

FIH Hockey5s World Cup 2024 trophy unveiled

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The main committee of FIH Hockey5s World Cup 2024, which will be hosted by Oman from January 24 to 31, 2024, unveiled the championship trophy at a colourful ceremony held in Al Mouj Walk Way on Saturday.

Commissioned by FIH (International Hockey Federation), the trophy – of gold, weighing 5kg – was made in Switzerland and symbolises modernity and contemporaneity in hockey. It will tour several places in Muscat governorate in the coming days.

The ceremony was held under the auspices of H E Basil bin Ahmed al Rawas, Undersecretary for Sports and Youth in the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, in the presence Dr Mar-



H E Basil al Rawas unveils the FIH Hockey5s World Cup 2024 trophy

wan bin Juma al Juma, Chairman of Oman Hockey Association, OHA officials and members of the organising committee of FIH

Hockey5s World Cup. On the occasion, H E Rawas said, "Organising committees are working hard to host this impor-

tant international event and promote the sultanate. The first edition of the FIH Hockey5s World Cup has come after the prestigious sporting position that Oman achieved at the continental and international levels of the game. Hosting this event will benefit the sultanate in the sports, tourism, cultural and economic fields."

Juma informed that a new stadium complex in Amerat built to host the global event will be completed in the coming days. It has been built to the latest standards and design approved by FIH.

"The integrated complex includes the main stadium in which the official matches will be held, in addition to four other training fields. Sixteen matches will be played daily during the tournament, each of 30 minutes.

"Oman Hockey Association will spare no effort to promote this great event to be hosted by the sultanate," Juma said.

"The trophy will tour around Oman, introducing the community to the sport of hockey and the spectacle of the global event to be hosted by the sultanate from January 24 to 31.

"In the past few years, Oman has been able to rise in international hockey rankings to reach 26th."

According to Juma, Oman Hockey Association is currently working to develop the women's team to compete at the international level.

"The World Cup will inspire the younger generation to play hockey and follow the stars of the game in the tournament," Juma said.



Sayyid Theyazin to preside over municipal councils symposium

Muscat - H H Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham bin Tarik al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth, will preside over the 2023 Municipal Councils Symposium and launch of the Tanmia app.

The event will take place at Al Bustan Palace, a Ritz-Carlton Hotel, on Sunday, in the presence of several senior officials and members of municipal councils in the governorates.

The two-day symposium has been organised by the Ministry

of Interior and its agenda will include topics such as developing the work of municipal councils and receiving proposals of council members.

Created by the Ministry of Interior, the Tanmia app is the digital interface for municipal councils. A link between society and municipal councils, it will enhance communication and transparency, leading to sustainable development and improving municipal work.

UNSC resolution to boost Gaza aid welcome: Oman

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman affirmed that the United Nations Security Council resolution regarding the Gaza Strip is a welcome progress, but it does not meet the broad international consensus calling for a ceasefire, calling for the need to ensure the continuous and effective flow of humanitarian and relief aid to the entire strip.

A statement issued by the Foreign Ministry said, 'Oman renewed its call on the Security

Council to carry out its responsibilities in implementing all its resolutions related to the Arab-Israeli conflict in order to achieve a just, comprehensive and lasting peace, based on the two-state solution and ending the illegal Israeli occupation of Arab lands.'

On 'X', H E Sayyid Badr al Busaidi, Foreign Minister, posted, "A resolution passed with expanded and unhindered access is progress, but to stop the killing and alleviate the suffering, a ceasefire is essential."

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Turkiye announces visa exemption for Omanis

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Omani citizens can now travel to Turkiye without an entry visa, according to the Turkish Embassy in Muscat.

A statement issued by the Turkish Embassy said, 'By Presidential Decree No 7976, dated December 23, 2023, it has been

decided that Omani citizens holding ordinary passports will be exempt from visa requirements for their travels for tourism purposes to Turkiye up to 90 days in any 180 day period.'

According to the decision published in the Turkish Official Gazette, ordinary passport holders of the United States of America, Bahrain, United Arab

Emirates, Canada and Saudi Arabia will also granted visa exemption for 90 days. The embassy stated that the decision was taken in accordance with Article 18 of the Foreigners and International Protection Law No 6458.

The decision was welcomed by Omani citizens, including Kaab al Maktoumi, Director of Holidays House for Travel and

Tourism, who described it as "very important" for the travel and tourism sector, considering it will reduce costs for Omani families who travel to Turkiye, especially in the summer months.

"This decision will also benefit many Omani patients who travel to Turkiye for treatment," Maktoumi added.

Mohammed Alawi, head of

Muscat Hiking Team, was delighted with the announcement. "We organise two trips for Omanis to Turkiye every year. Following this decision, we can organise more than four trips because it will reduce travel fees."

He described Turkiye as a "picturesque country, which helps us conduct a wide variety of activities, including hiking".

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App helps tourists find sites, facilities

Our Correspondent
Muscat

One-stop app Pinch is gaining traction. Providing comprehensive information about tourists spots and contacts, the app has been developed by entrepreneur Fahmi al Ma'awali. The idea emerged in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic with the objective of addressing the evolving landscape of domestic tourism. Called Pinch.om, the app aims to revolutionise the way travellers explore and experience Oman.

"As I observed a surge in domestic tourism, it was clear that people were increasingly relying on Instagram guides to discover new locations," Ma'awali said

"However, there were concerns about safety, navigation and the lack of reliable information, prompting the idea of creating an app that not only raises awareness of Oman's beauty but also ensures a seamless and secure travel experience for adventurers."

Originally named Smappy, the app has evolved since, settling on the name Pinch in a nod to users'



The app's key features contribute to its uniqueness and functionality. It has an intuitive interface; utilising Google Maps ensures a user-friendly and familiar experience

FAHMI AL MA'AWALI.

action when zooming in on online maps.

Pinch.om has three primary objectives – to boost domestic tourism; empower guides and monetise expertise; and ensure safety, eliminate mystery and save time.

Ma'awali recognised the growing interest in exploring one's own country and sought to fuel this trend by providing a platform that fosters a deeper connection with local landscapes to boost domestic tourism.

In the context of the second objective, Ma'awali understood the fact that guides play a crucial

role in enhancing the travel experience. Pinch.om enables guides to explain locations in detail and monetise their expertise, creating a symbiotic relationship that benefits both guides and travellers.

Considering safety and transparency are paramount for adventurers, Pinch.om aims to eliminate the uncertainty surrounding travel by providing comprehensive information, saving time and enhancing the overall travel experience.

"The app's key features contribute to its uniqueness and functionality. It has an intuitive interface; utilising Google Maps



ensures a user-friendly and familiar experience. It has advanced filters allowing users to choose activities and locate guides based on Instagram names. Addition-

ally, it has an internal messenger allowing guides and adventurers to communicate directly, akin to popular messaging apps," Ma'awali said.

The app also comes with a trail recorder, a feature that offers a comprehensive guide for users to dream, plan, book, experience and share their adventures seam-

lessly. There is also a forts and castles locator with information on 850 relevant sites.

While enabling users to effortlessly find and book tickets to explore Oman's rich history, it allows monetisation and a sustainable income stream for contributors.

Ma'awali, however, emphasised that Pinch.om is more than just a travel app – it is a tourism experience and information portal allowing locals to provide cultural insights that tourists and adventurers seek.

The app is free for users to explore locations using pins, but when services are required, financial discussions can take place directly with service providers.

Looking beyond Oman, Ma'awali foresees Pinch.om becoming a global directory of locations, addressing the needs of travellers in beautiful yet challenging places worldwide, including Saudi Arabia, Africa and India.

"The app is like an artist's canvas. We want it filled with beautiful colours so that the world can enjoy Oman as it should be enjoyed," he said.

Large turnout at 'Physical Activity Day' in Musandam

Our Correspondent
Muscat

More than 400 citizens and residents participated in an event called 'Physical Activity Day' organised by Oman Olympic Committee, represented by Oman Sports and Active Society Committee, in cooperation with Department of Culture, Sports and Youth in Musandam Governorate, on Wednesday.

The event was held under the patronage of Mubarak bin Ali bin Saeed al Rahbi, head of Musandam Governor's Office.

The event aimed to promote health and physical fitness by encouraging participants to engage in physical activities and adopt a healthy lifestyle, while creating an



opportunity for interaction between different ages through sports and activities.

Additionally, it provided an opportunity for community members to acquire new sports skills,

and motivated them to enhance community interaction and social communication.

Activities at the event included various sports programmes for different ages, a marchpast by athletes from Khasab Port Gate to the event venue at Bassa Beach, traditional Omani games, swimming and athletics competitions such as long jump and showjumping for different age groups, tug of war for adults, mountain climbing, scouts and guides activities, and a health workshop to educate community members about the importance of healthy nutrition and its role in improving public health.

The event witnessed wide community participation from all age groups and fruitful cooperation of institutions in the governorate with Oman Olympic Committee to make it a success.

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(PRE/23/285)	Consultancy Services for design of Wadi Al Mayh Road	13/01/2024	30/01/2024
(PRE/23/284)	Conducting tests and examinations of the Soil and asphalt layers of roads in Muscat Governorate	01/01/2024	07/01/2024

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H E Qais al Yousef

Oman, Saudi Arabia explore cooperation in investment sector

Muscat - H E Qais Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, held a meeting in Muscat on Thursday with Faisal Fadel al Ibrahim, Saudi Arabia's Minister of Economy and Planning, and his accompanying delegation.

The two sides discussed opportunities for cooperation in joint economic and investment spheres, as well as means of augmenting the volume of trade exchange.

The meeting was attended by H E Dr Saleh Said Masan, Undersecretary for Commerce and Industry in the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, and other officials from both sides.

OPINION

SALEH MIRI, MUSCAT DAILY COLUMNIST, IS AN ARCHITECT WHO CAME TO OMAN IN THE EARLY 1980S

We are reaching the end of 2023 and it seems like, as humans, we are going backwards.

Whilst in Dubai we are talking about climate change in the future, we are forgetting that every day people are getting killed in Palestine, Israel, Ukraine, Russia, Lebanon, Yemen, Africa, etc. Yet, nobody asks what about today?

How can we live and not be ashamed to be part of this new world, where technology has taken over, where we are able to communicate much better than in the 1950s and yet we have lost the most important part - our values?

Some larger countries are trying to impose their views on others, some institutions such as the United Nations cannot take the world out of this total mess, whilst the Red Cross and charity organisations do their best to provide some solutions

How can we talk about evolution and progress in parts of the world whilst some people have no access to water, fuel or bread? It is all related to the same planet. Animals behave better than we do.

Is this the world we are leaving for the next generation? Earlier, there was no TV, no mobile phones, no easy ways to travel, but people were respectful of others and their environment.

Is it technology, lack of knowledge or improper education which has led us to this situation? Southern countries

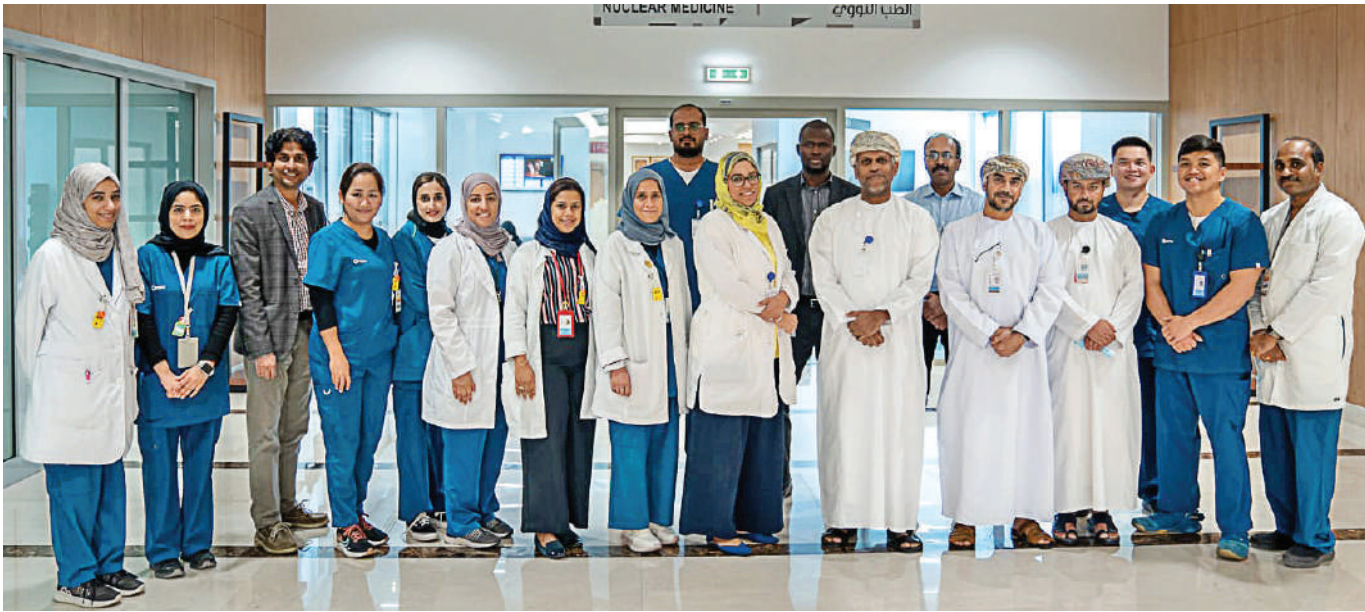
We can make changes if we begin with ourselves and join forces with people close to us

We cannot wait for the decisions of the responsible people. Each and every person needs to tackle the problem by not rushing to judge based on the information we get from the news, which are often manipulated. We have to avoid wasting food and water and educate our children with real values based on what history has taught us and not based on simple material opportunities.

