

ICJ call on Israel to avert genocide welcome: Oman

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman has welcomed International Court of Justice's decision on Israel and stressed the importance of adhering to the ruling.

The ICJ ordered Israel to prevent genocide against Palestinians in Gaza, but stopped short of calling on it to suspend its military campaign in the war-torn enclave, as South Africa had requested.

At a hearing in The Hague, the Netherlands, on Friday, ICJ said Israel must 'take all measures' to limit the death and destruction caused by its military campaign, prevent and punish incitement to genocide, and ensure access to humanitarian aid.

South Africa had accused Israel of violating international laws on genocide and asked the court to order Israel to cease fire in Gaza.

While ICJ did not order Israel to end its war, the ruling represents a blow to Israel, which had hoped the case would be dismissed outright.

"We commend South Africa for its leadership in support of Palestine and welcome the ICJ ruling that Israel must 'prevent and punish' incitement to genocide. We support immediate implementation. Israel must no longer be allowed to contravene



We commend South Africa for its leadership in support of Palestine and welcome the ICJ ruling that Israel must 'prevent and punish' incitement to genocide

H E SAYYID BADR
AL BUSAIDI

international law without consequences," H E Sayyid Badr al Busaidi, Foreign Minister, posted on 'X'.

In a statement, the Foreign Ministry said it had studied the decision of ICJ against Israel's clear, deliberate and widespread violation of its legal and humanitarian obligations to the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide.

It also stressed the need of immediately stopping all forms of Israeli aggression in the Gaza Strip and the rest of the occupied

Palestinian territories. The statement also called for lifting the siege imposed on Gaza to ensure safe entry for all types of humanitarian aid.

Oman also called on the international community to push Israel to stop military operations and acts of genocide against the Palestinian people.

The sultanate expressed its deep appreciation to South Africa for its position, for standing by human rights and justice, and for filing the lawsuit before the court.

Friday's decision related only to South Africa's request for emergency measures, which act like a restraining order while the court considers the full merits of the genocide case, which could take years.

"The catastrophic humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip is at serious risk of deteriorating further before the court renders its final judgment," Judge Joan Donoghue, President of ICJ, said on Friday.

The court voted in favour of six emergency measures, ordering Israel to 'take all measures within its power' to prevent acts which could fall foul of the 1948 Genocide Convention, and to ensure its military does not commit genocidal acts in Gaza.

ICJ's decisions are binding and cannot be appealed, but it has no way of enforcing these.

HOCKEY5S WORLD CUP OMAN 2024



NETHERLANDS CROWNED CHAMPIONS

The Dutch women's team claimed the title of the first-ever FIH Hockey5s World Champions on Saturday evening beating India 7-2, scoring six goals in the first half. India claimed the silver medal, with Poland taking bronze earlier in the evening

FIH president lauds Oman for hosting Hockey 5s World Cup

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Tayeb Ikram, President of International Hockey Federation (FIH), commended Oman, represented by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth and Oman Hockey Association, for its exceptional efforts in organising the historic FIH Hockey5s World Cup 2024. The tournament, which will end on January 31, marks a significant milestone in the development of five-a-side hockey.

Sixteen national women's squads took part in the tournament which ended on Saturday.



Tayeb Ikram

The men's matches will commence on Sunday.

Ikram highlighted the successful conduct of the tournament and the strategic importance of hosting it in Muscat. "The newly constructed complex, boasting in-

ternational standard facilities and services, was completed in a record time, positioning Oman as an upcoming hub for international championships and training camps for elite teams and clubs," he said.

The complex is seen as a crucial element in broadening the reach of hockey in Oman, increasing participation and nurturing talent.

The opening ceremony of the tournament, held in scenic Muttrah near the sea in the lap of towering mountains, was praised for its cultural and artistic diversity. Ikram appreciated the presence of H H

Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth, at the ceremony, reflecting his high regard for the athletes participating from around the globe.

"The World Cup has contributed to the establishment of a national women's hockey team in Oman, enhancing the skills of Omani players through exposure to international teams and players. This interaction has provided a conducive environment for technical skill development and experience sharing," the FIH president said.



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Indonesian cyclist traverses Oman, heads to Mecca promoting peace

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Indonesian cyclist Lintas Negeri is pedalling across the world to spread the message of peace and brotherhood. He embarked on his odyssey from Jakarta on October 18, his final destination is the holy city of Mecca.

Traversing diverse landscapes, Negeri recently cycled through India and is currently exploring the enchanting terrains of Oman. His next stop is



(L to R) Abdul Gaffar, Lintas Negeri and Mohammad Atif (Supplied photo)

United Arab Emirates from where he'll set off on the final leg of his expedition to Saudi Arabia.

He expects to complete his 8,000km ride to Mecca February-end.

"My mission extends beyond any personal accomplishment. I am driven by a profound desire to advocate for world peace and harmony. The hospitality of Oman and its breath-taking beauty have been a highlight of my journey. Visiting Mecca has

been a lifelong dream, and my prayers are dedicated to world peace," Negeri said.

While the journey has presented challenges, Negeri has found support and help along the way. Like Abdul Gaffar and Mohammad Atif in Oman who helped him navigate to local tourist spots and even shared meals with him. "Their generosity reflects the spirit of friendship that I hope to inspire throughout my expedition," he said.



(Supplied photo)

SPF opens registrations for family income support

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Social Protection Fund (SPF) has commenced the registration process for family income support benefit, an initiative aimed at assisting families with low income across all governorates of the sultanate. The registration is initially open to families holding social security cards.

Elaborating on the programme's objectives, SPF stated, 'This initiative provides monthly financial assistance to families with limited income-generating opportunities. The amount of support is determined based on the family's income level and its members' earning capabilities, with the target benefit value tailored to family size and gross income. The primary goal of this benefit is to enhance the living standards of these families.'

Families consisting of husband, wife and non-working children up to 26 years of age are eligible for SPF's family income support. Additionally, non-working daughters who are unmarried

Families consisting of husband, wife and non-working children up to 26 years of age are eligible for SPF's family income support

or divorced, without children and under the age of 40 are also considered. Foster children are included in the family count for determining the benefit amount.

SPF's statement further clarified the calculation of the benefit amount: 'The value of the family support benefit is determined monthly. It is calculated by finding the difference between the target level - the number of family members multiplied by RO115 - and the total family income.'

This initiative reflects SPF's commitment to social welfare and its efforts to provide essential financial support to families in need, thus contributing to overall social stability and economic well-being of citizens.

Changing lives through education, charity

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Chithra Narayan, Director of Middle East Nursery & Development of Mental Skills, was invited to speak at the World Tamil Diaspora Day 2024 organised by the Government of Tamil Nadu earlier this month in Chennai, India to celebrate Tamil heritage.

The keynote address of the two-day event themed Tamil Triumph was delivered by Chief Minister M K Stalin of Tamil Nadu and attended by 1,500 participants from 58 countries, including elected people's representatives from Australia, Malaysia, Mauritius, Singapore, the UK and the USA.

Chithra's presentation was titled 'Contribution of non-resident Tamils in the development of the Tamil language'. "It was a great opportunity to represent the



(Muscat Daily)

Tamil community of Oman. Being one of the speakers from 58 countries is one thing. To talk about my *karmabhoomi* Oman - the land where I work - in my *janmabhoomi* India - the land of my birth - is another thing," she said.

Chithra has been actively involved in promoting Tamil - considered among the oldest languages in the world - including co-writing a book in it titled *H M Sultan Qaboos bin Said - A Farsighted Statesman and a Philanthropist* released by the Ministry of Information in 2012. She presented copies of the book to international delegates at the event in Chennai, raising awareness on Oman and its message of peace.

She considers the inclusion of Tamil as a second language in a few Indian community schools in Oman as a milestone in the efforts for the development and growth of Tamil language and

culture in the sultanate.

Chithra believes inculcating the right value system in young minds at an early age is crucial for the development of sincere and conscientious individuals. Having worked with children of different nationalities in Oman for over three decades - Middle East Nursery is now in its 31st year - Chithra claims her medium of instruction is 'love'.

She has won several awards, including Apex Media's Oman Woman of the Year 2020 in the education category, and continues to participate in charitable and social welfare initiatives in India and Oman. More recently, in November 2023, Chithra received the Global Naari Samman Award 2023 presented by Women Entrepreneurs International Chambers of India in Mauritius for her efforts to change lives of people through education and charity.

Muscat governor reviews education development plans with MoE

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Sayyid Saud bin Hilal al Busaidi, Governor of Muscat, met Dr Madiha bint Ahmed al Shaibani, Minister of Education, on Thursday to discuss efforts to improve educational facilities in the governorate.

The meeting was in line with His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik's Royal directives emphasising purposeful interaction between service unit heads and governors.

The agenda of the meeting included a comprehensive review of the Ministry of Education's (MoE) plans and developmental projects in various educational fields within Muscat governorate. A visual presentation showcased the ministry's objectives and key statistics, highlighting its commitment to



(Supplied photo)

activating partnerships between MoE and the governorates.

The meeting focused on the importance of digital transformation and integration of modern technologies in educational curriculum. It also examined MoE's policies on recruitment and transfer, as well as the pivotal role of the 'Specialist Centre for Professional Training of Teachers' in enhancing teachers'

performance.

Additionally, discussions were held on the ministry's approach to curriculum development, educational evaluation and tracking student performance levels. Developmental projects in Muscat governorate, aligned with the 10th Five-Year Plan, were also reviewed, including improvements in school transportation and aspects of

educational expenditure.

The meeting was attended by Ahmed bin Mohammed al Humaidi, Chairman of Muscat Municipality, walis and officials representing the governorate and MoE, underscoring the collaborative efforts to advance the educational sector in Muscat and reflecting a shared commitment to fostering an environment conducive to learning.



