW M4 GT3 trio - currently fourth in the LMGT3 standings - are focusing on mounting a similarly strong bid to that delivered last time out.

As well as excellent pace and performance in race trim during the first two events of the season, Qatar and Italy, Al Harthy has also been very impressive in qualifying in his first season with



Oman's Ahmad al Harthy will be keen to continue his momentum at Spa-Francorchamps



I love competing at Spa and I really am looking forward to being there for the first time with BMW and the WRT guys, I know everyone is going to do a fantastic job as always

AHMAD AL HARTHY

BMW and will be absolutely determined to once again qualify for the all-important Hyperpole 'shoot-out'.

Although a car issue limited the Omani to a single flying lap in qualifying in Qatar during the opening event of the campaign back in March, he was still able to make it through into the Hy-

perpole session and at Imola he secured a season-best third on the grid in LMGT3.

While confident round three of the FIA WEC season at Spa should be a positive event for Team WRT's No.46 entry, Al Harthy - who is backed by prestigious partners OQ, Oman Ministry of Culture, Sports and

Youth, Omantel and BMW Oman - is well aware of the strength of opposition within LMGT3 and isn't underestimating the challenge which awaits Belgium.

"Spa is such an amazing track and we've enjoyed so much success there over the years, it's almost a second home for me in

my racing career. I absolutely love competing at Spa and I really am looking forward to being there for the first time with BMW and the WRT guys, I know everyone is going to do a fantastic job as always," said Al Harthy.

"We come into the weekend off the back of an amazing result in Imola, it was a fantastic race and both Maxime and Vale did a really incredible job in the car. I was so happy with my performance in the first two hours, and we were strong in qualifying and Hyperpole as well, so I really do hope we can continue that momentum, continue to push and build on the great start to the season."



Diego Maradona-with the FIFA World Cup trophy

Maradona's Golden Ball trophy goes to auction

Paris, France - Diego Maradona's Golden Ball trophy won for being named the best player at the 1986 World Cup will be auctioned in France in June, the Aguttes auction house said on Tuesday.

This is the first Golden Ball to go for auction and while the value is still to be confirmed, the auction house expects it to fetch millions on June 6.

Maradona, who died in 2020, won the award after leading Argentina to World Cup victory in Mexico, scoring five goals at the finals where he captained his country and played every minute of the

tournament.

That tournament is probably best remembered for Maradona's two goals against England in the quarterfinals.

The jersey he wore that day, along with the ball from the match, have both previously been sold at auction.

After his display against England, Maradona went on to score the two goals which defeated Belgium in the semi-final and Argentina won a thrilling final 3-2 against West Germany.

The Golden Ball award was introduced at the 1982 World Cup.



Olympique Lyon's Mama Balde (R) celebrates after scoring against Lille

Last-gasp Balde goal helps Lyon make dramatic comeback at Lille

Lille, France - A late goal from Olympique Lyon's Mama Balde capped a 4-3 comeback win away to Lille on Monday as the hosts missed the chance to climb into third place in Ligue 1.

Lille stayed on 55 points, two adrift of surprise package Brest, who drew with Nantes on Saturday, while Lyon reached 47 points to climb into seventh place and keep their European football hopes alive.

Second-placed AS Monaco

have 61 points, nine behind Paris Saint Germain, who have already secured a record-extending 12th league title.

Lille dominated the early exchanges and grabbed the lead after 21 minutes with Bafode Diakite's towering header off a set-piece before substitute Edon Zhegrova doubled the advantage in the 37th.

Lyon looked better after the break and pulled one back with Said Benrahma's 65th-minute ef-

fort before Malick Fofana equalised with a tap-in following a fine solo run from Mama Balde eight minutes from time.

Lille came close to victory again as Diakite restored their lead just three minutes later with his second of the night.

But Lyon's captain Alexandre Lacazette scored in the 88th minute to level again at 3-3, before Balde's stoppage-time header sealed the comeback win for Lyon.

Pegula feeling better, but unsure about French Open participation

Paris, France - World number five Jessica Pegula said she is feeling better after shaking off an injury that derailed her claycourt season but the American is unsure if she will play at the French Open, which starts on May 26.

The 30-year-old was one of the most consistent players on the WTA Tour last season, winning the Montreal title in the build-up to the U.S. Open, but has struggled this season due to illness and injuries.

Having withdrawn from Stuttgart and Madrid, Pegula confirmed she was also skipping Rome this week and said she may have to miss the year's second Grand Slam at Roland Garros (RG).

"Hi guys - quick update - will miss Rome and possibly RG. I actually feel really good but have to work back into training at a snail's pace," Pegula said on Instagram. She did not specify what the latest injury was.

Pegula, who also missed tournaments in the Middle East in February due to a neck issue, last competed in the Billie Jean King Cup in April.