We can make changes if we begin with ourselves and join forces with people close to us - friends, family and neighbours. The results can be spectacular. Remaining silent will plunge us into deeper problems. Let us believe in a better world; it is reachable if we are honest with ourselves. Let us hope for solutions, and propose other solutions.

HOPE FOR A BETTER WORLD

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



SQCCRC launches new prostate cancer therapy

Our Correspondent
Muscat

A specialised medical team at the Sultan Qaboos Comprehensive Cancer Care & Research Centre (SQCCRC) has launched a new treatment option for prostate cancer patients using the lutetium-177 PSMA radionuclide.

Doctors at the centre say that the new therapy is a valuable addition in the field of cancer treatment in the Sultanate of Oman.

The radionuclide treatment session for the first patient in the Department of Radiology and Nuclear Medicine was confirmed to be successful.

The radioactive substance Lu-177 targets prostate cancer cells, damages them, hinders their growth, and sometimes leads to the killing of active cells.

Dr Kholoud bint Salem al Riyami, head of the centre's Nuclear Medicine Unit, explained that this service is the ideal therapeutic option for treating



prostate cancer patients, who have been suffering from widespread disease and have not responded to other treatments such as androgen deprivation therapy and chemotherapy.

She added that the goal of using this diagnostic and therapeutic service is to relieve symptoms and achieve maximum control over the spread of cancer and its treatment.

This therapy has been found to be effective in preserving the

integrity of tissues around the area targeted for treatment, and greatly improves a patient's quality of life.

Dr Kholoud pointed out that providing this modern therapeutic service, which combines diagnosis and treatment by utilising nuclear medicine techniques, is a qualitative leap and will open new horizons in cancer treatment, and that they are striving to provide more treatments based on lutetium-177 in the near future for patients. People with other conditions such as neuroendocrine tumours.

Dr Rashid bin Fouad al Sakiti, head of the centre's Radiology and Nuclear Medicine Department, said that with the introduction of this therapy, the patients - who earlier had to go abroad for this treatment - would now get the much-needed relief from travelling. "The existence of this service is an important milestone for the Nuclear Medicine Unit and its integrated team of nuclear medicine doctors, nuclear medicine radiology technicians, medical physicists, oncology consultants, and the nursing team who work hand in hand to provide the best possible medical care for patients. "This approach confirms the centre's continued commitment to providing comprehensive care for cancer patients with the latest types of medical treatments, and application of scientific innovations," Dr Sakiti added.

RAM's master programme in leadership and management concludes

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Royal Academy of Management (RAM) successfully concluded the inaugural Master in Leadership and Management programme, preparing its first cohort with both scientific knowledge and practical skills. This programme was specifically designed to equip emerging leaders with the ability to innovate and thrive in a digital innovation-driven economy.

Utilising a blended network learning approach, the participants, who are section and department heads and their equivalent in the state's administrative apparatus, have successfully graduated after completing their third and final residency at Thunderbird College of Global Management at Arizona State University in the United States of America.

The programme was developed in collaboration with Thunderbird School of Global Management, renowned for its excellence in teaching leadership and modern executive management. The college's Master of Global Management programme has been ranked first globally in The Wall Street Journal/Times Higher Education College Rankings and endorsed as a recommended university for study by the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation.

The Master in Leadership and Management programme provided participants a unique opportunity to explore international perspectives in leadership, management, innovation, strategies, public policy analysis, and agile government. Its diverse implementation methods added richness and effectiveness to the programme.



This programme was designed to equip emerging leaders with the ability to innovate and thrive in this digital era

In addition to the academic depth provided by the university, RAM was committed to integrating supplementary components to create a comprehensive programme. This approach combined scholarly insights with cognitive growth, fostering leadership proficiency, adept management of change processes, and nurturing innovative thinking methodologies.

The third residency of the Master in Leadership and Management programme was held at Arizona State University and included impactful presentations by a diverse group of speakers. Key topics focused on the economic landscape and explored dynamic partnerships between public and private sectors, emphasising their pivotal role in driving innovation and technological advancement. The discussions included real-world cases and examples, providing insightful perspectives drawn from practical experiences.

The sessions explored essential subjects including economic success, contemporary manufacturing methodologies, and their significance in the integration of public and private endeavours. Discussions also focused on strategies to revitalise the economy, attracting tech industry giants for investment, and exploration of a project leveraging modern technology for global impact. Additionally, participants gained insights into communication applications designed to enhance people's lives.

During the concluding phase of the third residency, participants collaborated on group projects focused on digital transformation. These endeavours resulted in the generation of innovative ideas tailored to meet the demands of the evolving economy. RAM launched the programme in September 2022, with 22 participants, holding positions as department heads or similar ranks in the state's administrative apparatus.

Bids invited to develop and design Wadi al Mayh Road



Our Correspondent
Muscat

Muscat Municipality has invited tenders for the construction of a road connecting Amerat and Yiti, where an integrated tourism development stands as a symbol of urbanisation and sustainability in the Sultanate of Oman.

"In order to extend the road network between residential neighbourhoods and link urban plans, Muscat Municipality has floated a tender for consultancy services to develop and design Wadi al Mayh Road to

connect wilayat of Amerat with the Yiti area in Muscat governorate', the municipality stated.

'The project aims to smoothen traffic movements along the Wadi al Mayh Road with a suitable design; improvement of surrounding facilities, urban plans and neighbourhoods, besides relaying the drainage system.'

The municipality also invites bidders for construction of a square in Wadi Kabir.

The deadline for submission of bids is January 30, 2024, Muscat Municipality added.

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'Hydrogen projects to boost Oman's non-oil economy'

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman's ambitious targets to expand local green hydrogen production could support the country's key credit metrics, such as GDP, fiscal revenue, and the balance of payments, over the long term amid the global energy transition, Fitch Ratings said.

The sultanate's government aims to raise green hydrogen production to at least 1mn metric tonnes per year by 2030, rising to at least 3.25mn metric tonnes by 2040 and 7.5mn metric tonnes by 2050.

'Local state-owned enterprise (SOE) Hydrom Oman (Hydrom) signed six investment agreements, worth over \$38bn, with partners in 2023. However, we believe the hydrogen strategy will not involve large-scale SOE investments or associated sovereign contingent liabilities. Hydrom will only provide prepared plots, and another SOE, OQ Alternative Energy, will only take relatively modest minority stakes in selected projects,' Fitch noted.

According to Fitch, the main impact of Oman's green hydrogen development plan in the near term is likely to be on investment, external metrics, and em-



Oman has potential to compete in green hydrogen production, reflecting its low renewable-energy costs, available export infrastructure through Hydrom and Port of Duqm, and a clear, relatively low tax framework

FITCH RATINGS

ployment.

'The significant inflows of foreign direct investment would boost GDP, but the impact would be counterbalanced by rising imports for project delivery. We estimate the royalty on 1mn metric tonnes produced at current prices would be equivalent to

about 0.7% of Oman's GDP in 2023. This is a modest figure that is unlikely to reduce significantly the volatility of its fiscal revenues, which remain exposed to hydrocarbon prices,' the rating agency said.

Fitch stated in September 2023, at the time of its upgrade

of Oman's rating to 'BB+' from 'BB' with a stable outlook, that the growth of the non-oil economy, notably improving non-oil fiscal revenues and reducing social spending pressures on the government, could lead to positive rating action.

In the longer term, Fitch said Oman's success in the development of a green hydrogen sector would help to reduce somewhat its high dependence on fossil fuels and its exposure to the global energy transition.

'Fiscal and export revenues from green hydrogen may still be susceptible to global energy-price cycles, but if Oman is able to develop an export base for green steel, this could diversify its exports,' Fitch noted.

Fitch believes Oman has potential to compete in green hydrogen production, reflecting its low renewable-energy costs, available export infrastructure through Hydrom and the under-utilised Port of Duqm, and a clear, relatively low tax framework.

'However, the [hydrogen] sector's long-term viability will depend on a number of factors, including the speed and scale of global adoption of green hydrogen, carbon prices (particularly in Europe), and the emergence of competitors,' Fitch added.

Sohar International bids farewell to its chairman

Muscat – Sohar International – the fastest growing bank within Oman – has announced the departure of its esteemed chairman of the board of directors, Mohamed Mahfoudh al Ardhi.

As per a disclosure submitted to the Muscat Stock Exchange, Ardhi tendered his resignation from the board, effective from January 1, 2024, a decision accepted during the board meeting held on Thursday.

The disclosure also announced the appointment of Said Mohamed al Afi, the current deputy chairman, as the new chairman of Sohar International, and Tareq Mohamed al Mugheiry as the deputy chairman effective from January 1, 2024.

In a press release, Sohar International said that Ardhi has played an indelible role during his tenure as chairman, orchestrating the bank's ascent to new heights. His dedication, vision, and strategic leadership have been foundational in shaping the bank's success, marking an era of significant growth and accomplishment.

Under Ardhi's guidance, Sohar International achieved notable milestones aligned with a robust strategic framework. These milestones encompass the complete rejuvenation of the brand, substantial organic and inorganic growth propelling



Mohamed Mahfoudh al Ardhi

the bank to become the country's fastest-growing and second-largest financial institution, and the extension of operations across borders amongst others.

Acknowledging his departure, Ardhi expressed, "It has been an honour to lead Sohar International through an extraordinary period of growth and success. I am immensely proud of what we have achieved together, and I am confident that the bank will continue to thrive under its capable leadership. I take this opportunity to thank Sohah International, its people, and the people of Oman for making this stint a monumental one."

Honoring the outgoing chairman's legacy, Sohah International's chief executive officer, Ahmed al Musalmi, said, "We extend our heartfelt gratitude to Ardhi for his invaluable leadership that has left an indelible

mark on Sohah International, serving as the guiding force behind our journey towards remarkable achievements. His unwavering commitment, visionary guidance, and strategic foresight have been the cornerstone of our success. His acumen has not only shaped the bank's growth but has also inspired all those associated with Sohah International."

Announcing the appointment of Sohah International's new chairman, Musalmi further said, "As we warmly welcome Said al Afi as the new chairman, his exceptional track record and forward-thinking vision fortify our commitment to excellence and innovation to our stakeholders. I am confident that under Afi's guidance, Sohah International will continue to thrive, staying true to its mission and pursuing its strategic objectives with unwavering dedication."



SOHAR signs marine service agreements with local companies

Our Correspondent
Muscat

In a strategic move that enhances In-Country Value (ICV) and supports local companies, SOHAR Port and Freezone has signed three key agreements aimed at boosting its marine services. These agreements are a pivotal step in putting to action the port's dedication to nurturing local talent.

The first agreement with Global Tank Solution Company outlines a plan to revolutionise the vessel tank cleaning services at the port. Global Tank Solution will introduce advanced mechanised cleaning technology, skill development opportunities, and automated and non-man entry tank cleaning systems. This collaboration is expected to sharpen the competitive edge of local companies in the maritime sector.