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Conversion of Salalah Beach Resort SAOG to a sole proprietor company

This is to inform the public at large that, following the compulsory acquisition of the entire share capital of Salalah Beach Resort SAOG (Company) by Golden Sands Hotel Co. LLC, it has now been resolved, at an extraordinary general meeting held on Wednesday, 17 January 2024, to convert the Company to a sole proprietor company pursuant to Chapter 7 of Part 4 of the Commercial Companies Law (promulgated by Royal Decree 18/2019).

The Company will take the necessary measures to update its legal form with the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion and any other authority, as required.

If you have any questions or objections please do not hesitate to contact **Al Yaqdhan Al Busaidi on 24573073 or email at yaqdhan.al-busaidi@dentons.com**

Yours sincerely,

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MTCIT invites bids for 5 new bridges on Suhar-Buraimi road

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MTCIT) has extended the tender date for construction of five bridges on the Suhar-Buraimi road.

The last date for submitting bids has been extended from January 15 to February 12.

In a statement, MTCIT said it announced a tender for the construction of five bridges on the Suhar-Buraimi road in cooperation with the Secretariat General of Tender Board for companies registered with the Tender Board, graded as 'Excellent' and spe-

cialised in construction and maintenance of ports, roads, bridges, railways and dams.

MTCIT officially opened traffic on the Wadi Afful Bridge built at a cost of RO3.2mn in the wilayat of Rakhyut in Dhofar last week.

The project aims to safely connect the existing road through Wadi Afful after it was damaged by floods and hurricanes. It is in line with a strategic tourism plan for Dhofar.

The scope of the project work included asphalt paving of approximately 1.3km, including 300m of the bridge - 19m high above the wadi - in addition to excavation work, side protections and construction of retaining walls.

Our Correspondent

Muscat

A group of 400 people undertook an adventure walk on a 14km trail last week, in a bid to revive the tradition and lifestyle of their ancestors.

The trip, named 'For the love of His Majesty the Sultan and the Sultanate', was organised by Al Qadsiya Adventure and Hiking Team in Al Ain village, in the wilayat of Samail in Dakhliyah.

Speaking to *Muscat Daily*, Salim Salman al Mahrooqi, head of the Al Qadsiya team, informed that the participants of this trip came in 20 different groups from various governorates.

"The hike, which began at 7.30am, was a testament to the



The participants of this trip came in 20 different groups from various governorates. The hike was a testament to their commitment to health, adventure and domestic tourism

SALIM AL MAHROOQI

participants' commitment to health, adventure and domestic tourism," he added.

The hike took four hours to complete, traversing from Ain Ain through several areas in Samail and back to the starting point.

According to Mahrooqi, the

hike was meticulously planned with a detail planning of the participants various activities - from studying the location and weather conditions to ensuring the safety and suitability of the number of participants. This attention to detail makes for a fulfilling and safe experience for participants.

"It also included several activities such as reciting poems - Aazi, which embodies the originality of the past with popular songs. Participants made traditional painting depicting the old way of living," said Mahroogi.

"The idea of this trip had been executed to revive the lifestyle and practices of our forefathers. It was in a way tracing the footsteps of our grandparents."

The participants attempted

to experience the struggles and sufferings that their ancestors had to face as they traversed through different terrains, drinking water from wadis, fighting adverse weather conditions in summers and winters, he said.

Al Qadsiya Adventure and Hiking Team's annual plan includes many events to bolster domestic tourism and promote the spirit of adventure.

However, its commitment extends beyond adventure. The team engages in community activities, including clean up drives across various wilayats, demonstrating its dedication to voluntarism, Mahrooqi pointed out.

"We urge citizens and residents to participate in the group's upcoming activities which foster a collective spirit of adventure," he added.

Our Correspondent

Muscat

Nama Water Services has significantly contributed to the growth of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) by allocating over RO40mn worth of contracts to SMEs in 2023, a senior official said.

The initiative is part of a broader effort to support SMEs through various programmes, notably the In-Country Value Programme, aimed at creating jobs, enhancing skills, reducing import dependence, and fostering the development of SMEs.

Dr Barakat bin Amin al Busaidi, Senior Director of Supply Chain Management at Nama Water Services, detailed the company's



Dr Barakat bin Amin al Busaidi

efforts, while informing that the company “surpassed the milestone of RO40mn in contracts and purchases designated for SMEs in 2023”.

A key aspect of this support, Nama Water stated, includes awarding tenders and purchase orders to SMEs and ensuring that a portion of work on major pro-



jects is subcontracted to them.

Additionally, the company also holds training programmes for the SMEs to help them develop the skills needed for professionally preparing and submitting tenders. Busaidi pointed out that in continuing with its mission, Nama Water provided support to Riyadh cardholders among the

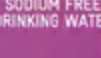
SMEs. "Main contractors are encouraged to allocate at least 10% of project work to these enterprises, totalling over RO11mn in 2023."

He also shed light on the company's training initiatives for SMEs. These cover areas like health and safety, tender preparation and submission, and tech-

nical skills for water and sewage network projects. In 2023, three tenders worth over RO400,000 were awarded for water and sewage network projects.

Busaidi spoke about variety of works and projects assigned to SMEs, including water connections, meter installations, and sewage and treated water connections for private and government facilities. "Leak detection and transportation and customs clearance services are also part of the allocated projects."

Busaidi revealed that Nama Water would like to raise the bidding ceiling from RO50,000 to RO500,000 in 2024. The company also intends to form a committee to train and develop SMEs in inspection fields.



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Our Correspondent

Dhofar

The Municipal Council of Dhofar governorate met on Thursday under the auspices of H H Sayyid Marwan Turki al Said, Governor of Dhofar and the Chairman of the Municipal Council.

The council discussed matters related to the development of services and municipal tasks

in various wilayats of the governorate and approved the minutes and recommendations of the council's seventh meeting.

The meeting looked into the Health and Environmental Affairs Committee's about proposals to keep pace with requirements of rapid development taking place in the governorate.

In this context, the council

was briefed about the need to expand the infrastructure of the sewage system and extend the sewage network to old residential neighbourhoods and heritage areas in the governorate, an official informed.

The council also discussed the outcome of its Legal Committee's meeting with the authorities concerned, in addition to related proposals.



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The Conditions:

- 1- **Collection of Tenders:** Interested, specialized companies and establishments registered under grade 3 and above (in C.R) with minimum of 3 years' experience in the same field. Bidders can collect the tender documents from the procurement department by sending a copy of the payment slip to procurement@almaha.com.om
- 2- **Bank Guarantee:** The bidder should enclose a bank guarantee issued by any bank in the Sultanate of Oman for an amount equivalent to (1%) of the tender value, with a validity of (90) Days from the last date of submission and addressed to Al Maha Petroleum Products Marketing Company SAOG.
- 3- **Offer Submission:** Tender bid should be submitted a sealed envelope and addressed to the **Chairman of Tender Committee**, Al Maha Petroleum Products Marketing SAOG marked with tender number and subject. Other marks or any reference must not be printed outside the envelope. The exterior of the envelope containing the tender document must not reveal the identity of the bidder.
- 4- **Submission Location:** The bid should be deposited in the tender box at Al Maha Petroleum Products Marketing SAOG head office located in Ghala before 01:00 PM on the submission date.
- 5- Any bid received after the specified date or if it does not meet the conditions will not be considered.
- 6- Each bid shall be signed and stamped with the signature of the authorized person.
- 7- Al Maha Petroleum Products Marketing Co SAOG reserves the right to accept, reject or cancel the tender without giving any reasons.
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Sohar Industrial City receives 55 investment applications in 2023

Sohar – Sohar Industrial City, affiliated with the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn), witnessed a surge in investment interest throughout 2023, receiving a total of 55 new investment applications.

Out of these, 45 projects have been localised, earmarking vast areas exceeding 461,000 square meters for future development.

Abdullah bin Ahmed al Mayasi, Director General of Sohar Industrial City, said, "In 2023, the Lada'in plastic industries complex inked five agreements, boosting the total investment in the complex to around RO22mn. Presently, seven projects are underway,

covering areas totaling 80,000 square meters, and employing approximately 200 workers in the initial stage."

Mayasi also affirmed that Madayn has achieved remarkable progress in completing the seventh phase development project of the city. The completion rate for this phase stands at an impressive 98.6%. Notable features of the project include a 32-kilometer road network with lighting poles, a drinking water network, a sewage network, a wastewater treatment plant with a capacity of 2,000 cubic meters, a rain drainage network, a flood protection wall, an irrigation network, and two water supply tanks with a total capac-

ity of 2,700 cubic meters.

The Masar Service Center in Sohar Industrial City serves as an investment facilitation hub, offering a unified system to streamline procedures for investors. The center aims to expedite the acquisition of all necessary approvals, permits, and licenses for investment projects in a single station within a specified timeframe.

This initiative by Madayn seeks to establish an integrated system of services, providing investors with the necessary tools to create added value and fostering an attractive business environment for investments in Oman.

ONA

Omani banks' 2023 profits surge 18.6% to RO453mn

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The combined net profits of Omani banks listed on the Muscat Stock Exchange witnessed a robust growth of 18.6%, reaching RO453.5mn in 2023 compared to the previous year's RO382.3mn.

According to a report published by Oman News Agency, the banking sector in the sultanate benefited from various positive economic developments in the past year. These included an increase in GDP growth, foreign trade, investment volume, government revenues, and government spending, all of which contributed to the recovery of various economic sectors.

Preliminary financial results of Omani banks revealed a profit increase for all seven banks listed on the Muscat Stock Exchange.