The 30-year-old was one of the most consistent players on the WTA Tour last season, winning the Montreal title in the build-up to the US Open, but has struggled this season due to illness and injuries



Victor Wembanyama

Wembanyama named NBA's rookie of the year

Texas, US - French phenom Victor Wembanyama of the San Antonio Spurs was named the unanimous winner of the NBA's rookie of the year award on Monday after a dominant season in which he lead all first-year players in scoring, rebounds and blocks. Wembanyama, who was the first pick in last year's NBA Draft, averaged 21.4 points, 10.6 rebounds, 3.9 assists and a league-high 3.6 blocks per game this season.

The NBA said Wembanyama received all 99 first-place votes from a media panel, making him the first unanimous rookie of the year since Karl-Anthony Towns in the 2015-16 season. The 20-year-old Wembanyama is the first player from France to win the NBA's rookie of the year award and the third player to earn the honor as a member of the Spurs, joining David Robinson (1989-90) and Tim Duncan (1997-98).

Wembanyama is only the second rookie to lead all NBA players in blocks per game in a season.

Forest fail to overturn four-point deduction, says Premier League

London, England - Nottingham Forest were unsuccessful in their appeal to overturn a four-point deduction in relation to their breach of the Premier League's profit and sustainability rules (PSR) in the 2022-23 season, the league said on Tuesday.

Forest lodged the appeal after the deduction in March left them in danger of relegation. They are now 17th in the table with 29 points, three above the

bottom three with two matches left.

"An independent Appeal Board has upheld the decision of a Commission to deduct four points from Nottingham Forest following an admitted breach of the Premier League's Profitability and Sustainability Rules," the Premier league said in a statement.

Forest had admitted to breaching their maximum loss threshold of 61 million pounds



Nottingham Forest had admitted to breaching their maximum loss threshold of 61 million pounds by 34.5 million

(£36.51 million) by 34.5 million, according to the Premier League.

England's top-flight clubs are allowed to lose 105 million pounds over three seasons. However, two years of Forest's assessment period were spent in the second-tier Championship, meaning they could lose only a maximum of 61 million pounds.

Forest argued that the commission should have seen the

sale of attacker Brennan Johnson after the assessment period as a "mitigating factor" and suspended some or all of the points deducted.

"Each of these grounds was rejected by the Appeal Board, which found the Independent Commission was entitled to immediately impose the sanction it did.

"The four-point deduction will therefore remain in place," the Premier League said.



SURYAKUMAR SHINES BRIGHT

Mumbai crush Hyderabad to raise hopes of mid-table contenders

Mumbai, India - A sensational unbeaten 102 off 51 balls from Suryakumar Yadav on the back of Piyush Chawla and Hardik Pandya's three-wicket hauls helped Mumbai Indians (MI) to their fourth win of the season as they got the better of Sunrisers Hyderabad (SRH) by seven wickets in Mumbai. The win also lifted MI out of the bottom of the table to ninth.

A run fest was promised at Wankhede Stadium with SRH visiting. Who would have doubted this considering the last time SRH and MI clashed, record books were rewritten. Instead, the MI bowlers came to the fore as SRH were restricted to 173 for 8. In reply, the SRH bowlers also got the new ball to move around and got three powerplay wickets.

But Suryakumar decided to do Suryakumar things as he launched an attack on the SRH bowlers, Marco Jansen in particular, to get things back on track. Tilak Varma played the perfect foil with 37 not out off 32 adding 143 off 79 balls with Suryakumar to help MI seal the win in 17.2 overs.

Chasing 174 at a venue where scores in excess of 180 have been breached in six out of ten innings this season coming into this game did not feel like a daunting ask, but the SRH



Suryakumar Yadav scored an unbeaten 102 off 51 balls to steer Mumbai Indians to a seven wicket win against Sunrisers Hyderabad

bowlers made life extremely tough for the batters. There was a lot of swing and seam available and, initially, the bowlers even struggled to control the swing. They bowled 18 extras in the first three overs, but once they found their lengths, batting started to feel arduous. The ball zipped off the surface, the batters were beaten multiple times, and wickets started to fall.

It was the Test-match length that got the SRH quicks the wickets. Jansen first struck with a

seaming delivery that Ishan Kishan could only edge to first slip. And when it's Test-match length we are talking about, how can Pat Cummins not come into the picture? Cummins bowled a sensational first over, a wicket- maiden in which Rohit Sharma was dismissed off a big top edge. Bhuvneshwar Kumar then got Naman Dhir for a nine-ball duck, dismissed flashing to first slip.

Not a single run was scored off the bat between overs 1.3 and

4.4 with MI all over the place.