In another agreement aimed at elevating its bunker services, SOHAR partnered with Global Oil Resources Company. This partnership will precipitate opportunities for local companies to interface with major enterprises in the marine fuel logistics and supply chain, thereby advancing Oman's global opera-

By integrating these specialised services at SOHAR Port, we are elevating our operational efficiency and significantly contributing to the growth of Oman's maritime industry and economy

BATTI AL SHIBLI

tions. Global Oil Resources will be able to supply bunker to vessels calling SOHAR Port.

The third agreement, SOHAR's collaboration with American Medical Center, in partnership with Star Lake Medical Services, introduces a comprehensive range of medical services for seafarers. This initiative is poised to stimulate growth in the local healthcare sector by increasing demand for medical supplies, services, and expertise.

In a press statement, Batti al Shibli, harbor master at SOHAR Port and Freezone, said, "By integrating these specialised services at SOHAR Port, we are

elevating our operational efficiency and significantly contributing to the growth of Oman's maritime industry and economy. These collaborations align with our broader ICV strategy, our commitment to creating sustainable opportunities for Omani companies, and our role in helping the sultanate achieve the goals outlined in Oman Vision 2040."

As the only complex of its kind in the region managed under a singular entity, SOHAR Port and Freezone offers a competitive edge in attracting foreign investments and promoting business growth. The port plays a critical role in supporting Omani companies, providing a platform for them to engage in large-scale industrial and logistical activities, which facilitates the growth and development of local businesses, contributing significantly to the ICV and national economy.

As one of the fastest-growing ports in the world, SOHAR Port and Freezone continues to leverage on its strategic location and enhance its services, positioning itself as a key logistics hub within the region and across the world boasting container, liquids, and bulk terminals.

Renaissance Services achieves top rating for its internal audit function

Muscat – Renaissance Services – the leading accommodation, services solutions and integrated facilities management company in Oman – received the highest possible rating of 'Generally Conforms' for its internal audit function during an independent assessment.

The rating was given following an external quality assessment (EQA) conducted by an independent professional assessor. It implies that the relevant charter, structure, policies and procedures of the internal audit department, as well as the processes by which they are applied, comply with the requirements of International Professional Practices Framework (IPPF) from the Institute of Internal Auditors (IIA) and the regulations of the Capital Market Authority of Oman (CMA).

The external quality assessment was held as part of the efforts to evaluate the conformance of Renaissance's internal audit activities to the mandatory guidance of the IPPF, assess the effectiveness in carrying out its mission as outlined in



the charter, identify opportunities to enhance its management and work processes.

Yahya Said al Jabri, Chairman of the Audit and Internal Controls Committee of the Board of Directors, Renaissance Services, accepted a special award from Shatha al Maskiry, Country Managing Director, Protiviti Oman on this occasion.

He said, "This remarkable achievement marks the company's unwavering dedication to excellence and adherence to

global best practices in internal auditing. As the company continuously upholds these high standards, stakeholders can be assured of a professional and robust internal audit function that contributes significantly to our ongoing success. The board strongly believes that good corporate governance practices are pivotal to maximising long-term value while safeguarding the interests of all stakeholders."

Stephen R Thomas, Chief Executive Officer of Renaissance

Services, said, "The internal audit department ensures that our corporate governance, risk management, internal controls, and other vital functions meet the highest standards. The independent expert's top rating has enhanced credibility and showcases the effectiveness of Renaissance's governance processes and controls. This rating sets the stage for the company's continued success as it serves its prestigious clients in Oman and beyond."

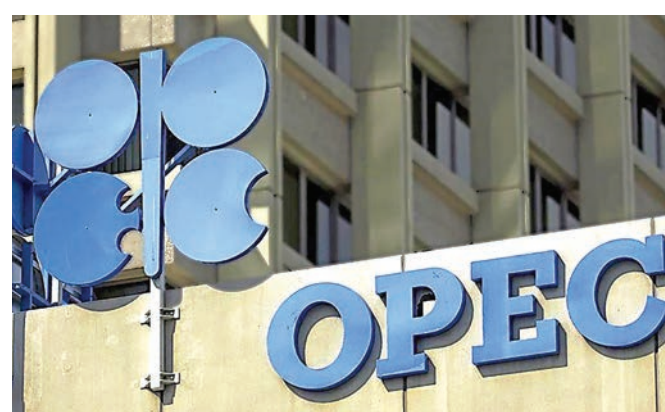
Angola quits OPEC amid oil output quota dispute

Vienna, Austria – Angola will exit the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) over disagreements on oil production quotas, Angola's ANGOP news agency reported on Thursday, citing country's oil minister Diamantino Pedro Azevedo.

The decision was taken at a session of the Council of Ministers, chaired by Angolan President Joao Lourenco.

Speaking to state broadcaster TPA, Azevedo said the decision was not taken lightly, but OPEC membership no longer served the African country's interests.

"If we remained in OPEC... Angola would be forced to cut production and this goes against our



policy of avoiding decline and respecting contracts,' Azevedo said.

Earlier this month, the OPEC group announced the updated production quotas for some

countries as agreed during the previous ministerial meeting in June.

According to assessments by three independent sources, including IHS, Wood Mackenzie

and Rystad Energy, production levels of Angola, Congo and Nigeria were set as 1.11mn barrels per day (bpd), 277,000 bpd and 1.5mn bpd, respectively.

The decision led the group's latest meeting on December 4 to be postponed for four days, the longest delay of a meeting in OPEC's history. The postponement was caused by dissatisfaction of some countries about the updated production quotas.

An OPEC member since 2007, Angola produces over 1.1mn barrels per day of crude oil. The southern African country is the second largest oil producer in the continent.

Anadolu Agency

Bank Nizwa inks financing agreement with RDAC

As the pioneering provider of fully Sharia-compliant Sustainable Finance solutions in the Sultanate of Oman, Bank Nizwa ardently champions endeavours that align with its strategic focus on sustainable development for the advancement of the country's economy.

In line with the same, the bank formalised a financing agreement with Renaissance Duqm Accommodation Company (RDAC), a subsidiary of leading accommodation solutions, facilities management and services solutions company, Renaissance Services, to extend USD 90mn in Sustainability Linked Financing to support its projects, a press release said.

The financing agreement was signed at a ceremony, by Khalid al Barwani, DGM and head of Wholesale Banking Group at Bank Nizwa, and Raashid Ali, Chief Financial Officer, Renaissance Services, in the presence of key personnel from both organisations.

Renaissance Duqm Accommodation Company's efforts in the Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD) have culminated in the establishment of the world-class Renaissance Village Duqm, a pioneering enabler of the government's vision for



Duqm as a smart city and global logistics hub driving economic diversification in the Sultanate of Oman. The integrated workforce accommodation facility provides premium living standards to workers of all segments, in full compliance with the standards of SEZAD and the International Labour Organization (ILO).

"At Bank Nizwa, sustainability is a core concept shaping our product and service offerings, in

alignment with Oman's Vision 2040," said Khalid Al Barwani, on the occasion. "As the leading and most trusted Islamic Bank in the country, we are keen to forge partnerships with corporates and entities that share our dedication to the adoption of green practices and eco-conscious endeavours to guarantee the socio-economic progress of the Sultanate. Our partnership with Renaissance signifies more than

just a financial pledge; it marks a strategic alliance toward a sustainable future."

He added, "Through this partnership, Bank Nizwa will be supporting the development of sustainable workforce accommodation projects undertaken by Renaissance Duqm Accommodation Company."

Speaking on the occasion, Raashid Ali, Chief Financial Officer, Renaissance Services, said,

"In line with Renaissance's commitment to sustainability and alignment with the Sultanate's Net Zero target, we are delighted to announce our partnership with Bank Nizwa for our first-ever sustainability-linked financing facility. This innovative collaboration is a testament to continuous efforts to meet sustainability benchmarks. We believe collective efforts are essential to achieving ambitious

targets that benefit future generations, and our partnership aims to encourage a strategic shift towards a more sustainable future for corporates in the Sultanate."

Under its Wholesale Banking arm, this partnership exemplifies the bank's commitment to supporting key national projects that aid in the socio-economic development of the country, and fostering a green economy.

Omantel launches FTTR

Omantel has launched the next-generation Fibre To The Room (FTTR) solution to deliver to home subscribers an exceptional home broadband experience.

Omantel is the first internet service provider in the sultanate to offer this revolutionary technology, an advanced tech solution that is guaranteed to considerably enhance the customer experience in every room, a press release said.

Saleh Mahmood al Maimani, senior manager Residential, Omantel, said, "The FTTR solution represents a remarkable advance in smooth connectivity within rooms. A 2mm thin and transparent fibre cable is used to replace traditional network cables in an innovative way to achieve premium experience of full gigabit coverage and seamless Wi-Fi coverage."

From small apartments to big villas, you can get your whole home covered with up to 10 rooms with reliable high-speed connectivity and low latency that will be the best upgrade your home entertainment needs to stream 8K Ultra High Definition (UHD), play cloud gaming services and enhance your smart home living experience.

Omantel is the sultanate's first and leading integrated telecommunications services provider, enabling the digital society to flourish, allowing new ways of business and delivering a world of information.

CROWE LIFTS AUDITORS CRICKET CUP 2023



The 21st edition of the Auditors Cup took place at Oman Cricket grounds last week in which Crowe emerged winners. Having won the toss, Crowe opted to chase, putting BDO to bat first & restricting them to a decent 46 runs losing 7 wickets in 6 overs with Captain Abu Hashim scoring 20 runs, the highest amongst the lot. In reply, Crowe, after losing their captain early, chased the target in 4.5 overs losing only 2 wickets with an outstanding performance by Ivan Manjila scoring 14 runs off 11 balls & Rehan Sharif emerging as the top scorer with 26 runs in just 12 balls earning the man of the match award. At the end EY finished the charts as second runner-up.

Meethaq takes part in 2nd 'Decrypt the Future' forum

In order to reinforce its commitment to advancing Islamic Banking practices, Meethaq Islamic Banking from Bank Muscat participated in the 2nd edition of Decrypt the Future of Islamic Banking Forum, which came this year under the title 'Islamic Financing in Digital Transformation Era: Vision for Achieving Sustainable Development'.

The event was organised under the patronage of HE Tahir bin Salim al Amri, executive president, CBO, and attended by a large number of officials and experts from the sector from different institutions, a press release said.

The forum touched upon the recent updates and opportunities in Islamic Banking Sector and financial technology in Oman. Discussions included the role of Islamic financing in enhancing sustainable development, opportunities and challenges of digital era, and the profound impact of Islamic Banking services.



During the forum, attendees got introduced to innovation in Islamic Banking products, Islamic Banking and social justice, Fintech and Islamic Banking and artificial intelligent. The forum served as a meeting ground for specialists in Islamic Banking and Finance in Oman fostering collaborative dialogues aimed at propelling sectoral growth.

Sami Bait Rashid, assistance general manager, Meethaq Personal Banking, said, "We are pleased to participate in the second edition of this forum to contribute along with the other institutions in enhancing the role of Islamic Banking in the

sultanate. In Meethaq, we are keen to work towards achieving common goals and contributing in the development of national economy. As a pioneer in Islamic Banking sector, Meethaq will continue to enhance its leadership position by developing and offering the best Sharia-compliant services and products."

Meethaq has been keen to participate in the events related to fostering the concept of Islamic banking, and the services provided through Islamic financing. Since its inception, Meethaq has been providing a comprehensive range of value-added products and services that undergo rigorous Sharia compliance certification by the Sharia Supervisory Board and adheres to guidelines set forth by the Central Bank of Oman. Meethaq's adoption of AAOIFI standards (Accounting & Auditing Organisation for Islamic Financial Institutions) further distinguishes its Islamic banking practices.

Ooredoo backs Al Mouj Muscat Marathon

Ooredoo has partnered with Sabco Sports for the 21.1km event at Al Mouj Muscat Marathon.

As Ooredoo is the race category sponsor for this half marathon distance, the race has been officially named the 'Ooredoo Half Marathon', with the company putting its stamp on speed, stamina, and all things running.

The popular annual event always covers several distances, but the half marathon suits those who have yet to become seasoned professionals, a press release said.

Ooredoo gives customers discounted entry fees to join any of the races and run for fun and health. The company will also arrange several activations at the



Al Mouj race village for runners and spectators alike. This year, many other companies will play a role in making Al Mouj Muscat Marathon bigger and better than

ever before.