Bank Muscat, the largest banking institution in the sultanate, reported the highest net profit at RO212.4mn for the year 2023, compared to RO200.7mn in 2022. Sohar International Bank secured the second position with a net profit of RO70.3mn in 2023, a notable rise from RO34.9mn net profit posted in 2022. This sharp increase in Sohar International



Total assets of Omani banks listed on Muscat Stock Exchange rose to RO38.8bn at the end of 2023, marking a 14.9% growth from RO33.7bn at the end of 2022

Bank's 2023 profit can be attributed to its acquisition of HSBC Bank Oman, as announced in 2022 and finalised in mid-2023.

On the other hand, National Bank of Oman (NBO) reported a net profit of RO58mn for 2023, reflecting a 20.3% increase from the previous year's RO48.2mn.

Bank Dhofar's net profit also witnessed growth, reaching RO38.7mn in 2023 compared to approximately RO34.2mn in the previous year.

Oman Arab Bank's net profit increased from about RO16.2mn in 2022 to RO20.5mn in 2023, while Bank Nizwa recorded a 13% growth in net profit, rising

from RO15.05mn in 2022 to RO17.02mn in 2023.

The total assets of Omani banks listed on the Muscat Stock Exchange rose to RO38.8bn at the end of last year, marking a 14.9% growth from RO33.7bn at the end of 2022.

In terms of assets, Bank Muscat led the list with its assets increasing from RO12.7bn in December 2022 to RO13.6bn in December 2023.

Sohar International Bank secured the second position with assets amounting to RO6.7bn at the end of 2023, compared to RO4.1bn at the end of 2022.

Oil prices rise 4% last week over demand hopes in US, China

Muscat – Oil prices increased more than 4% during last week ending January 26, reaching two-month highs over potential disruptions in the Red Sea and greater demand hopes in the world's largest oil-consuming countries, the US and China.

International benchmark Brent crude traded at \$82.02 per barrel on Friday, increasing by over 4.4% relative to the closing price of \$78.56 a barrel on Friday last week.

West Texas Intermediate (WTI), the US benchmark, traded at \$76.67 a barrel at the same time on Friday, for a rise of around 4.6% from last Friday's session that closed at \$73.25 per barrel.

Both benchmarks started the week on a negative note over weak demand woes in the world's largest fuel consumer, the US, as strong winter storms killed several people in many US states, destroyed buildings and cut power. Authorities have warned of the possibility of another bout of snow and ice sweeping in for the weekend.

However, these concerns were eased, and prices rebounded later on Thursday to two-month highs, with data revealing strong demand in the US and due to escalating tension in the Middle East.

According to data released by the Energy Information Administration (EIA) on Wednesday, US commercial crude oil inventories decreased by around 9.2mn barrels to 420.7mn barrels, compared to the market expectation of a fall of around 3mn barrels.

Meanwhile, an official from the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) on Thursday warned against the negative impacts of the ongoing crisis in the Red Sea on global trade.

"We are very concerned that the attacks on Red Sea shipping are adding tensions and costs to



Global oil benchmark Brent crude traded at \$82.02 per barrel on Friday, increasing by over 4.4% during the week

global trade," Jan Hoffmann, chief of the UNCTAD Trade Facilitation Section, told reporters virtually.

The Red Sea route and the Suez Canal are 'critical' for global trade flows, Hoffmann said, adding, "The Suez Canal handles approximately 12% to 15% of global trade. For container shipping, it's even more important as 20% of the world's container trade goes through the Suez Canal."

On Monday, US and British forces said they carried out strikes against eight Houthi targets in Yemen in response to the group's attacks in the Red Sea.

Following the strikes, Yemen's Houthis vowed to retaliate, as Houthi military spokesman Yahya Saree said: "These assaults won't go unpunished."

Demand hopes in China, the world's largest importer and second-largest oil consumer, also helped price upticks as the country ramped up efforts to revive its economy, which in turn drove up oil prices.

Agencies

MENA green bond and sukuk issuances hit new annual record of \$24bn in 2023

Dubai, UAE – Annual issuances of green social, sustainable, and sustainability-linked bonds (GSSB) in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) hit a new record in 2023 of approximately \$24bn, according to data from Bloomberg's Capital Markets League Tables.

The 155% increase was driven primarily by growth in the UAE and Saudi Arabia, which together accounted for 77% of total regional issuances.

The UAE led regional green bond league tables in 2023, with sales reaching \$10.7bn, up nearly 170% and accounting for approximately 45% of regional totals. The year in which the UAE hosted COP28 was notable for the large number of debut sustainable debt issuances from the country's corporates and government entities, which amounted to \$7.95bn in total.

The 11 debut green issuers included bonds or sukuk from DP World sukuk (\$1.5bn), Sharjah



government (\$1bn), TAQA (\$1bn), Emirates NBD (\$750mn), Masdar (\$750mn), Mubadala (\$750mn), Aldar sukuk (\$500mn), Commercial Bank of Dubai (\$500mn) and Five Holdings (\$350mn), in addition to green Sukuk from Dubai Islamic Bank (\$750mn) and Abu Dhabi Islamic Bank (\$500mn)

Saudi Arabia accounted for 32% of total regional volumes, up 69% year-on-year. Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund was the region's largest issuer in 2023, driven by issuances of \$5.5bn in February 2023. Other notable Saudi issuers were Saudi National Bank (\$60.69mn), Saudi Electricity Company

(\$1.2bn) and Al Rajhi Bank (\$1bn).

2023 was a milestone year for green Sukuk as Islamic issuances accounted for more than a quarter of MENA totals for the first time. Green Sukuk totalling approximately \$6.5bn were issued in the MENA region in 2023, representing more than half of all

global green Sukuk, with notable sales by ADIB (\$500mn), DP World (\$1.5bn), First Abu Dhabi Bank (approximately \$350mn), Majid Al Futtaim (\$500mn), and Aldar (\$500mn).

Venty Mulani, Data Specialist - Sustainable Fixed Income, Bloomberg LP, said, "2023 was a record-breaking year for green bonds in the MENA region. A wave of UAE corporates made their debuts as the country geared up to host to COP28, while Saudi Arabia accounted for approximately a third of total regional sales. As COP moves from the MENA region for the first time in two years, the direction of the green bond market in 2024 will be shaped by developments in borrowing costs, regulations, and taxonomies."

Bloomberg's league tables are a one-stop shop for constant and timely access to the most comprehensive information available on capital markets representation.

India's Akasa Air orders over 300 CFM engines

New Delhi, India – In conjunction with the state visit of French President Emmanuel Macron to India, Akasa Air and CFM International announced an agreement to purchase more than 300 CFM LEAP-1B engines to power 150 Boeing 737 MAX airplanes, the sale of which was announced last week.

The agreement by Akasa Air, India's newest airline, also included spare engines and a service contract.

The Mumbai-based operator launched its operations in August 2022 and had previously ordered a total of 76 LEAP-1B-powered 737-8 aircraft, of which 22 are currently in ser-



vice. The carrier launched its first commercial flight on August 7, 2022, to support the growing civil aviation demand across India.

"This significant, long-term

agreement is testament to the confidence that CFM International has in Akasa Air. Continuing to partner with CFM as our engine maintenance provider not only reaffirms our focus on

operational reliability but equally underscores Akasa Air's relentless pursuit of world-class safety," said Vinay Dube, founder and CEO of Akasa Air.

"With CFM as our long-term engine maintenance provider, we remain confident in our path to becoming one of the top 30 leading airlines in the world by the turn of this decade," he added.

This new order grows CFM's footprint in India, with more than 400 CFM-powered aircraft in service and 2,500 LEAP engines in the backlog.

"Our customers, including Akasa, are seeing 15 to 20 percent better fuel efficiency with

their LEAP-powered fleets and it has the highest reliability and daily utilisation rates in this thrust class," said Gael Meheust, president and CEO of CFM International.

CFM International is a Franco-American aircraft engine manufacturer. The company is a joint venture between GE Aerospace and Safran Aircraft Engines and is headquartered in Cincinnati, Ohio.

"Today's order will continue to bring these benefits to Akasa and support their continued growth, as well as play an important role in India's economic development," Meheust added.

ANI



Transits through Suez Canal down 42% in past 2 months: UN

Istanbul, Turkey - Weekly transits going through the Suez Canal decreased by an estimated 42% over the last two months, the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) said in a statement on Friday.

The intergovernmental organisation within the UN Secretariat said it is concerned over the rising disruptions in global trade, especially due to geopolitical tensions affecting shipping in the Black Sea, recent attacks on shipping in the Red Sea affecting the Suez Canal, and the impact of climate change on the Panama Canal.

"The recent attacks on Red Sea shipping, coupled with existing geopolitical and climate-related challenges, have given rise to a complex crisis affecting key global trade routes," it said.

"The crisis in the Red Sea, marked by Houthi-led attacks disrupting shipping routes, has added another layer of complexity. Major players in the shipping industry have temporarily suspended Suez transits in response. Notably, container ship transits per week have plummeted by 67% compared to a year ago, with container carrying capacity, tanker transits, and gas carriers experiencing significant declines," it added.

The organisation said avoiding the Suez Canal causes increased expenses in a number of ways, such as extended cargo travel distances, higher trade costs, rise in food and energy prices, and a surge in greenhouse gas emissions.

"The price per day of shipping and insurance premiums have surged, compounding the overall cost of transit. Additionally, ships are compelled to travel faster to compensate for detours, burning more fuel per mile and emitting more CO2, further exacerbating environmental concerns," it explained.

UNCTAD noted that maritime transportation is responsible for more than 80% of the global movement of goods in international trade.

Anadolu Agency

US economy grows 3.3% in Q4, faster than expected

Josh Schafer

The US economy grew at a faster rate than expected in the fourth quarter of 2023, capping off a year many expected to end in recession with one final economic surprise.