After three overs in which nine runs were scored, Suryakumar decided enough was enough. He first took on Cummins before reserving special treatment for Jansen. He went 4, 4, 6 in the seventh over before swatting Jansen over fine leg for a flat six as overs six and seven yielded a combined 38 runs. From 4 off 7, Suryakumar moved to 32 off 14 in no time and all the initial momentum that SRH had gained was lost.

Tilak played the role of the second fiddle to perfection even as Suryakumar kept on going. In all, Suryakumar walloped Jansen for 32 runs off nine balls, which included four fours and two sixes, and he reached his fifty off 30 balls.

There were a few concerned faces in the MI dugout - and no doubt among people interested in India's fortunes at the T20 World Cup next month - when Suryakumar was seen limping for a bit, but the big hits didn't cease. A Bhuvneshwar slower ball was moved over long-on before Shahbaz Ahmed was swept twice in two balls. Suryakumar then raced from 82 to 96 in three balls going 4, 4, 6 in the 17th over. And then, with six needed to win and four for his century, he backed away and went inside out over the covers off T Natarajan to finish the job.

This was Suryakumar's second IPL hundred, and sixth in T20 cricket.

It was a strange sort of powerplay with the ball for MI. They didn't bowl badly but hardly found any luck going their way.

ESPNcricinfo



Matheesha Pathirana

Pathirana ruled out of IPL with hamstring injury

Chennai, India - Chennai Super Kings have suffered a significant blow with their death-bowling specialist Matheesha Pathirana returning to Sri Lanka to recover from a hamstring injury that has ruled him out of IPL 2024.

After missing the home fixture against Punjab Kings in Chennai, Pathirana was also ruled out of the reverse fixture in Dharamsala on Sunday. His absence further depletes CSK, who were already without Deepak Chahar, their power-play specialist.

It's understood Chahar didn't travel to Dharamsala and is waiting for his scan reports in Chennai after bowling just two balls against PBKS on Wednesday.

Pathirana played only six games for CSK in IPL 2024, taking 13 wickets with an economy rate of 7.68. He had missed the IPL 2024 season-

opener against Royal Challengers Bangalore with a hamstring injury he had sustained while playing for Sri Lanka against Bangladesh in Sylhet in March. He is the second Sri Lanka fast bowler on the sidelines with left-armers Dilshan Madushanka, who was due to make his IPL debut for Mumbai Indians, ruled out of the entire IPL season.

Sri Lanka's premier legspinner Wanindu Hasaranga, who was due to play for Sunrisers Hyderabad, had also pulled out of the entire IPL 2024 because of chronic heel pain in his left foot. Sri Lanka are yet to unveil their provisional squad for the upcoming T20 World Cup in the USA and the West Indies.

With Pathirana leaving the IPL with injury, England's Richard Gleeson, 36, is the only overseas fast bowler in the CSK squad.

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Zendaya in Maison Margiela by John Galiano

MET GALA 2024

THE GARDEN OF TIME

THE MET GALA 2024, THEMED 'SLEEPING BEAUTIES: REAWAKENING FASHION', SAW A BEVY OF A-LISTERS HITTING THE RED CARPET IN CUSTOM CREATIONS ON MAY 6



Emma Chamberlain in Jean Paul Gaultier



Kendall Jenner in Vintage Givenchy

The Met Gala red carpet produces some of the most memorable celebrity fashion moments of all time every year. Monday night's very best dressed attendees were those who paid homage to this year's theme (and 'the garden of time' dress code) - doing so in both thoughtful and unexpected ways.

Of course, all of the official 2024 Met Gala co-hosts made the best dressed list. Zendaya turned heads in not one but two striking looks - including her custom Margiela look, and a vintage Givenchy dress from the house's spring 1996 collection. Jennifer Lopez opted for a sparkling Schiaparelli number while Bad Bunny wore a sculptural Margiela suit and Chris Hemsworth a sleek Tom Ford one.

Florals, unsurprisingly, proved to be the breakout look of the night. Celebrities transformed into high-fashion bouquets in a variety of ways. There was Nicki Minaj in a Marni dress covered in



Gigi Hadid in Thom Browne

hand-painted metal flowers, and Gigi Hadid in a Thom Browne three-dimensional floral ballgown. Adwoah Aboah, meanwhile, had the night's best maternity moment - in a red floral H&M look that included a crop top and full skirt.

Some of the night's more unexpected - and way more avant-garde - moments shined, too, proving that the best dressed celebrities of the nights didn't have to be in florals. Lana Del Rey, for one, brought forward the drama in a veiled Alexander McQueen look with an antlered headpiece - it was a thoughtful homage to the late designer's iconic fall 2006 collection. Tyla also transformed herself into a sand sculpture - via an extremely-fitted Balmain gown that was like a second skin.