Ooredoo and Sabco Sports have teamed up before for big sports events, including the World Cup 2022 in Qatar.

Oman Olympic Committee holds 4th meeting

The Board of Directors of Oman Olympic Committee (OOC) held its 4th meeting this year at OOC headquarters, headed by Khalid bin Muhammad al Zubair, OOC chairman, who began the meeting with a welcome speech.

The Board of Directors approved the financial statement submitted by Olympic Solidarity Committee to the sports federations and committees benefiting from the Olympic Solidarity programmes for the period (2021 - 2024).

This includes five programmes represented by programmes to support technical crews, administrative support programmes for national Olympic committees and knowledge exchange, and programs to qualify



ify players for the Games, a press release said.

In addition, programmes to support Olympic values, and programmes to develop the sports system were also discussed. The attendees reviewed the minutes

of the meetings of sub-committees, represented by Oman Sports Medicine and Anti-Doping Committee, and Oman Athletes Committee, and they were approved.

The 4th meeting concluded

with a review of many important topics that were included in the agenda, and other comments received from members of the Board of Directors, regarding which the necessary decisions taken.

Anti-Muslim sentiments in US, Europe; discrimination takes centre stage in 2023

Istanbul, Turkey - Increasing anti-Muslim sentiments in Europe and the US have brought discrimination to the forefront in 2023.

The bigotry has been supported directly or indirectly by governments that are held up as beacons of freedom and in one particular case as the ‘only democracy in the Middle East’.

Israel’s attacks on residential areas, hospitals, schools, mosques and churches in the Gaza Strip have left the world demanding a cease-fire. The attacks have targeted the Al-Aqsa Mosque and the sacred values of Palestinians.

But human rights violations have continued in occupied Palestinian territories since October 7, when the Palestinian resistance group launched a surprise attack against Israel.

Despite the attacks by forces affiliated with the Tel Aviv administration, Western countries, including the US, the UK, France, Germany, and Italy, refrained from issuing condemnatory statements against Israel’s attacks.

Rising anti-Muslim sentiment in Europe

Danish far-right politician Rasmus Paludan burned *Quran* in front of Turkey’s Stockholm Embassy on January 21 and its Copenhagen Embassy on January 27.

Paludan continued his *Quran*-burning provocations in Malmo, Norrköping and Jönköping during the Easter holiday in April.

Iraqi-origin Salwan Momika also burned the Muslim holy book under police protection in front of the Stockholm Mosque on June 28, coinciding with the first day of the Eid al-Adha holiday. Momika, on July 20 in front of Iraq’s Stockholm Embassy and on July 31 in front of the Swedish Parliament building, trampled *Quran* and the Iraqi flag under



police protection. Increasing his attacks. He continued to burn *Quran* in various locations in Stockholm on August 25, 26, 27, and 29 under police protection.

The UN Human Rights Council said *Quran*-burning provocations in Europe fueled hate speech and increased discrimination. The Council also expressed that future sessions would discuss religious hate actions in more detail.

Following the announcement by Education Minister Gabriel Attal on August 27 that the use of the abaya by women in schools would be prohibited, the ADM Association, which advocates for the rights of Muslims, took the ban to the Council of State.

The Council of State in France rejected the request to suspend the ban on September 7. It argued that female students wore

the abaya and male students wore the kamis, a traditional tunic, for religious reasons.

And Sports Minister Amelie Oudea-Castera announced that no French woman in the French delegation would be allowed to wear a headscarf during the Paris Games.

UN Human Rights High Commissioner’s spokesperson, Marta Hurtado, said in response that the ban was not justified. “The Human Rights Office generally emphasises that no one should dictate what a woman should or should not wear,” she said.

A report published in November on anti-Muslim sentiment in Germany noted that one in every two people in the country approved or used expressions that contained ‘anti-Muslim hatred’.

Interior Minister Nancy Faeser announced that anti-Muslim sentiment had risen re-

A report published in November on anti-Muslim sentiment in Germany noted that one in every two people in the country approved or used expressions that contained ‘anti-Muslim hatred’

cently and mechanisms and advisory centres documenting it would be increased next year.

In the Netherlands, at least 10 municipalities conducted secret investigations on mosques, imams, leaders of religious organisations and influential indi-

viduals in congregations.

It was reported that the research, financed by the Dutch Security and Counterterrorism Agency through municipalities, was conducted by a private firm called NTA, Nuance door Training en Advies.

Minister of Social Affairs and Labour Karien van Gennip expressed regret about the investigation and said lessons would be learned.

Anti-Muslim sentiment across US

A Human Rights Report released by the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) in April noted that complaints about anti-Muslim sentiment, prejudice and discrimination had fallen compared to 2021, but complaints in the education sector had increased by 33 per cent.

In June, three Democratic

members of the US Congress introduced the ‘International Islamophobia Combat Act’ against the increase in anti-Muslim incidents worldwide.

Swiss computer hackers, who seized an FBI’s watchlist on June 13, leaked the information to the public. It was revealed that 1.5mn individuals, including children as young as 7, and 2,500 mosques, mostly with Arab and Muslim names, were secretly monitored by the bureau dating back 20 years.

CAIR filed a lawsuit against the government for the ‘FBI terrorism watchlist’. The lawsuit included 29 high-ranking government officials and agencies, including ministers, as defendants, along with the FBI, the CIA and the National Security Agency (NSA), including President Joe Biden’s government.

The UN Special Rapporteur on

Human Rights and Counterterrorism, Fionnuala Ni Aolain, published a report on lawlessness in the Guantanamo Bay prison after her technical visit June 27.

The UN condemned the US for the torture of prisoners at the prison and recommended its closure.

On the other hand, according to the annual hate crime statistics released by the FBI on October 10, violence and discrimination against Muslims in the US increased compared to the previous year.

The health sector was not spared as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in the US said one in five women in the country experienced mistreatment in health centres during pregnancy and the postpartum period.

The report, citing statistics, noted the rate of encountering mistreatment reached 30 per cent for Black, Latin American-origin US citizens and biracial women, and 40 per cent of those women reported experiencing discrimination.

In the Gurugram region of the Haryana state in India, Muslim-owned businesses that experienced arson, along with a mosque, as well as the killing of an imam by ultra-nationalist Hindu groups on August 8, raised concerns among Muslims.

Following the attacks on minorities, the Hindutva Watch organisation reported September 26 that more than 250 hate incidents against Muslims were carried out in India in the first half of 2023.

The report highlighted an increasing trend in hate speech against Muslims since the nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) came to power in 2014, noting that government officials have engaged in insulting and derogatory rhetoric against Muslims and Islam’s sacred values.

Anadolu Agency

‘Finland’s border closure with Russia violates human rights’

London, UK - Finland closed its entire 1,340km (832-mile) border with Russia last week after it accused Moscow of resuming an effort to funnel migrants into the country to cause destabilisation.

Finland’s decision has prompted concerns among human rights organisations with Amnesty International and the UN warning the complete closure of the land crossing which leads to preventing people from seeking asylum, is contrary to international law. Amnesty International Finland told Anadolu that the closure ‘undermines the rights of asylum seekers and increases the risk of serious human rights violations at the border’.

Essentially the border closure means that there is no possibility to seek asylum from the eastern side of Finland, which is not in line with the 75-year International Human Rights Agreement that grants everybody the right to asylum.

Hybrid threats

Finnish authorities accused Moscow last month of carrying out a suspected ‘hybrid attack’ and purposefully assisting undocumented migrants in crossing into the Nordic country. It was an accusation Russia denied.

When facing difficult times, every country has the right to guard its borders and address national security matters. But it



should do so while respecting international agreements and human rights, Executive Director of the Finnish Refugee Council, Annu Lehtinen told Anadolu.

This must be maintained even when it is evident ‘that there is more in play than just individuals seeking asylum’, she said.

The message that the Finnish government is trying to get across ‘is that refugees are not welcome’, which is a massive shift in the country’s migration policies, legal advisor and spokesperson for Amnesty International Finland, Pargol Mirafatabi, told Anadolu.

The interior minister has clearly said: “Refugees should not come to the eastern border but the fact is that we do have

people seeking asylum, and we have people who have had to leave their homes. And this is not the right way to approach this question, to close all the borders.

Following an initial two-week land crossing closure between the two countries last month, the Council of Europe published a letter on December 4 expressing concerns ‘about the rights of refugees, asylum seekers, and migrants’ urging Finland to ensure asylum seekers and migrants could continue to seek protection.

“The actions of another state, as reprehensible as they may be, do not negate Finland’s obligations under international refugee and human rights law, including as regards non-refoulement, the

protection of the right to life, the prohibition of inhuman or degrading treatment, and the prohibition of collective expulsions,” the Council of Europe human rights commissioner Dunja Mijatovic said in the letter to Interior Minister Mari Rantanen.

Under international human rights law, the principle of non-refoulement guarantees that no one should be returned to a country where there is a real risk the person would be subjected to persecution, torture, inhuman or degrading treatment or any other human rights violations.

Lehtinen underlined the fact that Finland should take into consideration the vulnerabilities of different people.

Anadolu Agency

2023 marked transformation for several countries through elections

Ankara, Turkey - Elections across the globe in the first half of 2023 led to changes in leadership in many countries, and some nations experienced intriguing outcomes.

Local and general elections resulted in political changes.

The selection of mayors in a coin toss, the assumption of the prime ministerial role by two coalitions and the inability of a candidate with a lot of public support for prime minister despite failing to receive parliamentary confidence were among noteworthy consequences.

In the February 12 presidential elections in the Greek Cypriot administration, where a second round took place, independent candidate and former Foreign Minister Nikos Hristodulidis, supported by the centre-right voters, competed against independent candidate Andreas Mavroyannis, who had the support of the extreme-left Progressive Party of Working People (AKEL). Hristodulidis won the second round with 51.97 per cent of the vote.

Bola Ahmed Tinubu from the All Progressives Congress (APC) in Nigeria won the elections held on February 25 - 26, taking the presidential seat from Muhammad Buhari, who, due to constitutional limitations about re-election after completing two terms, handed over the position on May 29.



Selection of mayors in a coin toss, assumption of the prime ministerial role by two coalitions and inability of a candidate with a lot of public support for prime minister were among noteworthy consequences

In early parliamentary elections in Kazakhstan on March 19, the ruling party, Amanat, which secured 53.9 per cent of the vote, won 40 seats in the 98-seat parliament. Alihan Ismailov was reappointed as prime minister.

Voters in Montenegro went to the polls for presidential and general elections this year. The two candidates who received the most votes in the March 9 presidential election competed in a second round on April 2.

Former Minister of Economy and leader of the European Now Movement (PES) party, Jakov Milatovic, won with 60 per cent of the vote. Milo Djukanovic of

the Democratic Party of Socialists of Montenegro (DPS), who received 40 per cent of the vote, resigned from his party.

Following the expiration of the deadline for the formation of a new government on March 16, parliament was dissolved, and an early general election date was announced for June 11.

During general elections, PES, with 25.6 per cent, became the party with the most seats in the parliament, while the coalition of DPS and its partners - Montenegrin Liberal Party (LP), Albanian Alliance and Social Democrats (SD) - received 23.2 per cent.

Anadolu Agency

UN Security Council passes resolution to boost humanitarian aid access to Gaza

Washington, US - The UN Security Council on Friday passed a resolution calling for 'urgent steps' to immediately allow 'safe, unhindered, and expanded' humanitarian access to Gaza amid the ongoing Israeli offensive on the strip, but with the US again nixing language calling for a cease-fire in the conflict before the vote.

After several days of intense negotiations and nail-biting delays, the resolution submitted by the United Arab Emirates passed by a vote of 13-0, with the US and Russia - both permanent council members - abstaining.

The resolution demands the parties to the conflict allow and facilitate the use of all available routes to and throughout the entire Gaza Strip, including border crossings, to ensure humanitarian personnel and assistance reach the civilian population in need.

The resolution requests that UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres appoint a 'senior humanitarian and reconstruction coordinator' to expedite the delivery of humanitarian assistance to the civilian population in Gaza.

It further requests that the coordinator expeditiously establish a UN mechanism for accelerating the provisions of humanitarian relief to Gaza.

Demanding that parties to the conflict cooperate with the coordinator to fulfill their mandate 'without delay and obstruction', the resolution also requests that the coordinator report to the council with an initial report within 20 days and thereafter every 90 days through next September 20.