The Bureau of Economic Analysis's advance estimate of fourth quarter US gross domestic product (GDP) showed the economy grew at an annualized pace of 3.3% during the period, faster than consensus forecasts. Economists surveyed by Bloomberg estimated the US economy grew at an annualised pace of 2% during the period.

The reading came in lower than third quarter GDP, which was revised down to 4.9%. For the year 2023, the US economy grew at an annualised rate of 2.5%, up from 1.9% in 2022.

The GDP release highlights the resilience of the US consumer despite ongoing concerns of a slowdown. It's the latest in a string of economic data releases that show the US economy ended 2023 on solid ground as investors closely watch to see if the Fed can achieve its vaunted "soft landing," in which inflation returns to the 2% goal without a severe economic downturn.

Economic output hit its highest levels in seven months in January, according to the latest S&P Flash PMI release. A recent reading on consumer spending came in higher than expected with December's retail sales number.



This file photo shows cranes for unloading shipping containers stand at the Port of Los Angeles, California

For the full year 2023, the US economy grew at an annualised rate of 2.5%, up from 1.9% recorded in 2022

And the labor market hasn't shown severe signs of cooling off, with the latest reading of

weekly jobless claims hitting its lowest level since September 2022.

"The economy [fared] noticeably better than expected in the final three months of last year, reinforcing our view that market expectations for the Federal Reserve to cut interest rates as early as March is premature," Oxford Economics chief US economist Ryan Sweet wrote in a note to clients on Thursday.

But Sweet did note that the release had some positives for investors hoping Fed rate cuts are coming sooner rather than later. The positive growth has combined with further inflation declines, setting the stage for a potential soft landing. The "core" Personal Consumption Expenditures Index showed prices increased at a 2.0% rate compared to the prior quarter, in line with the Fed's 2% goal for inflation.

"The Fed will have to ease unless they have very good reasons to think the economy is about to re-strengthen or inflation somehow will rebound," Pantheon Macroeconomics Ian Shepherdson wrote in a note to clients. "We doubt those arguments can be made with confidence, so we expect the first easing in March or May."

Yahoo Finance



Red Sea crisis: Shipping rates set to rise further in February

Oslo, Norway - Early indications suggest ocean freight shipping rates are set to increase further in early February amid the ongoing Red Sea crisis, according to data released by Xeneta.

The Xeneta ocean freight rate benchmarking platform calls upon more than 400mn crowd-sourced data points and the latest projection is based on rates already received from customers for the first week in February. While the situation remains volatile and subject to change, the newly-released data is best indication of where the market is headed, according to a press statement issued by Xeneta.

From the Far East to Mediterranean, market average short term rates are set to increase 11% by February 2 to stand at \$6,507 per FEU. This is an increase of 243% since the Red Sea crisis escalated in mid December.

Rates from the Far East to North Europe are set to rise by 8% by February 2, with a market average of \$5,106 per FEU. This is an increase of 235% since mid December.

The biggest increase in rates is from the Far East into US East Coast.

On this trade, the newly-released data suggests an increase of 17% by February 2 to bring the average short term rate up to \$6,119 per FEU. This is an increase of 146% since mid December.

Peter Sand, Xeneta Chief Analyst, said, "Carriers are trying to

Sand said, "The Red Sea crisis is causing a capacity issue rather than a demand issue, as we saw during the pandemic. It is the massive uncertainty in the market which has brought imbalance and instability. During times like this you can only keep your cool if you are well informed."

Carriers are trying to readjust services to make up for the additional sailing time around the Cape of Good Hope. They are cutting journeys short, missing port calls and increasing sailing speed

PETER SAND

readjust services to make up for the additional sailing time around the Cape of Good Hope. For example, they are cutting journeys short, missing port calls and increasing sailing speed.

"However, despite this, the early data from Xeneta suggests rates will continue to rise as we head into February."

While the market is set to rise further, there are early signs of factors which could see rates begin to fall again following the Lunar New Year peak.

"We are hearing from Xeneta customers that carriers are now no longer offering the most expensive premium services which guarantee freight will be shipped during periods of extreme pressure on available capacity."

"This may suggest there is a waning demand for this level of service because the urgency is fading from the shipper side, or perhaps it is because capacity is available after all, despite the chaos caused by carriers pausing transits through the Suez Canal."



NATIONAL BISCUIT INDUSTRIES LTD. SAOG

DIRECTORS REPORT

Company performance from 1st April, 2023 to 31st December, 2023

The Company has recorded sales of RO 12,582,904 for the nine months period ending 31st December, 2023 as against RO 10,706,316 in the corresponding period of last year thereby registering growth of 18%.

The gross profit earned during the period of nine months is RO 1,930,593 against RO 1,075,856 in the corresponding period of last year thereby registering growth of 79%.

The net profit for the nine months period ending 31st December, 2023 stood at RO 409,365 as against net loss of RO 50,665 for the corresponding period in the previous year.

Future Outlook

The company's reach to the end consumers in GCC market has improved which has helped to grow the GCC sales. The management is focusing to strengthen the distribution network across all operating markets for achieving the targets of the company. Wafers and Snacks business across GCC will be further focused on through consumer activations to drive consumer preference towards our brands.

The company has developed a mid-premium range of new cookies, which will be launched in our operating markets over the next few months. This will help in strengthening our portfolio in most markets.

Nooh Bin Mohammed Al Zidjaly
Chairman

UNAUDITED BALANCE SHEET AS ON 31ST DEC 2023

ASSETS	31-Dec-23 RO	31-Dec-22 RO
Non-current assets		
Property, plant and equipment	6,484,466	6,424,132
Intangible Assets	164,539	117,406
Right of Use assets	250,349	272,907
Advance for Capital Goods	43,436	96,206
Total non-current assets	6,942,790	6,910,651
Current assets		
Inventories	2,411,665	2,492,322
Trade and other receivables	5,292,300	4,291,298
Wakala deposits	-	755,260
Bank balances and cash	217,512	121,872
Total current assets	7,921,477	7,660,752
Total assets	14,864,267	14,571,403

EQUITY AND LIABILITIES

Equity attributable to equity holders of the Company		
Share capital	1,000,000	1,000,000
Legal reserve	333,333	333,333
Retained earnings	6,343,435	5,992,431
Total Shareholders' equity	7,676,768	7,325,764
Non-current liabilities		
End of Service Benefits	507,358	432,852
Deferred tax liability	88,948	45,909
Lease Liabilities	285,881	305,354
Total non-current liabilities	882,187	784,115
Current liabilities		
Trade and other payables	5,955,165	5,587,756
Provision for Income tax	83,667	10,441
Current Portion of Lease Liabilities	19,693	15,891
Bank Borrowings	246,787	847,436
Total current liabilities	6,305,312	6,461,524
Total liabilities	7,187,499	7,245,639
Total equity and liabilities	14,864,267	14,571,403

Net assets per share 7.677 7.326

UNAUDITED STATEMENT OF PROFIT OR LOSS FOR THE PERIOD ENDED 31ST DEC 2023

	9 Months 31-Dec-23 RO	9 Months 31-Dec-22 RO
INCOME		
Sales	12,582,904	10,706,316
Cost of sales	(10,652,311)	(9,630,460)
Gross profit	1,930,593	1,075,856
Other Income	23,448	71,979
	1,954,041	1,147,835
EXPENSES		
Selling and distribution	(846,846)	(645,222)
General and administration	(583,276)	(511,838)
Directors' meeting attendance fees	(12,700)	(14,200)
Finance costs	(29,904)	(36,895)
	(1,472,726)	(1,208,155)
Profit/(Loss) before tax	481,315	(60,320)
Income Tax	(71,950)	9,655
Profit/(Loss) for the Period	409,365	(50,665)
Attributable to:		
Equity shareholders of the Company	409,365	(50,665)
Earnings/(Loss) per share	0.409	(0.051)

Meethaq receives Oman's Most Trusted Brand Award in Islamic banking for 3rd consecutive year

For its commitment to excellence in the Islamic banking sector, Meethaq Islamic Banking from Bank Muscat has recently won the prestigious Oman's Most Trusted Brand Award in the Islamic banking category for the third consecutive year.

The award, instituted by Apex Media, was presented by H E Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, to Sami Bait Rashid, Assistant General Manager, Meethaq Personal Banking. The ceremony took place at the Sheraton Oman Hotel, Muscat, in the presence of Saleh Zakwani, Executive Chairman of Apex Media, and was attended by various distinguished guests, including high-profile individuals such as their Highnesses, Excellencies, chairmen, managing directors, CEOs, and other senior officials.

The Oman's Most Trusted Brand Award recognises outstanding brands in the sultanate based on public feedback, serving as a testament to the public's confidence in brands that have solidified their position as leaders in the minds of customers.

Reflecting on the momentous ceremony, Sami Bait Rashid, assistant general manager,



Meethaq Personal Banking, expressed his gratitude to Apex Media for the significant recognition granted to Meethaq Islamic Banking.

"It triggers immense pride that Meethaq has received the esteemed Oman's Most Trusted Brand Award, validating its unparalleled standing as a trailblazer in Islamic banking sphere in the sultanate," he said.

Meethaq Islamic Banking, the assistant general manager said, provides innovative Islamic banking products and services, driven by its robust customer-centric approach, resulting in remarkable growth over the past decade.

"We would like to extend our appreciation to our valued customers for their trust and unwavering confidence in Meethaq, as they continue to be integral partners in our ongoing journey to establish new benchmarks in the Islamic banking sector in the region."

Meethaq Islamic Banking upholds its position as the most preferred provider of Sharia-compliant services and solutions in Oman. It delivers a comprehensive suite of sharia'a-compliant retail, corporate, and wholesale banking products and services.