As for some of the best dressed men of the night? Well-clad gents like Josh O'Connor (in Loewe), Morgan Spector (in Willy Chaverria), and Stefon Diggs (in H&M) shined in tailoring that was contemporary and dapper.

(Courtesy: Vogue)



Naomi Campbell in Burberry



Ariana Grande in Loewe



Penélope Cruz in Chanel



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ISTANBUL MODEST FASHION WEEK

Stolls, scarves, and more

THE 9TH EDITION OF INTERNATIONAL MODEST FASHION WEEK (IMFW), HELD IN ISTANBUL (APRIL 25-27), WAS A VIBRANT SHOWCASE OF EXCITEMENT, RESPONSIBILITY, AND A RENEWED VISION. ISTANBUL MODEST FASHION WEEK 2024 NOW PROMISES TO BE AN EXCLUSIVE ADDITION TO THE GLOBAL MFW JOURNEY

Every aspect of the International Modest Fashion Week (IMFW) fashion statement holds significance, symbolising its role as a catalyst for change in the industry. The theme for this year - A Unique Fashion Call for Solidarity - brought together designers, artists, and personalities from diverse backgrounds, cultures, and industries, uniting them for a common cause.

From Oman, Priyah Prakash Pawani (backed by H E Muhammet Hekimoglu, Ambassador of the Republic of Turkiye, and Turkish Airlines), graced the event as the Modest Fashion Brand Ambassador of Oman and a guest speaker.

Priyah eloquently underscored the importance of inclusivity, diversity, and the democratisation of modest clothing and fashion at the event where she showcased Arabic modest fashion styled by an Omani designer.

She also acknowledged the support she received from Turkish Airlines in facilitating her trip to Istanbul as well as encouraging her in keeping Oman in the fray in this field.

In her role as an ambassador, Priyah Prakash Pawani's primary objective this year was to foster connections between artists and their designs, fostering cultural and social ties between Oman and Turkey.

Her attires, exquisitely crafted by Faiza al Balushi, from Chiffon Style, showcased Oman and India in its traditional elegance. As an Indian in Oman, she also adorned a saree - the timeless classic in its modest form.

Present on the occasion was Halima Aden, an American fashion model - the first woman to wear a hijab in the Miss Minnesota USA 2016 pageant where she was a semi-finalist. Following her participation in the pageant, Halima had received national attention and was signed to IMG Models. Her attendance at the event added the much-needed recognition for modest fashion and sustainability.

With more and more beauty queens and pageant winners embracing 'modest fashion', this year's IMFW stood out as one of the best witnessed so far. In a tete-a-tete with Muscat Daily, Priyah shared her frank opinion on the evolution and future of modest fashion. Excerpts:



To address the concerns and promote a safer, more respectful environment for all participants is important. I have always voiced out my opinion and taken a stand in this regard

PRIYAH PRAKASH PAWANI



How was this year's theme for the Istanbul Modest Fashion Week demonstrated on the ramp?

This year's theme - A unique fashion call for solidarity - was beautifully expressed on the runway with a mix of cultural influences and modern styles, showcasing diversity, inclusion and unity. Many top models from various backgrounds walking for different designers made it even more special.

Why aren't Omani models participating - is there any initiative to groom and present young Omanis at such pageants?

Omani models might not be participating due to various reasons, but there could be room for initiatives to support and showcase local talent on such global stages. I have been training women and men in India for pageants and would love to explore these options in Oman too.

Are such fashion shows yet to receive support from the authorities concerned - have you approached them?

While the Ministry of Culture's stance on fashion shows may vary, it might be worthwhile exploring ways to collaborate with them to promote the cultural significance of these events in future. I need to gain some experience from global platforms before I approach them to seek support for local shows. That's definitely something in the pipeline.

How has the concept of Modest Fashion evolved since its inception?

Modest fashion has evolved tremendously by embracing new styles while staying true to its principles, catering to a wider audience around the world. Modest fashion now highlights sustainability, fashion in a new limelight, and creativity.

What is your opinion about concerns of privacy and unfair treatment towards models which can be a deterrent for aspiring models from conservative societies?

Concerns about privacy and respect in changing rooms can indeed discourage aspiring models, especially in conservative societies like the Arab world. Fortunately, Oman has been very kind, respectful and supportive of models. I never experienced anything like that in Oman.

As an ambassador, do you propose to take up initiatives to quell the doubts in the minds of those who discourage fashion shows?

As an ambassador, advocating for initiatives to address these concerns and promote a safer, more respectful environment for all participants is important. I have always voiced out my opinion and taken a stand in this regard. Educating the models is important, too.

Will there be any change in the next edition of this pageant with regard to such concerns?

Changes to address these issues are already in the process, especially through personality development and grooming schools. More focus is required, possibly through better policies and training to ensure dignity and professionalism for everyone involved.