UN Security Council votes on a draft resolution aimed at boosting the flow of humanitarian supplies into Gaza, at the UN headquarters in New York on Friday (Xinhua)

After several days of negotiations and delays, the resolution submitted by United Arab Emirates passed by a vote of 13-0, with the US and Russia - both permanent council members - abstaining

The resolution also demands the 'immediate and unconditional' release of all hostages, and calls on the parties to adhere to international law, and deplores all attacks on civilians and civilian

objects. Demanding that all parties take all appropriate steps to ensure the safety and security of UN personnel, the resolution stressed that humanitarian relief

personnel must be protected. It also requested UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres report to the council in writing within five working days on implementation of the resolution. Ahead of the vote, the US vetoed an amendment proposed by Russia demanding an 'immediate cessation of hostilities' in Gaza to ensure 'uninterrupted and safe' access to humanitarian aid. The US has already blocked resolutions calling for a cease-fire, to the evident frustration of

many countries worldwide, including some of its allies on the Security Council. Speaking ahead of the vote, UAE Ambassador to the UN Lana Nusseibeh said the purpose of the resolution is 'very simple'. "It responds with action to the dire humanitarian situation on the ground for the Palestinian people bearing the brunt of this conflict, while protecting those who are trying to deliver life-saving aid and it demands the urgent release of the hostages and for

humanitarian access to address their medical needs," she added. The council's 15 members have negotiated extensively to try to find a language that meets everyone's concerns, Nusseibeh said, urging the members not to reject the resolution 'when the needs of people are so great'. The vote was especially notable in that since October 7, a number of Security Council resolutions on the conflict failed to pass due to vetoes by its permanent members, leading some

world leaders and observers to question the council's effectiveness. Since October 7, the Israeli army has been waging a destructive war on Gaza, resulting in 20,057 deaths and 53,320 wounded so far, most of them children and women. This has caused immense damage to infrastructure and an unprecedented humanitarian catastrophe, according to Palestinian and international sources. Anadolu Agency

Gaza residents facing starvation: WHO chief

Gaza, Palestine - Residents in Gaza City are facing starvation and selling their possessions for food, the head of the World Health Organization (WHO) said on Saturday.

"Hunger is present, and famine is looming in Gaza," Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus wrote on X.

Four of five households in northern Gaza and half of displaced households in the south are going days and nights without eating, said Ghebreyesus.

"This is heartbreaking. This protracted conflict is blocking much-needed access to food and other life-saving humanitarian aid," he wrote.

Ghebreyesus urged the international community for immediate improvement in food security via accelerated flows of aid into Gaza to stop the famine.

End of ground operation?

Tel Aviv is preparing to end its



Caption

military ground operation in the Gaza Strip as part of the third stage of its war in the coming weeks, the Israeli Public Broadcasting Corporation reported on Friday.

The broadcaster quoted unnamed sources as saying that the Israeli army 'is preparing to move to the third phase of the fighting

in Gaza during the coming weeks, in accordance with operational achievements'. "The third phase includes ending the ground operation in the Gaza Strip, reducing army forces and demobilising reserves, resorting to air strikes, and establishing a buffer zone on the border between Israel and the Gaza Strip,"

according to the sources. The report claimed that the army 'took control of most of the northern Gaza Strip area, while it faces great difficulties in moving forward in the southern Gaza Strip area'. At least 472 Israeli soldiers have been killed since the start of the ground operation in the

Palestinian enclave on October 27, according to Israeli army figures. The Walla news website and the Israeli Channel 12 broadcaster reported on Thursday that one of the units in Gaza, known as the Golan Brigade, had lost 44 soldiers in 70 days of fighting. The brigade left Gaza to 'reorganise their ranks and visit their families for a few days', it was reported. Israel's indiscriminate attacks have turned the northern Gaza Strip into a 'pile of rubble', medical charity Doctors Without Border (MSF) said on Friday. In a post on X, MSF said: "After more than 2 months of the war, Israel's indiscriminate strikes on Gaza have turned the north of the Strip into a pile of rubble. In Nasser hospital in Khan Younis, south Gaza, the dead and wounded continue to arrive almost every day ... Nowhere is safe..." Anadolu Agency



Reporters Without Borders files complaint on journalists killed

London, UK - Paris-based NGO Reporters Without Borders (RSF) said on Friday that it has filed a second complaint with the International Criminal Court (ICC) on seven Palestinian journalists killed in Gaza from October 22 to December 15.

In response to the continuing tragedy in Gaza, the RSF filed its latest complaint ... this one concerning 'probable war crimes' by Israel forces, it said in a statement. The 'RSF has urged the ICC prosecutor (Karim Khan) to investigate all of the deaths of Palestinian journalists killed by the Israeli military since October 7, currently totaling 66', it added.

Montaser Al-Sawaf, an Anadolu freelance cameraman who was killed in Israeli airstrikes on December 1, is among the journalists named in the complaint. Other journalists are Asem Al-Barsh, an Al Najah radio journalist, Bilal Jadallah of Palestinian Press House, Rushdi Al Siraj, Hassouna Salim of Quds news agency, Sari Mansour, a photo-journalist for Quds news, and Samer Abu Daqqa, an Al Jazeera correspondent. The 'RSF has reasonable grounds to believe that the journalists named

in this complaint were the victims of attacks amounting to war crimes', it said. The non-profit said the 'journalists may have been deliberately targeted as journalists', which is why it is describing these deaths as 'intentional homicides of civilians'. It's first war crimes complaint since October 7 was filed with the ICC on October 31, and concerned the deaths of seven other journalists.

136 UN workers killed

As many as 136 UN workers have lost their lives in the last 75 days in the ongoing war between Israel and Hamas while several employees of the world body have been forced out of their homes, the United Nations Secretary General, Antonio Guterres said.

Guterres said that no one has ever seen such number of casualties of the UN staff in the history of the world organisation. '136 of our colleagues in Gaza have been killed in 75 days - something we have never seen in @UN history. Most of our staff have been forced from their homes,' the UN Chief wrote on X. Anadolu Agency

Hollywood actress Angelina Jolie decries global injustice

Istanbul, Turkey - Hollywood actress and humanitarian Angelina Jolie decried how justice is sought for one group of people, but not for other groups, something she said is present 'even in the UN'.

Speaking with Syrian journalist and filmmaker Waad Al Kateab, Jolie said that 20 years ago, when she began working internationally, she had a notion of 'good guys', whether they were specific countries or individuals, but later experience has told her that that's simply not true.



Hollywood actress Angelina Jolie (Anadolu Agency)

Stressing that human rights are not equally spread around the world, she said 'human rights

(are) sometimes for these (some) people ... (but) never for these (other) people'.

The reality is that the world operates based on 'business interests', said Jolie, a former UN goodwill ambassador and later special envoy until last year, calling this an 'ugly state' of affairs. She said that she found this 'disheartening' and 'upsetting', especially 'as someone who has witnessed war crimes firsthand'. Governments, politicians, and decision-makers make promises and declarations, but these often lead to 'nothing changed and nothing different', she said. She noted that though people were often raised with the idea

that 'colonialism ended', the control and abuse of developing countries still persists. "The attitudes, the control and abuse of developing countries is maybe worse than ever in the grab for resources ... The business interests (are) set even in the United Nations, who has the final veto power. It's always been that way," she added. Last month, Jolie condemned Israel's ongoing bombardment of Gaza and urged action against the collective punishment of Palestinian civilians. Anadolu Agency

INDIA

Multifold jump in COVID cases reported

A total of 423 cases were reported of which 266 were from Kerala and 70 from Karnataka

New Delhi - A multifold spurt in fresh COVID cases was noted in India over the past 24 hours, with Kerala contributing the major chunk of those.

A total of 423 cases were reported and of which 266 were from Kerala and 70 from neighbouring Karnataka, Union health ministry data showed.

Two deaths were reported in Kerala.

The total number of active cases of COVID-19 in the country was recorded at 3,420.

Meanwhile, amid rising concerns over the emergence of the new variant of the coronavirus, former World Health Organisation (WHO) chief scientist Dr Soumya Swaminathan asserted that there is no need to panic currently as it is a variant of interest and not of concern. However, she urged people to be cautious by taking proper precautionary measures.

Speaking to ANI exclusively, Dr Soumya Swaminathan, former DG, of the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) said: "We need to be cautious, but we don't need to worry because

we don't have any data to suggest that this variant JN.1 is more severe or it's going to cause more pneumonia, more death."

The WHO recently classified JN.1 as a variant of interest, distinct from its parent lineage BA.2.86. However, the global health body emphasised that the overall risk posed by JN.1 remains low based on current evidence. The number of new COVID cases increased by 52 per cent during the past four-odd weeks, the WHO said, with over 850 000 new cases reported during the period.

The number of new deaths decreased by 8 per cent as compared to the previous 28-day period, with over 3,000 new fatalities reported, WHO said in its latest press release.

As of December 17, over 772mn confirmed cases and nearly seven million deaths have been reported globally since the onset of COVID-19, the WHO noted.

Further, the WHO said over 118,000 new COVID-19 hospitalisations and over 1600 new



Hospital authorities make arrangements in view of new COVID-19 sub-variant JN.1, in Samba, Jammu and Kashmir on Friday (ANI)

intensive care unit (ICU) admissions have been recorded, with an overall increase of 23 per cent and 51 per cent, respectively, globally.

Due to its rapidly increasing spread, WHO is classifying the variant JN.1 as a separate variant of interest (VOI) from the parent lineage BA.2.86. It was previously classified as VOI as part of BA.2.86 sublineages.

Based on the available evidence, the additional global public health risk posed by JN.1 is currently evaluated as low.

Despite this, with the onset of winter in the Northern Hemisphere, JN.1 could increase the burden of respiratory infections in many countries.

The WHO had earlier said it was continuously monitoring the evidence and would update the JN.1 risk evaluation as needed.

Current vaccines continue to protect against severe disease and death from JN.1 and other circulating variants of SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, it noted.

COVID-19 is not the only respiratory disease circulating. Influenza, RSV, and common childhood pneumonia are also on the rise.

The WHO advised people to take measures to prevent infections and severe disease using all available tools. These include wearing a mask when in crowded, enclosed, or poorly ventilated areas, keeping a safe distance from others, practicing respiratory etiquette (covering coughs and sneezes) and cleaning hands regularly.

ANI

ROSE SHOW



A young girl takes a look at the different varieties of roses during the All India Winter Rose Show inaugurated by NDMC at the India-Africa Friendship Rose Garden, Shanti Path in New Delhi on Saturday (ANI)

Merchant ship hit by suspected drone attack

New Delhi - The Indian Navy and Indian Coast Guard vessels are moving towards a merchant vessel, MV Chem Pluto, in the Arabian Sea, which caught fire after a suspected drone attack.

The merchant vessel was reported to be present at 217 nautical miles off Porbandar coast on Saturday, defence officials said.

Taking swift action, the Indian Coast Guard Ship ICGS Vikram, deployed on patrol of the Indian Exclusive Economic Zone started moving towards the merchant vessel MV Chem Pluto in distress.

The Indian Navy warships in the vicinity are also moving towards the distressed vessel with around 20 Indian crew members who are all reported to be safe.

The vessel has crude oil and was going towards Mangalore from a port in Saudi Arabia. The fire has been reportedly extinguished but has affected the functioning of vessel.

ANI

Cold tightens its grip over north, fog envelopes UP

Kanpur, Uttar Pradesh - The cold tightened its hold on Uttar Pradesh on Saturday, with Noida, Aligarh and Ghaziabad experiencing dense fog as the mercury slipped further.

With a further dip in the mercury, locals were seen huddling around bonfires on the streets. Meanwhile, in the national capital, the minimum temperature at Palam was recorded at 14°C on Saturday while Safdarjung logged 12.2°C.

Locals out cycling or taking morning walks said the mercury fell significantly in the early hours of Saturday and the cold was extreme. "It's getting tougher for us to take morning strolls as the cold is extreme. The fog and pollution are further compounding the woes of regular commuters and morning walkers. We are having step outdoors wearing masks to keep out health problems caused because of pollution," a local told ANI on Saturday.

The overall Air Quality Index (AQI) of Delhi, according to SAFAR-India (System of Air Quality and Weather Forecasting and Research), was recorded in the 'Very Poor' range at 8.07am on Saturday.