Moreover, Meethaq has successfully established the largest network of branches across the sultanate, with over 28 branches including 14 branches in Muscat and over 14 in the other governorates. To ensure enhanced accessibility of banking services and solutions, Meethaq Islamic Banking offers its customers access to a dedicated network of over 50 ATMs/CDMs while also providing them with free access to over 820 ATMs and CDMs of Bank Muscat, indicating that the diverse suite of Meethaq's banking services and facilities are obtainable and accessible for a wide base of customers.

In recognition of its pioneering positioning in the Islamic banking landscape, Meethaq Islamic Banking has been recognised for its leadership stance several times by regional and global highly ranked institutions. Over the past few consecutive years, Meethaq received the Leading Islamic Banking Brand Award from *The Banker*, besides multiple prestigious awards. With the continuous regional and global recognitions, Meethaq Islamic Banking is committed to upholding its pioneering leadership in the sultanate's banking industry.



ahli Islamic opens first Islamic bank in Quriyat

ahli Islamic bank its latest branch in Quriyat, which is considered to be the first Islamic bank in the wilayat coming up with premium sharia'a-compliant banking products and services, catering to a diverse and discerning customer base.

The grand opening was conducted under the esteemed patronage of Sheikh Tala bin Saif al Hosni, wali of Quriyat.

Nestled in the iconic town of Quriyat, renowned for its rich history and breathtaking scenery, the new ahli Islamic branch will serve as a vital hub for facilitating Sharia-compliant financial services. The Bank is committed to meeting the evolving needs of a growing customer base, capitalising on the burgeoning opportunities in the region.

With a host of tourism projects coming up in and around

Quriyat, complemented by the increasing awareness of Islamic banking, this new branch underscores ahli Islamic's mission to provide exceptional value to its shareholders by being accessible to people even in the far-flung areas of the sultanate.

Noora Sultan, AGM - Head of Retail Banking at ahli Islamic, expressed gratitude during the opening ceremony. "It is our immense pleasure to announce our venture into the ever-pleasant locale of Quriyat. Our new branch promises to provide innovative sharia'a-compliant banking solutions in a state-of-the-art environment. Our experienced team is dedicated to exceeding expectations of individuals and businesses alike. As we continue to evolve, our expanding network of branches is set to make a lasting impact on the banking industry."

Sohar International partners with Oman InFocus to unveil hidden treasures of Arabian deserts

Reaffirming its commitment to socio-economic development, Sohar International has announced its collaboration with Oman InFocus to sponsor a groundbreaking documentary.

The documentary will feature a new 3-part series titled *Arabia Untamed*, aiming to showcase Arabian deserts and explore the past through rare archives, local folklore, and bold expeditions.

The series will capture the present with contemporary adventurers, ecologists, and unique wildlife, finally glimpsing the future. Signing the agreement on behalf of Sohar International was Mazin Mahmood al Raisi, Chief Marketing Officer at Sohar International, with Oman InFocus represented by Maisa al Hooti, Managing Director of Oman InFocus.

Elaborating on Sohar International's commitment to the nation, Ahmed al Musalmi, Chief Executive Officer of Sohar International commented, "At Sohar International, it is within our strategic outlook to sponsor initiatives that promote environmental sustainability and place this beautiful nation on the international world map for wildlife tourism and conservation efforts.

"With international expertise and a local flavour, the potential



A documentary - featuring a new 3-part series titled Arabia Untamed - aims to showcase deserts and explore the past through rare archives, local folklore, and bold expeditions

outcome of this initiative will not only showcase the diverse abundant wildlife Oman has to offer but will also provide an avenue for young Omanis to pursue their passions in exploration, filmmaking, conservation, and beyond, thereby providing economic impetus to the country."

The final films will take viewers on an epic journey of discovery, blending history, culture, and nature, and are expected to be completed in 2025.

Packed with impressive wildlife footage, it aims to offer the audience an extraordinary exploration of the sultanate's fascinating scenery.

Commenting on the project and the association with Sohar International, Maisa al Hooti, Managing Director of Oman InFocus, highlighted the importance of collaboration with renowned international channels and the support of both government and private institutions.



Oman International Hospital opens modern stroke unit

Oman International Hospital proudly announces the grand opening of its Stroke Unit, a dedicated facility aimed at revolutionizing stroke care and improving patient outcomes. Designed to meet the growing demand for specialized stroke care, this state-of-the-art facility represents an important milestone in the hospital's continued efforts to provide superior medical care.

The Stroke Unit is equipped with the latest diagnostic and treatment tools to ensure rapid and high-quality intervention following a stroke in the critical moments following the accident. The unit offers 24/7 monitoring capabilities as well as specialized rehabilitation services to address the full spectrum of stroke care, including acute intervention and long-term recovery.

Dr Amal al Hashmi, Senior Consultant Vascular Neurologist at OIH, expressed her enthusiasm for the new Stroke Unit. "This unit represents a significant milestone in our efforts to improve patient care. It is a testament to our commitment to providing the highest standards of medical care and ensuring that our community has access to world-class stroke treatment."

The unit consists of a comprehensive team of expert neurologists, ER physicians, Radiologists, nurses, and rehabilitation specialists with extensive training in stroke management. The unit is strategically located for rapid access, ensuring minimal time from admission to intervention. The latest imaging technologies, such as MRI and CT scans, enable precise diagnosis.

Saud Bahwan Automotive announces 17th Toyota Dream Car Art Contest

Saud Bahwan Automotive recently announced the 17th Toyota Dream Car Art Contest - a hugely popular annual drawing contest that gives young minds a unique opportunity to showcase their drawing skills and stand a chance to win interesting prizes.

Calling upon children to take part in the mega contest, the company urged participants to visit any Toyota showroom or its service facility to collect drawing sheets and submit the art work by February 29, the last date for submission.

The 17th Toyota Dream Car Art Contest is scheduled to be

held across Saud Bahwan Automotive's Toyota showrooms across Oman. The event is open to all legal residents of Oman aged 15 years or under.

The objective of the competition is to encourage dreams of young children and bring their inspirations to life on paper through their creative sketches.

Like each year, this year too, the art competition has exciting prizes for winners. The winners of the national contest will be eligible to take part in the world contest. Conditions apply. Participants can draw their automotive imaginations using any paint in-



cluding water colours, markers, and crayons. The sketches must be drawn with hands only. Digitally created artwork will not be accepted. Artwork should include a background and should be submitted on entry forms available at any Toyota showroom or its service facility.

Judges will select winners based on originality of the art, the concept, artistic expression and colouring. All artworks should be submitted with an entry form signed by the participant and a parent or guardian.

Since 2004, every year, through this contest with the

theme 'Your Dream Car', Toyota reached out to budding young artists around the world, to nurture the creativity of young dreamers while offering an opportunity to pursue their dreams. The contest is open for participants from three age groups; under eight years, 8-11 years and 12 - 15 years.

Those interested in making the most of the 17th Toyota Dream Car Art Contest can log on to <https://www.toyota-dreamcarart.com/meca/en/> to better understand what the contest is about by taking a look at previous submissions.

MHD Automobiles-Mopar introduces exclusive checkup campaign for Jeep, Dodge, RAM

In a significant move to enhance the after-sales experience for Jeep, Dodge, and RAM owners in Oman, MHD Automobiles - Mopar proudly announces the launch of the Free Brakes and Suspension Checkup Campaign.

Through this initiative, Mopar, the Stellantis after-sales brand, aims to improve customer safety and satisfaction, a release stated.

Customers owning Jeep, Dodge and RAM models are invited to avail themselves of a complimentary brakes and suspension checkup at the MHD Automobiles Mopar Service Centre in Al Hail. This exclusive offer, valid until March 20, addresses the aftermath of winter adventures, ensuring vehicles are ready for the upcoming months.

The campaign provides a meticulous examination of brakes and suspensions and extends a 20% discount on selected parts for customers opting for service during this period. This initiative underscores MHD Automobiles' commitment to customer care, inviting even those who may have sought services elsewhere to experience the expertise of the authorised Mopar Service Centre.

Mohsin Hani al Bahrani, Chief Executive Officer of MHD Automobiles, expressed the company's dedication to customer experience, stating, "At MHD, we believe that exceptional service is the foundation of a lasting



relationship with our customers. Our Mopar Service Centre, with its well-trained experts and state-of-the-art facility, ensures the highest standard of care for every vehicle."

Customers are encouraged to take advantage of the free checkup. Off-roading and extended drives during the season can put additional stress on brakes and suspensions. The campaign not only identifies potential issues but also empowers customers with information about necessary repairs, maintenance, or part replacements for their vehicle's optimal performance and safety. To schedule a complimentary checkup and experience the unmatched care provided by Mopar, customers can call 80022008.

MHD Automobiles, as the new distributor of these iconic Stellantis brands in Oman, continues to set new standards in customer service, ensuring that every drive is a safe and enjoyable experience.

MHD Automobiles LLC. is one of the main operating divisions under MHD ACERE and represents premium automotive brands. MHD is a key contributor to the economy of Oman committed to the progress of the country in accordance with the government's vision for capacity building, human capital creation and efforts towards Omanisation.

Outward Bound celebrates International Day of Education with special focus on experiential learning

In line with the International Day of Education, and in celebration of a profound impact on more than 25,000 participants over its 14 years of operation, Outward Bound Oman hosted a special event focusing on the role of experiential learning in achieving national SDGs.

The event welcomed a team of experts from KPMG, who presented a detailed overview showcasing the impact of Outward Bound Oman courses, following a dynamic panel discussion on how Experiential Learning drives progress towards Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The panel consisted of H H Sayyid Dr Fahad bin al Julanda al



Said, Vice Chancellor of Sultan Qaboos University, H E Professor Abdullah Ambusaidi, Undersecretary for Education in the Ministry of Education, Dr Manal al Khanbashi, the Head of Research and Project Development team

at Oman Implementation & Follow-up Unit (OVIFU), and Mohammed al Zadjali, the COO of Outward Bound Oman.