The national weather forecasting agency earlier said the



A cleaning worker at Kartavya Path in a foggy morning in New Delhi on Saturday (ANI)

Flight operations at Delhi's Indira Gandhi Airport were adversely affected due to a thick layer of fog that enveloped the national capital

minimum temperature across North India was likely to increase by 2-3 degrees Celsius in Northern India over the next three days.

Flight operations at Delhi's Indira Gandhi International Airport on Saturday were adversely affected due to a thick layer of fog that enveloped the national capital, affecting visibility. As per Delhi Airport's Flight Information Display System, a total of 11 international flights and 5 domestic flights to and from the airport were delayed today.

However, as of now, there is no official confirmation from the Ministry of Railways in connection to the delay of trains due to the fog in the national capital.

ANI

Cultivated relationships with competing powers: Jaishankar

Gandhinagar, Gujarat - Highlighting the accomplishments of Indian diplomacy, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar asserted that New Delhi has effectively cultivated relationships with multiple and often competing powers, calling it a 'significant' milestone.

Speaking at the 3rd convocation of Rashtriya Raksha University in Lavad, Gandhinagar, Jaishankar emphasised that geopolitical considerations often revolve around identifying reliable partners during challenging times.

He said: "It has been a significant achievement of Indian

diplomacy that we have been successful in forging relationships with multiple and often competing powers."

Highlighting the positive impact of overall national development since 2014 that has addressed the shortcomings in the security domain, Jaishankar said: "Strenuous efforts have been made, especially in the last decade, to correct the shortcomings of the previous ones. The overall development of our national strengths that we have seen since 2014 has clearly had positive repercussions in the security field, whether it is internal, external or at the border."



External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar speaks during an interaction with students of Rashtriya Raksha University, in Gandhinagar on Saturday (ANI)

"There are some basic components of these capabilities that all of us are familiar with.

How to acquire and develop weapons and development-related capabilities has not only

been at the core of our business policies but even of our diplomacy. Indeed, a large part of our geopolitical calculations rest on which nations are reliable partners during times of stress," he added.

The External Affairs Minister affirmed that the security factor is 'embedded 'deeply' into India's strategy and diplomacy while engaging with a competitive world.

"We embed the security factor deeply into our strategy and into our diplomacy when we engage a competitive world. The magnitude of what we seek naturally reflects growing interest,

greater aspirations and, in fact the nature of warfare... What would we consider relevant to national security itself has a very much broader definition," the EAM said.

"We have long been conversant with the concept of dual technology, which was extended even more to encapsulate critical and emerging technologies," he added.

"In our travel abroad, I am glad to report that we are now seen as a credible and effective development partner.

"Our development partnership portfolio now spans 78 countries and the hallmark of

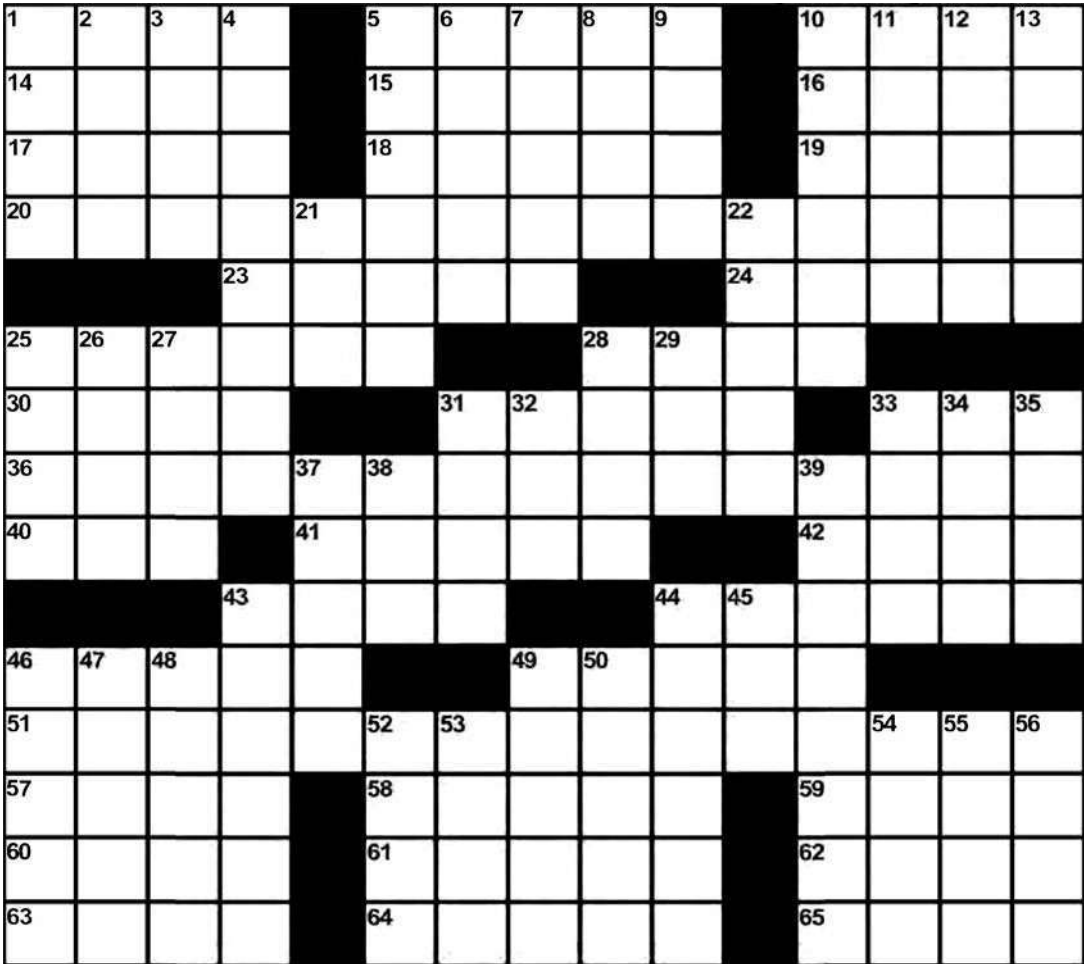
these projects is that they are demand-driven, transparent, empowerment-oriented, environment friendly and rely on a consultative approach," Jaishankar underlined.

The Minister emphasised India's role in promoting digital public infrastructure and sharing digital governance best practices, especially with the Global South.

"We have also been spearheading the promotion of digital public infrastructure and sharing best practices in digital governance, especially with the Global South," he added.

ANI

DAILY CROSSWORD



ACROSS

- 1) Three-player card game
5) Thumbnails
10) "Then it's settled"
14) "Little" girl of early comics
15) Flynn of old Hollywood
16) Napoleon exile spot
17) Jewish month after Shevat
18) Sung syllables
19) Like a useless tire
20) Back fill x 3
23) Sculpting materials
24) Decreases in strength
25) Ancient
28) A pair's air
30) "Buona _" (Italian greeting)
31) Cause to laugh
33) Scholastic stat
36) Back fill x 4
40) "What _ the odds?"
41) Fabled slipper material
42) Place of desertion
43) Bit of defamation
44) Steal gas, in a way

- 46) Follow as a result
49) Birchbark craft
51) Back fill x 3
57) Shot for one?
58) Baking need
59) Lake that's great
60) Certainly not for
61) Top- _ (golf ball brand)
62) Move merchandise
63) Medical advice, often

DOWN

- 1) Concrete section
2) African antelope
3) Winged
4) Traitor
5) Group of four
6) Deck out
7) Sticking points on crows?
8) Caffeine-containing nut
9) Kill, as a dragon
10) Beat in competition
11) DeGeneres of TV
12) Decrease
13) Plasterwork backers
21) Addition shape, some-
times
22) Dinner jacket material,

- sometimes
25) Fishing in the Atlantic,
e.g.
26) Reverse or drive, e.g.
27) Scottish Gaelic
28) All couples
29) Apollo letters
31) Way, way off
32) Title for a married
woman
33) "Fancy that!"
34) Game played with horses
and mallets
35) Prayer's end
37) Like bodies on beaches
38) Winter ailment
39) Something tested on
the vine
43) Naturally bright
44) Makes noise at night
45) Letters from a poor gam-
bler
46) Painter Degas
47) Not a soul
48) Belts, as flies
49) _ de Guerre (French
military award)
50) Type of angle or pain
52) Cut- _ (short shorts)

- 53) _ podrida (Spanish stew)
54) Fruit bearer
55) Make upset
56) Cry like a pup

NOTE PAD



YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE



ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

Your creativity is stimulated in a big way today. Suddenly, your mind is full of ideas for a new project or approach. The only problem might be choosing the best idea and running with it! Don't let yourself be slowed down today by indecision. Go with your gut. This shouldn't be difficult for you, since you're a natural self-starter. Just choose a starting point and go for it.



LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

Get out of the house or office today. You're too lighthearted and energetic to stay in! It's fun to laugh, chat or even flirt a little bit. You feel very awake and alert. Using your mind is a pleasure, so work it out as you'd work your muscles. Puzzles and complex concepts present an enjoyable challenge, and working through them helps you communicate your own ideas with greater eloquence.



SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

You're impatient today. Nervous excitement bubbles within you. You're like a wild horse straining at the bit, ready to take off -- but with little sense of direction. Impulsive moves aren't your best bet now. Try to have at least a vague sense of your goal before you make a move. Actually, a vague sense may be as good as it gets now, since you just keep changing your mind!



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

01. Which is the odd one out?

- A. Greywacke
B. Schist
C. Phyllite
D. Siltstone

02. The years 1563, 1593, 1603, 1625, 1636 and 1665 marked waves of what in and around London in England?

- A. Building
B. Recruitment to sail to the Americas
C. Plague epidemics
D. Scientific discoveries

03. Where is the country of Aruba?

- A. On the southwest coast of Africa
B. In the Gulf of Guinea
C. In the Caribbean Sea
D. In the Indian Sea

Answers: 1.A 2.C 3.C



TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

A lively mood sets in today. You welcome phone calls and emails from friends. In fact, you might not get much accomplished, because you're so happy to engage in interactions with other people! If you work in a position that depends on customer service or other communication, you'll do well today. You might learn something new, too. Your mind is more open and agile than usual.



VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

It's hard to focus today. The devil is truly in the details. Why else would they be so confusing? As you move through your day, you might feel as if you're moving one step forward and two steps back -- or just around and around in circles. This isn't an efficient way to get things accomplished, but it may be the best you can do. Simplify your agenda as much as possible.



CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

Your energy is all over the place today, as are your moods. You aren't used to feeling this ungrounded, and it isn't a comfortable state for you. But don't let it get the best of you. Stay as focused as you can. Break up the day into several smaller errands or activities. Trying to stick to just one task will only frustrate you, because it will be harder to complete it efficiently.



GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

Conversation energizes you today. You see the humor in all things. Life itself makes you laugh, and this isn't just a gift from the stars, you know. Today marks the beginning of a new personal cycle for you. The next four weeks hold a lot of surprises, and this is your day to think about how you'd like them to unfold. Move forward with a sense of purpose, Gemini.



LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

Today, you're at your mental best: peppy and outgoing, interested in every person and idea you encounter. You encourage other people to trade ideas. This makes for an interesting, stimulating day, but it also serves another purpose. Talking about your perceptions and comparing them with others' helps you make sense of things. You're building a logical, balanced view of reality, which helps you make better decisions and move forward with confidence.



AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

It's shaping up to be a busy, active day. Your mind is sharp and your perspective accurate. It's a great day to learn something new. Be sure to take notes! You'll want to keep this useful information for later. Your comprehension is at an even higher level than usual. And you're no intellectual slouch, Aquarius! Now all the separate details are coming together in your mind. You can understand everything.



CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

You're most comfortable with a steady paced and routine lifestyle. Today, though, you're a lot more adaptable than you think. The trick is to look for the funny side of things. And there's humor everywhere. Even communication bloopers are comical, if you're willing to laugh instead of scowl. Being able to poke fun at your own foibles is a sign of strength. And you certainly aren't short on that, Cancer.



SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

You can't stand artificial chatter. And inane social pleasantries make your skin crawl! But today, a grin-and-bear-it approach is best. Your agenda is full, and everywhere you go, you encounter someone in the mood for chitchat. Maybe the conversation will turn out to be interesting. You'll never know unless you give it a chance. So open your mind and pretend interest, if you have to. You might be glad you did.



PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

It's easy to get distracted today. Your mind just keeps wandering. If you're just having lunch with a friend, that's okay. It might even make for an interesting and imaginative discussion! But if you're trying to keep up in a business meeting, your level of distraction could make it tough to pay attention. Think of it as a challenge. Just keep refocusing when you realize you've drifted off.

KIDS COLOURING



BOGGLER

L	T	E	P
D	R	I	I
L	N	A	A
E	S	G	I

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

DO YOU SUDOKU?

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

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

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

FIVE-STAR SHOW

Man City win Club World Cup for their fifth title of the year



Manchester City players celebrate with the Club World Cup trophy on Friday

Jeddah - Manchester City etched their name on the Club World Cup trophy in emphatic fashion, crushing Brazilian champions Fluminense 4-0 in Friday's final to claim their fifth title of a staggering 2023. Despite the absence of injured talisman Erling Haaland, Pep Guardiola's men were unstoppable, with Julian Alvarez etching his name in history with the fastest goal ever scored in the tournament's final.

Guardiola hinted that his time at the club might be coming to an end when he said "the job was done" and "there was nothing else to win" after eight years at the helm.

"I have the feeling we've closed a chapter. We've already won all the titles," Guardiola told a news conference. "There's nothing left to win. I have the feeling the job is done, is over."

Guardiola, who arrived at City in 2016, claimed his 16th title with the club. He added he wanted to

write a new chapter with the team where he has 18 months left on his contract.

"Now it's Christmas time, buy another book and start to write it again. The last eight years it's over," he said.

"When I close the chapter it's for eight years of incredible work behind the scenes. Today we celebrate on the plane, tomorrow rest. "The players out there are still hungry and motivated. It's a beautiful, beautiful day."

Captain Kyle Walker added: "To win these five trophies -- for me, the five biggest prizes available to us -- is incredible.

"I am so proud to have been a part of this and I can honestly say it's an honour to play alongside these players; I couldn't ask for better team mates.

"It's really, really hard to win consistently, so to be sat here today having won the (five titles) is really special and a huge achievement."

Alvarez had the travelling City fans cheering 40 seconds after kick off. Keeper Fabio did well to push Nathan Ake's long shot off the post but Alvarez was quick to the rebound, stooping to his hands and knees to chest it home. Nino scored an own goal in the 27th minute, deflecting a shot from Phil Foden sideways into the net.

Foden put the game away in the 72nd minute when he slid to poke in a hard cross across the box from Alvarez.

"It was an unbelievable match," Foden told FIFA.com. "The lads showed not only quality, showed heart and determination. I'm delighted with the outcome.

"This is so important for the club," he added. "I'm delighted. It is massive for the club."

Alvarez completed his brace in the 88th with a strike from just inside the box, prompting delighted City fans to break into

"Blue Moon."

The victory made Guardiola the first manager to guide three different clubs to Club World Cup titles, winning with Barcelona in 2009 and 2011, then Bayern Munich in 2013.

Guardiola stressed to his players this week about the importance of "closing the circle" on the team's trophies, and achieving a "once-in-a-lifetime" goal.

Message received. City never allowed Fluminense, who play the quintessential Brazilian short-passing possession style, to find their stride.

"Fair play to them, I love the way they play with short passes, they didn't make it easy for us," Foden said.

The Brazilians' best chance would have been a penalty that referee Szymon Marciniak initially awarded after Ederson brought down Paulo Henrique Ganso. But technology showed he was offside.

Ake: We wanted to score goals and keep clean sheet

Jeddah - Nathan Ake wasted no time in showcasing Manchester City's intent in their FIFA Club World Cup final showdown with Fluminense.

The clock hadn't yet struck the one-minute mark when the defender glided forward, sized up a shot from 25 yards, and hit the post with sweetly-struck effort. Julian Alvarez was on hand to expertly chest home the rebound and net the fastest goal in the competition's history.

City did not look back after that blistering start, eventually recording a 4-0 win to cement their status as the greatest club team on the planet.

"It feels great, we're so happy," Ake told FIFA. "It's the first one [Club World Cup] for City and the first for ourselves as players. It was a difficult match. Fluminense are a very good team who play very good football. We tried to press them high, but they



Nathan Ake celebrates with Manchester City's this year's trophies

have a lot of quality so sometimes they could get the ball out [despite our pressure].

"We were resilient. We wanted to keep a clean sheet and we wanted to score goals - and we did that. We fought every hard. I'm so happy we managed to win this one and, in total, five trophies this year."

Indeed, the victory capped a

dream 2023 for City, who became the first English team to win the Club World Cup in their debut appearance.

Their 4-0 win over Fluminense was also the joint-biggest in a final at the competition, matching Barcelona's victory against Santos by the same scoreline in 2011.

FIFA

Al Ahly claim bronze after six-goal thriller

Jeddah - Al Ahly claimed the bronze medal at the FIFA Club World Cup Saudi Arabia 2023 following a six-goal thriller against Urawa Reds in the play-off for third place at the Prince Abdullah Al-Faisal Stadium.

Ahly opened the scoring in the 19th minute when Mohamed Hany's 30-yard effort proved too powerful to hold for Shusaka Nishikawa, with his attempted save sending the ball spinning high into the air before being tapped home by the grateful Yasser Ibrahim.

And the Reds' misery was compounded when Atsuki Ito allowed himself to be robbed of possession on the edge of his own box, with Ahmed Koka rolling the ball into Percy Tau's path to smash beyond the helpless Nishikawa.

But the Asian Champions League winners pulled them-



Al Ahly's Yasser Ibrahim (C) celebrates with teammates after scoring against Urawa Reds on Friday

selves back into the contest shortly before the interval, with Jose Kante despatching a curling volley with the outside of his left boot following a poor defensive header from Ali Maaloul.

And they were back on level terms in the 54th minute with Alexander Scholz calmly firing his penalty straight down the middle

after referee Tori Penso pointed to the spot following a VAR review with Mohamed Hany guilty of handball.

However, the topsy-turvy contest was settled with Hany going from villain to hero as his strike on the hour mark deflected off the unfortunate Yoshio Koizumi and into the back of the net.

CLASSIFIEDS

BIRTHDAY WISHES



DARSH NIKHIL

HAPPY BIRTHDAY DACHU!
Loads of love, hugs and kisses!
Zuzu, Achicha, Ammamamma, Achamma, Achachan, Abba, Chitta, Amma and all your friends!

BIRTHDAY WISHES



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MIDFIELD MAESTRO

Al Yahmadi holds key to Oman’s Asian Cup chances

Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia - Four years after making his AFC Asian Cup debut as part of the Oman squad that reached the round of 16 in the UAE, Jameel al Yahmadi returns as a key member of the team, now that he is in the peak years of his career.

Al Yahmadi broke into the forefront of Omani football as a 20-year-old when the nation hosted the 2017 CISM World Football Cup. He was the stand-out performer as Oman reached the final and he scored one of the penalties in the shootout win over Qatar to bring home the title for the first time in Oman’s history.

Since then, the midfielder, playing his trade at domestic minnows Al Shabab at the time, chose a different path than that typical for Omani players, opting to move to Qatar where he has been playing since 2018, representing the likes of Al Wakrah, Al Shahania and Al Markhiya, before moving to his current club Al Kharaitiyat.

After playing at the AFC U23 Asian Cup China 2018, Al Yahmadi’s real start with the Reds was at the 2018 Gulf Cup of Nations in Kuwait, where he was a key player as Oman stunned their regional rivals to win the title for only the second time in their history and the first one away from home, beating the UAE in the final on penalties.

A year later, the midfielder was starting in the AFC Asian Cup as Oman finished third in their group behind Japan and Uzbekistan, advancing to the Round of 16 as one of the best-ranked third placed teams before



Jameel al Yahmadi

Al Yahmadi broke into the forefront of Omani football when they hosted 2017 CISM World Football

losing to IR Iran.

Another impressive international appearance followed in the FIFA Arab Cup Qatar 2021, when Al Yahmadi led his side to pip-ping Iraq and Bahrain to a place in the quarter-finals, where they were beaten by Tunisia 2-1.

Returning to Gulf Cup of Nations action at the start of 2023, Oman and Al Yahmadi nearly re-

peated their 2019 success, only to be denied by a 3-2 extra time defeat to hosts Iraq in Basra in the final.

A creative midfielder, capable of playing out on the right flank where he cuts inside on his stronger left-foot, or centrally where his combination of vision and trickery can unlock defences, Al Yahmadi will be the main at-

tacking outlet for head coach Branko Ivankovic.

With Oman having been dealt a tough group with three-time champions Saudi Arabia, Thailand and Kyrgyz Republic to contend with, Al Yahmadi will need to carry his form from the Qatari Second Division into Asia’s top competition.

AFC



Aston Villa’s Nicolo Zaniolo celebrates after scoring against Sheffield United

Zaniolo rescues Aston Villa with late equaliser

Birmingham, United Kingdom - Substitute Nicolo Zaniolo stepped off the bench to grab a dramatic equaliser in the seventh minute of stoppage time for Aston Villa, who missed the chance to go top of the table as they drew 1-1 with Sheffield United.

Former Villa academy graduate Cameron Archer looked to have fired Sheff Utd to their first Premier League away win of the season with a shock 87th-minute opener, but Zaniolo struck with two minutes left.

It was the first time in 307 days that Villa failed to win at home, while the draw ended their consecutive run of home wins after 15 matches.

Unai Emery switched away from the 3-5-2 formation used against Brentford, and started this match with a back four that had Clement Lenglet partnering Ezri Konsa in central defence, while Lucas Digne returned at left-back.

Sheff Utd made five changes to the team beaten at Chelsea last time out, including Jack Robinson, suspended at Stamford Bridge, taking the captain’s armband from the

absent Anel Ahmedhodzic.

Aston Villa were dominant in the opening stages and had two penalty appeals, one for a foul on Ollie Watkins by Vini-cius Souza, the other for a possible handball, reviewed by VAR.

Moussa Diaby’s stinging shot was palmed away by goalkeeper Wes Foderingham and Konsa nodded over the bar as Villa continued to press for the opening goal.

Another teasing John McGinn corner was headed down to Watkins eight yards out, but Villa’s top scorer was off balance and hooked his effort over.

Indeed such was Villa’s first-half dominance that the Blades completed only seven passes in the final third in the opening 45 minutes. Only Crystal Palace (three vs Manchester City) and Sheff Utd (six vs Liverpool) have completed fewer in the first half of a Premier League match this season.

Villa started the second-half in similar fashion to the first, but continued to be frustrated by Sheff Utd’s well-disciplined 5-4-1 formation.

Tottenham beat Everton to leapfrog Manchester City into top four

London, United Kingdom - Tottenham Hotspur beat Everton 2-1 to move into fourth place, knocking Manchester City down to fifth and ending Everton’s four-match winning league run.

Richarlison and Son Heung-min scored the goals before Andre Gomes set up a nervy finish at Tottenham Hotspur Stadium with his first Premier League goal since February 2019.

The hosts were indebted to goalkeeper Guglielmo Vicario, who made seven saves and somehow kept out Arnaut Danjuma’s effort in the last minute of stoppage time on the goalline.

Spurs took a ninth-minute lead when Richarlison steered in Brennan Johnson’s low cross for his fourth goal in three Premier League matches, following a run of only two in his previous 39 appearances for the club.



Richarlison and Son Heung-min scored Tottenham’s goals

It made Richarlison the 13th different player to score against Everton in the Premier League having previously played for the Toffees in the competition, and the first since Joshua King in October 2021.

Johnson then missed a big chance to double the lead mo-

ments later, but in the 18th minute it was 2-0. Jordan Pickford saves Johnson’s shot in the box but the rebound fell to Son, who finished first time past five Everton bodies for his 11th goal of the season, behind only Erling Haaland’s 14 in the Premier League Golden Boot race.

Substitute Jovic strikes late to help Milan hold bottom club Salernitana

Salerno, Italy - Substitute Luka Jovic snatched a dramatic 90th-minute equaliser for AC Milan to salvage a point from their away clash against Serie A strugglers Salernitana on Friday. The late strike preserved Milan’s third-place with 33 points.

Salernitana, despite languishing at the bottom with nine points, put up a valiant fight and even took the lead twice before Jovic’s last-gasp intervention. The draw provides a flicker of hope for the hosts, while Milan, frustrated by the dropped points, will look to quickly refocus on chasing down their rivals near the top of the table.