During the event, KPMG presented the result of a comprehensive social study about

Outward Bound Oman courses, which mapped the outcomes into five personality traits of the beneficiaries which was experienced through challenging outdoor experiential courses, Character Development, Employability,

Physical, Social and Mental well-being, Building Resilience, and Relationship with Environment.

The study concluded that every RO1 invested in Outward Bound Oman programmes has created RO10.5 Social Value.

Richard Lewis, the newly appointed Executive Director of Outward Bound Oman stated that the event was not only a celebration of shared accomplishments but also an opportunity to express "our deepest appreciation to those who have been instrumental in our endeavours".

"The Outward-Bound principles we uphold, coupled with the generous support from organisations such as KPMG."

Trend Micro launches next-gen email security to safeguard digital realm in Oman

Trend Micro, a global leader in cybersecurity, recently launched Trend Micro Email Security in the Sultanate of Oman and the region. The innovative cybersecurity solution leverages a blend of cross-generational threat techniques, including machine learning, sandbox analysis, data loss prevention (DLP), and various other methods to stop all email-based threats.

In today's digital landscape, email remains a mission-critical communication channel for businesses, but it is equally susceptible to an ever-increasing array of threats, including ransomware and business email compromise (BEC).



Dr Moataz bin Ali

The company is dedicated to countering threat actors by leveraging a cross-generational blend of threat detection techniques

According to Trend Micro's Mid-Year Cybersecurity Report, in the MEA region during the first half of the year, the company's solutions detected and blocked over 475mn threats, of which 281mn were email threats. These alarming figures underscore the need for the adoption of a robust email security solution to navigate through the evolving threat landscape.

"In the day and age where digital communication serves as the lifeblood of organizations, email has risen to prominence as the central conduit of information flow. However, it has also become the primary target for a myriad of relentless cyber threats," said Dr Moataz bin Ali, Regional Vice President and Managing Director, Mediterranean, Middle East, and Africa, Trend Micro. "Amid this volatile threat landscape, Trend Micro stands as a vigilant guardian of digital security. This product launch is a

testament to Trend Micro's unwavering commitment to online safety, ensuring that organisations can thrive in the digital era with confidence and peace of mind."

Trend Micro Email Security streamlines threat management and seamlessly integrates with other Trend Micro security layers, offering central visibility of threats across your organisation. Importantly, it protects a wide range of email platforms, including Microsoft Exchange, Microsoft Office 365, Gmail, and other hosted and on-premises email solutions. It also provides advanced protection against BEC scams by using enhanced machine learning, email header, and content analysis, with an additional layer of authorship scrutiny.

Indian Embassy celebrates 75th Republic Day



The Embassy of India in Muscat celebrated the 75th Republic Day with a flag unfurling ceremony on January 26.

H E Amit Narang, Ambassador of India to the Sultanate of Oman unfurled the Indian national flag in the presence of over 500 participants, including members of the Indian community and guests.

The morning started with a floral tribute to the Gandhi statue within the embassy by H E Narang and his spouse Divya Narang. Following this, the Indian

national flag was unfurled, and the students of the Indian School Bousher sang the country's national anthem.

Ambassador read out excerpts from the President of India's address to the nation on the eve of the Republic Day.

The event concluded with students from Indian School Bousher performing two patriotic songs. In continuation of the Republic Day celebrations, a grand reception will be hosted by the Embassy on Sunday evening, embassy stated.

Indian School Ghubra marks the day in style

The 75th Republic Day of India was marked by Indian School Al Ghubra (ISG) with pride and dignity. The programme began with the school band playing the national anthem of India. The band continued with a piece based on raag 'Yaman' and invigorating marching tunes - titled *Kadam Kadam Badhaye Ja* and *Vijay Bharat*.

The students of grade 8 pre-

sented a choral rendition titled 'The Glorious Reminiscence', which highlighted the values and principles on which the nation was founded. Avi Pandya of 9C played a soulful rendition of *Vande Mataram* and *Vaishnava Janato* on the keyboard.

This was followed by the school choir singing the uplifting song *Hum Honge Kamayab* which conveyed positivity and hope for

a future free of the ills of the past.

A video presentation highlighted the far-sighted vision and tireless striving of the members of the constituent assembly who gave India the constitution which lies at the heart of the nation.

The school choir regaled the audience with the number 'One World', which resonates with the theme *Vasudev Kutumbakam* meaning the world is one family.





The US State Department approved the pending US\$23bn sale of F-16 aircraft and modernisation kits to Turkey, sending formal notification to Congress (Anadolu Agency)

US approves F-16 fighter jet sale to Turkey

Approval came after Turkey submitted documents related to Sweden’s NATO membership protocol

Washington, US - The US State Department approved on Friday the pending US\$23bn sale of F-16 aircraft and modernisation kits to Turkey, sending formal notification to Congress.

“This proposed sale will support the foreign policy goals and national security of the United States by improving the air capabilities and interoperability of a North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Ally that is a force for political and economic stability in Europe,” the US Defence Security Cooperation Agency said in a statement.

“The proposed sale of this equipment and support will not alter the basic military balance in the region,” it said.

The approval came after Turkey submitted documents related to Sweden’s NATO membership protocol after it was ratified on Tuesday by the Turkish Parliament.

Turkey made a request to the

US in October 2021 to purchase 40 new F-16 Block 70 aircraft, as well as 79 modernisation kits to upgrade its remaining F-16s to Block 70 level.

The request includes 32 F-16 C Block 70 aircraft, 8 F-16 D Block 70 aircraft, 48 F110-GE-129D engines, as well as 119 for the modernisation programme - 79 installed, 40 spares.

The State Department informally notified Congress last January of the F-16 fighter jet

Congress has the right to object to the State Department’s determination within 15 business days for sale approvals granted to NATO members, including Turkey

sale but key lawmakers on Capitol Hill have vowed to nix the deal because of several demands, including making the purchase contingent on Ankara’s approval of Sweden’s NATO membership bid.

Congress has the right to object to the State Department’s determination within 15 business days for sale approvals granted to NATO members, including Turkey, a member of the alliance for more than 70

years.

Senate Foreign Relations Chair Ben Cardin said in a statement on Friday that he would permit the sale after Ankara’s ratification of Sweden’s NATO membership bid.

Senator Jim Risch, ranking member of the Foreign Relations Committee, said in late October that he would drop his objection to the sale after Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan gave a greenlight to

Sweden’s bid to join NATO.

House Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Michael McCaul and House Foreign Affairs Committee Ranking Member Gregory Meeks released statements that said that they approved the sale to Turkey.

The State Department also notified Congress on Friday on the US\$8.6bn possible sale of 40 F-35 aircraft and related equipment to Greece.

Anadolu Agency



AUSTRALIA DAY

Aircrafts perform a fly-past over the Sydney Opera House to mark Australia Day in Sydney on Friday (Xinhua)

NATO membership: Sweden not to negotiate with Hungary

Izmir, Turkey - Sweden’s Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson has said he will not negotiate NATO membership with his Hungarian counterpart Viktor Orban during their meeting in Brussels next week.

Kristersson will meet with Orban one-on-one in Brussels, where he will attend a European Council meeting on Thursday.

“We are not negotiating NATO membership, but we can discuss how we can best cooperate as NATO members,” Kristersson told Sweden’s TV4 on Friday. “However, I’m considering that Orban confirmed only a few days ago that they will approve Sweden’s (NATO mem-



Sweden’s PM Ulf Kristersson

bership). We have a lot to discuss,” he said.

Orban had earlier this week invited Kristersson to visit Hungary. Kristersson said he is willing to travel to Budapest and meet with Orban. However, due

to his busy schedule in the coming weeks, the next suitable opportunity to meet him will be at the EU Council meeting in Brussels. “We’ll see each other on Thursday next week at the European Council and we can begin discussions then,” he said.

When asked about the possibility of visiting Budapest, he said: “Then we have to find a suitable date for this... it is not done in a hurry. I expect Orban’s calendar to be quite full, just like mine.”

Earlier on Wednesday, Orban informed NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg that his government supports Sweden’s membership application and will

push parliament to vote in favour of it. His comments came a day after the Turkish parliament approved Sweden’s membership to the military bloc.

“It is good... very good. It is a significant step forward, a labour victory, but we are not yet there. We only have one country left,” Kristersson told the broadcaster.

“We have shown to Turkey that we take the fight against terrorism seriously, and they had some valid reasons for their position. We have made a really big effort to show other countries that we take their security concerns as seriously as we do our own.”

Anadolu Agency

Charles Michel abandons plan to run in EU elections

Brussels, Belgium - European Council President Charles Michel is pulling out of the European Parliament election race, choosing instead to focus on the remainder of his current mandate that runs until November.

He announced his decision in a lengthy post on Facebook on Friday. The announcement followed intensive criticism of his plan to abandon his post at a critical time to run in the European Parliament election as the top candidate on his party’s list.

He admitted that his intention to ensure transparency with an early announcement of his plan to run in the European elections had backfired.

“I welcome all political criticism and legitimate arguments. Naturally, every situation has several possible viewpoints. But personal attacks are increas-



Charles Michel

ingly taking precedence over factual arguments. I believe this distorts objective democratic discourse ... For all these reasons, and to maintain the focus of my mission, I will not be a candidate in the European elections. I will devote all my efforts to my current responsibilities with steadfast determination until they come to an end,” he wrote.

Xinhua

US jury orders Trump to pay \$83.3mn in defamation suit

Washington, US - A New York jury ordered former President Donald Trump to pay writer E Jean Carroll US\$83.3mn in damages on Friday for defamation after she accused him of sexual assault.

The jury awarded Carroll US\$65mn in punitive damages, US\$11mn for damage to her reputation and another US\$7.3mn, according to multiple outlets.

Carroll accuses the former president of damaging her reputation by calling her a liar.

The verdict marks the second time Trump has been ordered to compensate Carroll. He was directed by a jury to pay US\$5mn in another defamation suit last year.

The nine-person jury began deliberations in New York federal court at 1.40pm local time and reached its verdict in a little under three hours, NBC News reported.

Trump was quick to respond,



Former President Donald Trump

saying he would appeal.

“Absolutely ridiculous! I fully disagree with both verdicts, and will be appealing this whole Biden

Directed Witch Hunt focused on me and the Republican Party,” he wrote on his social media platform, Truth Social.

The jury awarded writer E Jean Carroll US\$65mn in punitive damages, US\$11mn for damage to her reputation and another US\$7.3mn

“Our Legal System is out of control, and being used as a Political Weapon. They have taken away all First Amendment Rights. THIS IS NOT AMERICA!” he added.

Carroll, 80, alleged that Trump raped her in the dressing room of a Bergdorf Goodman store in New York in the spring of 1996.

Anadolu Agency

Iraqi Shiite militia vows to continue attacks

Baghdad, Iraq - The Islamic Resistance in Iraq, an Iraqi Shiite militia, vowed on Friday to continue its attacks on military bases housing US forces until all US troops leave the country, rejecting a proposed US-Iraq commission to oversee a ‘transition’ of the bilateral security partnership.

In an online statement, the group, which has claimed dozens of attacks on bases in Iraq and Syria, dismissed the U.S. proposal as a ‘deceptive tactic’ designed to ‘buy more time’ for its troops to carry out ‘more crimes to harm Iraqi people’.

Xinhua

174 Palestinians killed in last 24 hours

Many are still trapped under rubble and on the roads as rescuers are unable to reach them

Gaza City, Palestine - At least 174 Palestinians were killed and 310 others injured in the last 24 hours as the Israeli army continues its onslaught on the besieged Gaza Strip, the territory's Health Ministry said on Saturday.

"The Israeli occupation committed 18 massacres against families in the Gaza Strip, leaving 174 martyrs and 310 injured during the past 24 hours," the ministry said in a statement.

"Many people are still trapped under rubble and on the roads as rescuers are unable to reach them," the statement said.

With the latest Palestinian casualties, the death toll from Israel's ongoing attacks on Gaza since October 7 has risen to 26,257, with 64,797 others injured, the ministry said.

Israel has pounded the Gaza Strip since a cross-border attack by Hamas on October 7, which Tel Aviv says killed nearly 1,200 people.

The Israeli offensive has left 85 per cent of Gaza's population internally displaced amid acute shortages of food, clean water, and medicine, while 60 per cent of the enclave's infrastructure was damaged or destroyed, according to the UN.

Young man killed in West Bank
Israeli soldiers killed a young man



With the latest Palestinian casualties, the death toll from Israel's attacks on Gaza since October 7 has risen to 26,257, with 64,797 others injured, Palestinian health ministry said (Wafa)

The Israeli occupation committed 18 massacres against families in the Gaza Strip, leaving 174 martyrs and 310 injured during past 24 hours

PALESTINIAN HEALTH MINISTRY

in his 20s with indiscriminate fire during an overnight incursion into a village in the West Bank, Palestinian media reported on Saturday.

The official news agency Wafa reported that 'a twenty-seven-year-old Palestinian was killed overnight after being shot by Israeli forces' live fire during con-

frontations in the village of Deir Abu Deif, northeast of Jenin'.

Israeli forces stormed the village and sealed off its entrances, provoking residents and sparking confrontations, the agency said.

During the confrontations, Israeli soldiers fired live ammunition at residents, seriously injuring Qassam Ahmad Yasin, who died from his injuries shortly after, the news agency said.

According to the Palestinian

Health Ministry, at least 373 Palestinians have been killed by Israeli forces in the West Bank since October 7.

'Running out of supplies'

The head of the World Health Organization (WHO) said on Friday that 350 patients and 5,000 displaced residents remain at Nasser Hospital which is running out of fuel, food and supplies in

southern Gaza.

As fighting intensifies around the hospital in Khan Younis, hundreds of patients and health workers have fled, said Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus.

"Currently 350 patients and 5000 displaced people remain at the hospital. The hospital is running out of fuel, food and supplies," he wrote on X, with an accompanying video from the hospital.

He said fighting continues in the vicinity of the hospital and noted access for resupplying the 'remains challenging'.

"We appeal for an immediate ceasefire, so that we can replenish urgently needed lifesaving supplies," he said.

'Much-needed light'

An interim ruling by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) for Israel to take measures to prevent acts of genocide in the Gaza Strip is a 'much-needed light in the darkness', a UK-based lawyers' group on Palestinian rights said on Friday.

"It is a historic day for clearly recognising the fundamental human rights of Palestinians, including their fundamental right to life, and an important vindication of the vital resort to law to uphold fundamental rights," Lawyers for Palestinian Human Rights (LPHR) said in a statement. Noting that the order is legally binding on Israel and automatically sent to the UN Security Council, it said all governments and UN bodies should take tangible action to ensure that Israel complies.

"Whilst this historic legal case takes its course, we strongly re-emphasise that it remains deeply imperative that all diplomatic measures be urgently exercised to deliver an immediate ceasefire," it said.

LPHR added that the order is 'crucially important' but will not, on its own, end the extreme human suffering and acute struggle for survival. The ICJ ordered Israel to take 'all measures within its power' to prevent acts of genocide in Gaza. South Africa, which brought the case, had asked the court for provisional measures against Israel.

Anadolu Agency

Uganda government disowns judge who voted in favour of Israel at UN court

Kampala, Uganda - Uganda distanced itself on Friday from Julia Sebutinde, a judge who voted against all provisional measures that a UN court ordered Israel to undertake in a case brought by South Africa concerning the war in the Gaza Strip.

"Justice Sebutinde ruling at the ICJ (the International Court of Justice) does not represent the Government of Uganda's position on the situation in Palestine," Uganda's Permanent Representative to the UN, Adonia Ayebare, wrote on X. "Uganda's support for the plight of the Palestinian people has been expressed through our voting pattern at the United Nations."

South Africa, dragged Israel to the Hague-based ICJ on Decem-



Julia Sebutinde was the sole judge who ruled against emergency orders against Israel

ber 29 on charges of genocide against Palestinians.

On Friday, the ICJ found South Africa's claim that Israel is committing genocide plausible. The court issued an interim order

urging Israel to stop obstructing aid deliveries into Gaza and improve the humanitarian situation.

Sebutinde voted against all six measures of the ICJ. She is now facing the wrath of the world for

her vote with several social media users saying that Ugandans should be embarrassed. "Judge Julia Sebutinde is such an embarrassment to her country & a disgrace to humanity. She

didn't just vote against S. Africa's petition, she voted against reason & morality, justice & freedom, love & compassion. She voted against the very soul of humanity," one Kenyan user wrote on X.

"Julia Sebutinde is a disgrace to all of us in Africa, more especially African women. She demonstrated that she is nothing else, but a paid-up agent of the criminal Zionist Entity of Israel," wrote another.

Sebutinde was the sole judge who ruled against emergency orders against Israel.

But despite her vote, the UN court ordered Israel to take all measures within its power to prevent acts of genocide in the besieged enclave.

Anadolu Agency



Southern Gaza run out of healthcare options, warns MSF

London, UK - Doctors Without Borders (MSF) expressed concern on Friday about the heavy bombing in southern Gaza, warning that vital medical services have collapsed at Nasser Hospital, the largest functioning health care facility in the enclave.

MSF said it deplores a situation in which 'people have been left with no options'.

"The hospital's surgical capacity is now almost non-existent, and the handful of medical staff remaining in the hospital must contend with very low supplies that are insufficient to handle mass casualty events - large influxes of wounded people," said the international medical care organisation. It noted that at least one patient at the hospital died on Wednesday because there was no orthopaedic surgeon available. "Between 300 and 350 patients remain at Nasser Hospital, unable to evacuate because it is too dangerous and there are no ambulances," it said.

Guillemette Thomas, MSF's medical coordinator in Palestine, said that Nasser and the European Gaza Hospital are almost inaccessible and there is no

longer a health care system in Gaza. "These systematic attacks against health care are unacceptable and must end now so that the wounded can get the care they need. The entire health system has been rendered inoperative," she said.

The statement recounted an account by a nurse who was trapped inside Nasser who said there was no staff left in the emergency room.

"There were no beds, just a few chairs and no staff, just a few nurses," said Rami, who preferred to use only his first name.

Meanwhile, Australia announced on Saturday that it would temporarily pause funding to a UN agency that provides humanitarian aid to Palestinians following allegations of involvement by some of its employees in the October 7 attacks on Israel.

Foreign Minister Penny Wong said in a statement that Australia is deeply concerned over allegations that UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) staff were involved in the October 7 attacks.

Anadolu Agency

US strikes Houthi anti-ship missile in Red Sea

Washington, US - The US said on Saturday it conducted a self-defence strike against a Houthi anti-ship missile in the Red Sea.

"U.S. Conducts Self-Defence Strike Against Houthi Anti-Ship Missile On Jan. 27 at approximately 3:45 a.m. (Sanaa time), U.S. Central Command Forces conducted a strike against a Houthi anti-ship missile aimed into the Red Sea and which was prepared to launch," US Central Command (CENTCOM) wrote on X.

US forces determined that the missile presented an 'im-



minent threat' to merchant vessels and US Navy ships in the region, it added.