“It leaves you with regrets, like so many other times this season,” Milan manager Stefano Pioli said. “The hardest part was to make the breakthrough, which we did and controlled it well. The



AC Milan’s Luka Jovic celebrates after scoring against Salernitana on Friday

we made mistakes that we can’t afford at this level. We were able to pull it back, but it wasn’t the result we wanted.”

Milan opened the scoring in the 17th minute when a free kick found Rafael Leao in the box who

played the ball back across the goal where it was headed home by Fikayo Timori.

Salernitana equalised in the 42nd minute from a corner kick when Federico Fazio rose above Ruben Loftus-Cheek to power

his header past Mike Maignan.

Maignan had only just pulled off a great save from Antonio Candreva which led to the corner, but could do nothing to keep out Fazio’s header and the sides went in level at the break.

The home side took the lead in the 63rd minute, with Antonio Candreva taking the ball to the edge of the area out wide and with Maignan expecting a cross, the shot took him by surprise and beat him at the near post.

“We shouldn’t have allowed Salernitana to take the lead and get back into the game. We still have a lot of work to do to become a great team,” Pioli said.

Salernitana came close to extending their lead just four minutes later but this time Maignan was there to tip over Pasquale Mazzocchi’s shot from outside the area.

Harmanpreet’s double-strike late on day three puts India in the driver’s seat

Mumbai, India - After dominating the Test for a good part of two days, India were finally put under the pump, largely through Tahlia McGrath, who scored her second fifty of the Test, and impressive contributions from Ellyse Perry and Alyssa Healy. However, Harmanpreet Kaur weaved her magic with the ball to pick two wickets late in the day as India had their nose marginally in front at the end of day three in Mumbai.

By the time stumps were called, Australia had reached 233

for 5 in their second innings - effectively 46 for 5 - with a day to go. At the crease were Annabel Sutherland, unbeaten on 12, and Ashleigh Gardner on 7.

Resuming on 376 for 7 in the morning, India added 30 to their overnight score to stretch their lead to 187 before being bowled out 35 minutes into the day. Pooja Vastrakar struck three fours early in the day but fell three short of a maiden Test fifty to Australia’s short-ball plan, caught at deep square-leg, where Kim Garth was halfway in



India captain Harmanpreet Kaur celebrates after taking the wicket of Australia’s Tahlia McGrath

from the rope.

Garth then sneaked through Deepti Sharma’s bat and pad to finish her stay on 78, before Sutherland cleaned up the innings via another short ball that Renuka Singh could only fend to gully. India, however, did manage to reach their highest Test score against Australia.

Beth Mooney came out on a positive note in the second dig. She got going with two sublime fours off Vastrakar and then crashed Renuka through the covers, and largely looked untrou-

bled. Then came a bit of a brain fade that she would want to forget soon. Mooney pushed a full delivery from Sneha Rana to Richa Ghosh at silly point and, possibly thinking she was out caught, wandered out her crease with her back to the fielder. Ghosh sensed an opportunity and hit the stumps direct to find Mooney well short of her crease.

Phoebe Litchfield then attempted a pre-meditated reverse sweep, misjudged the length of the ball, and was cleaned up by Rana for 18. McGrath and Perry

survived a few nervy moments to move to 63 for 2 at lunch, still trailing by 124 runs.

The script, however, changed after lunch. For the first time in the Test, the India bowlers were made to toil. Both McGrath and Perry used their reach well to smother the spin and negate any threat. Perry started the session with a two and a four and then dug in. McGrath had a life on 15 when Rana at first slip failed to take a sharp chance to her left. Apart from that, the duo hardly offered any chances.



Rachel Jones



Christina Quarles



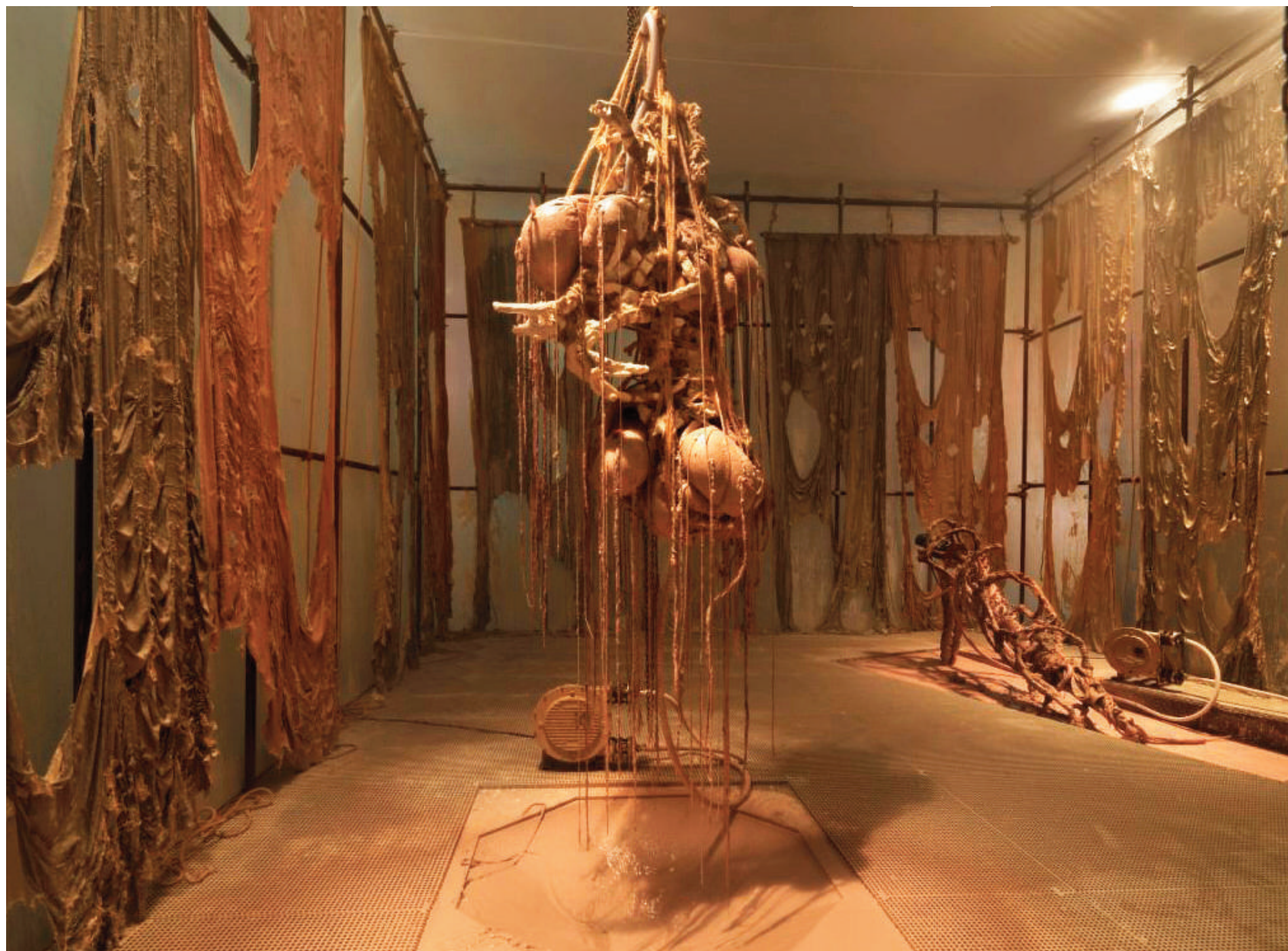
Jesse Darling



Doron Landberg



Mire Lee and (left) her installation



ABSTRACT ATTENTION

IN 2023, THESE EIGHT INTERNATIONAL ARTISTS HAD A BANNER YEAR, WITH INSTITUTIONAL SHOWS, MAJOR PRIZE WINS, AND UNEXPECTED LEAPS AT AUCTION



Mandy el Sayegh

Abstract painting has continued to dominate in 2023, with a host of emerging names making a sizable dent in the market with energetic works inspired by the body and its interior world. Many artists have also successfully embraced an expanded painting practice, working canvases into site-specific, immersive installations, or showing them alongside sculptural and sound elements. This year, psychological themes, unruly bodies, and political collapse have taken centre stage.

There has also been a notable move beyond rigid fine art practices, seeing artists experimenting with other forms such as opera, fashion, set

design, and music. The artists on this list have seen an increase in their profile this year, with institutional shows, in-depth profiles, major prize wins, unexpected leaps on the auction scene, or exciting ventures into new formats. Nengi Omuku's profile has been on the rise for some time, and this summer she signed with US mega gallery Kasmin. The Nigerian artist combines textile and painting, often depicting hazy scenes that speak to both real world and interior, psychological spaces.

Her solo exhibition 'The Dance of People and the Natural World' opened in October at Hastings Contemporary and runs through March 2024. The exhibition explores her deep connection with the natural world, and the sense of peace and serenity that she finds within it, informed by her personal work as a florist and gardener.

Rachel Jones made her mark on the art world in a big way in 2022. But this year, she accelerated beyond it. The British artist designed a BRIT award, appeared in playful luxury brand Loewe's Spring Summer 2024 pre-collection campaign; and staged Hey Maudie, her first opera in collaboration with the Roberts Institute, featuring costumes by fashion designer Roksanda.

In spring, Jones opened her first solo exhibition in China. 'A Shorn Root'

at the Long Museum continued her exploration of raw, bodily abstraction, with mouths and teeth evoking the intertwined interior and exterior experiences of the human form.

Mire Lee was standout at the 2022 Venice Biennale with a hellish structure dripping in sculptural gore and gristle. This year, the Korean artist opened her first solo institutional exhibition in the US, bringing flesh and technology together to chilling effect.

'Black Sun' at New York's New Museum featured a site-specific installation, with Lee's signature visceral bodily decay and kinetic elements. She also showed in the long-running 58th Carnegie International until spring, with Untitled (My Pittsburgh Sculpture) (2022) questioning how we understand or make sense of violence.

Doron Langberg had a long-running solo show at the Rubell Museum for much of 2023, which brought together a vivid selection of canvases that imbue everyday scenes of queer intimacy with heated passion. The Israeli artist often depicts himself or those close to him, from family members to friends and lovers. His work has also captured the art market.

The artist has a strong 2024 coming up, with solo shows planned for Victoria Miro's London and Venice spaces through early spring.

US painter Christina Quarles had

her first institutional exhibition in Germany at Berlin's Hamburger Bahnhof. In 'Collapsed Time', Quarles' paintings were shown alongside pieces from the museum's collection, with gauze panels chopping up the space and adding a further layer of abstraction to the bodies that are already so entangled within her paintings.

In autumn, Quarles inaugurated Pilar Corrias's new Mayfair gallery with a selection of dynamic paintings on walls painted in lilac and deep ochre.

Before the winner had been announced, many critics had already claimed Jesse Darling as their top pick for this year's Turner Prize. In the exhibition currently showing at Towner Eastbourne (through April 14, 2024), the British artist's overwhelming installation captures the broken and chaotic nature of life in the UK.

The work evokes the social impact of Brexit, austerity and hostile immigration policies through mangled crowd control barriers, a maypole hung with police tape, and a precarious roller-coaster track smashing through one of the walls.

Michaela Yearwood-Dan's booming popularity shows no sign of stopping. Her star has been firmly on the rise over the last few years, with her paintings far outpacing their estimates at auction (in spring 2023, Love me nots sold for roughly 12 times its estimate of £60,000, or US\$76,390, at Christie's in London).

In April, Marianne Boesky Gallery opened 'Some Future Time Will Think of Us', a solo show including paintings, ceramics, works on paper, and a site-specific installation, exploring her ongoing interest with optimistic queer spaces, joy, and abundance.

She has appeared in numerous group exhibitions, including at CICA Vancouver ('New British Abstraction'); Gagosian Gallery, London ('Rites of Passage'); and Contemporary Arts Center, Cincinnati ('Ecolo-



Nengi Omuku



Michaela Yearwood-Dan

gies of Elsewhere').

Mandy el Sayegh had three prominent commercial shows this year, at Ropac in Mayfair and Lehmann Maupin's New York and London spaces. Her intense painted installations explore the interior world, and often evoke physical places that invite introspection, from the artist's studio to the analyst's consulting room.

She recently closed her first institutional show in Switzerland with Zurich's Tidy Ocean Foundation. 'In Session' focused on Sigmund Freud's room, with Persian rugs, a take on his famous couch, and painted grids. (Source: Art World)