It said US forces destroyed

the missile in self-defence. "This action will protect freedom of navigation and make international waters safer and

more secure for U.S. Navy vessels and merchant vessels," it added.

Tensions have escalated in the Red Sea amid Houthi attacks on commercial ships that allegedly have links with Israel.

The Houthis said the attacks are to pressure Israel to halt its deadly onslaught on the Gaza Strip.

The US and UK launched airstrikes against Houthi targets in Yemen in recent days in retaliation for the attacks, which have created fears of a new bout of inflation and supply chain disruption.

In December, US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin announced the creation of a multinational mission, Operation Prosperity Guardian, to counter Houthi attacks.

Meanwhile, Houthis reported fresh airstrikes by the US and its allied British forces on the western province of Hodeidah on Saturday.

The Houthi-run satellite channel Al-Masirah reported that 'the American-British aggression targeted the Ras Issa area in Hodeidah Governorate with two raids'.

Anadolu Agency

INDIA



Indian President Droupadi Murmu meets French President Emmanuel Macron at Rashtrapati Bhavan in New Delhi on Friday (ANI)

India, France concerned at killings in Gaza

Ankara, Turkey - India and France have expressed concern about the massive loss of civilian lives in the ongoing Israeli war on the Gaza Strip, urging Tel Aviv to respect international humanitarian law and create conditions, including a humanitarian cease-fire, for aid to flow to the enclave.

French President Emmanuel Macron and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi expressed these views in a joint statement issued by the Foreign Ministry in New Delhi on Friday night.

Macron arrived in Jaipur, in northwestern Rajasthan state, on Thursday for a two-day state visit, where he attended several events alongside Modi. On Friday, he was the chief guest at Republic Day in the capital New Delhi before departing late evening.

Macron arrived in India's capital on Thursday for a two-day state visit, where he attended Republic Day as chief guest and several other events alongside Modi before departing late on Friday evening.

"Both leaders also called for an immediate and unconditional

release of all hostages....the two leaders reaffirmed that a political process leading to a two-state solution for the Israeli and Palestinian people is required for lasting peace and stability in the region," the statement said.

They also expressed solidarity with the people of Israel, condemning the October 7 attack. Both leaders also expressed grave concern about the possibility of further spreading regional conflicts, including in the Red Sea, and 'recalled the utmost importance of upholding freedom of navigation in the Red Sea and of respecting the international law of the sea'.

"They expressed deep concern over the war in Ukraine and its tragic humanitarian consequences," it said.

During Macron's visit, the two countries also agreed on a defence production roadmap and signed a memorandum of understanding between NewSpace India Limited and France's Arianespace to establish a long-term partnership on satellite launch missions, the Indian Foreign Ministry statement said.

Anadolu Agency

Modi stresses on women, youth participation in legislative bodies

PM Modi was virtually addressing the All India Presiding Officers' Conference

New Delhi - Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday emphasised women's empowerment and youth participation, saying that deliberations should be held on increasing the representation of women and youth in legislative bodies.

Modi was virtually addressing the All India Presiding Officers' Conference.

"Only last year, the Parliament approved the 'Narishakti Vandan Adhiniyam'. Such suggestions should also be discussed at this conference, which will increase the efforts and representation of women's empowerment," Modi said.

"In a young country like Bharat, discussion should be held on increasing the youth participation in the legislative bodies," he added.

The prime minister further said that the states and the state assemblies play a huge role in shaping the goals of the country.

"Today, during the 'Amrit Kaal', the states and the state assemblies play a huge role in shaping the goals of the country. The country will only progress if the states are on the path of development. The states will progress if the legislative bodies and the executives coordinate and determine the goals towards development," he said.

"The efforts put in by the



Prime Minister Narendra Modi virtually addresses the All India Presiding Officers' Conference, in New Delhi on Saturday (ANI)

In a young country like Bharat, discussion should be held on increasing youth participation in the legislative bodies

NARENDRA MODI

legislative bodies towards the achievement of the goals will determine the progress of the state. The issue of the empowerment of the legislative bodies serves as an important factor in the economic development of the state," said the prime minister.

He further stated that during the past 10 years, the cen-

tral government eliminated over 2,000 'insignificant' laws.

"During the past 10 years, the central government has eliminated over 2,000 insignificant laws, which were proving to be detrimental to our management system. The simplification of the justice system has reduced the impediments and contributed to the 'ease of living'," said Modi.

The 83rd All India Presiding Officers' Conference (AIPOC), the biggest gathering of the presiding officers of the country's legislative bodies, is being held in Maharashtra.

The conference will brainstorm on matters pertaining to the smooth functioning of the legislative and executive bodies. Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla, and Rajya Sabha Vice-Chairman Harivansh Narayan

Singh, are among the 250 delegates attending the mega conference.

Spirit of 'Ek Bharat'

Meanwhile, addressing the NCC PM Rally, which was held at Cariappa Parade Ground in Delhi on Saturday, Modi expressed his happiness over the increase in the number of NCC rallies being conducted in recent years and said that NCC cadets embody the spirit of 'Ek Bharat, Shreshtha Bharat'.

"Being an ex-NCC cadet, every time I come to address you, I get flashbacks of my own experiences and memories. NCC cadets embody the spirit of 'Ek Bharat, Shreshtha Bharat'. You all have come here from different regions of India, and I am happy that over the past years, the stature of

NCC rallies has also increased."

The prime minister further stated that this year's NCC rally is in the direction of the 'One World, One Family, One Future' motive.

"This year, more than 400 Sarpanches of the Vibrant Villages and more than 100 women belonging to various self-help groups from different parts of the country are present here. I welcome all of them. This rally of the NCC is continuously strengthening the 'One World, One Family' motive. In 2014, NCC cadets from 10 countries participated in this rally. This year, cadets from 24 countries are present here at the rally, and I welcome all the young cadets from these 24 countries," the PM said.

ANI

A SALUTE TO THE NATION



A girl holds a national flag on a boat in River Tapi to celebrate the 75th Republic Day, in Surat on Friday (ANI)

Fog: Delhiites grapple with health issues

New Delhi - As the cold weather and persistent pollution persist, locals, including asthma patients, are grappling with health problems.

Dense fog also prevailed in parts of Delhi on Saturday as cold wave conditions persisted. The residents are complaining of health issues like cough, cold, throat irritation, chest tightness, low oxygen level, burning sensation in the eyes, and high fever.

"The symptoms like cough, cold, throat irritation, chest tightness, low oxygen level, burning sensation in the eyes, and even high fever are being seen in people," said Dr Suresh Kumar, medical director of Loknayaak Jai Prakash Hospital.



A glimpse of the AIIMS area against the backdrop of sunrise, in New Delhi on Saturday (ANI)

Dr Suresh has advised people to avoid going outside during fog, saying 'dense fog in the morning and evening is harmful to your health', hence people should avoid going out of the

house at this time.

The Meteorological Department has also predicted that temperature will continue to dip for another few days.

As Delhi is gripped with cold

and dense fog, children are also developing chest infections. "With the drop in temperature, problems like chest infection, pneumonia are seen in people. Especially if we talk about children and elderly people, this winter season is troubling them more, the number of children and elderly people in hospitals is increasing," said Dr Suresh.

He said that several asthmatic patients are suffering from problems like difficulty in breathing. "If a patient is already suffering from high blood pressure, diabetes, or any other serious disease, then going out of the house in this season can cause problems."

ANI

Russia rejects accusations of military cooperation with North Korea

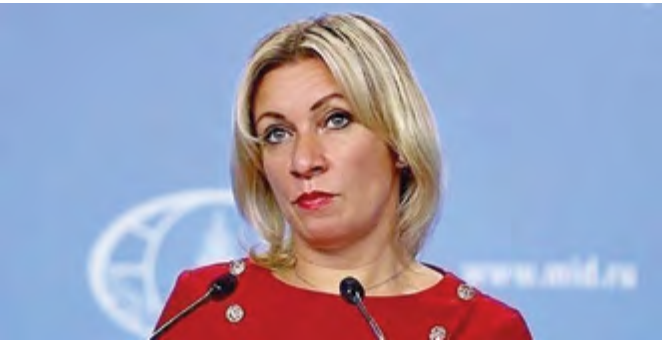
Moscow, Russia - Moscow categorically rejects accusations by Washington and its allies about Russia's illegal military-technical cooperation with North Korea, Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said on Friday.

Zakharova said in a news conference in Moscow that the US made up the story about Russian-North Korean military cooperation to get South Korea on its side in the war against Ukraine.

Zakharova noted that South Korean military officials started

speaking about military aid to Kyiv right after rumours about cooperation between Moscow and Pyongyang emerged.

She said the US spread gossip to find additional sources for refilling Ukraine's arms depots and to develop military infrastructure in the Asia-Pacific region. "Russia has the right to develop friendly relations with North Korea. Cooperation with this country has long-standing historical roots, does not threaten the security of neighbouring states and is time-tested," she said.



Russia's foreign ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova

Turning to NATO plans to hold the large-scale military exercise, Steadfast Defender

2024, near Russian borders, Zakharova slammed them as 'provocative'.

"This step is deliberately aimed at aggravating the situation and increases the risks of military incidents and, as a result, can lead to tragic consequences for Europe," she warned.

For months, a 90,000-strong group of forces from 31 NATO member countries and Sweden will stay near Russian borders on the territory from Norway to Romania, she said.

"The Russian side has no plans to attack NATO countries," she said. Zakharova also

criticised Sweden's accession to NATO, which may happen soon, and said it will have an 'extremely negative effect' on stability in Northern Europe and the Baltic region.

"Abandoning the long-standing policy of military non-alignment and joining the ranks of an openly hostile bloc to Russia is unlikely to strengthen the sense of security among ordinary Swedes," she said.

Russia will take response measures due to Sweden's accession to NATO risks, the cen-

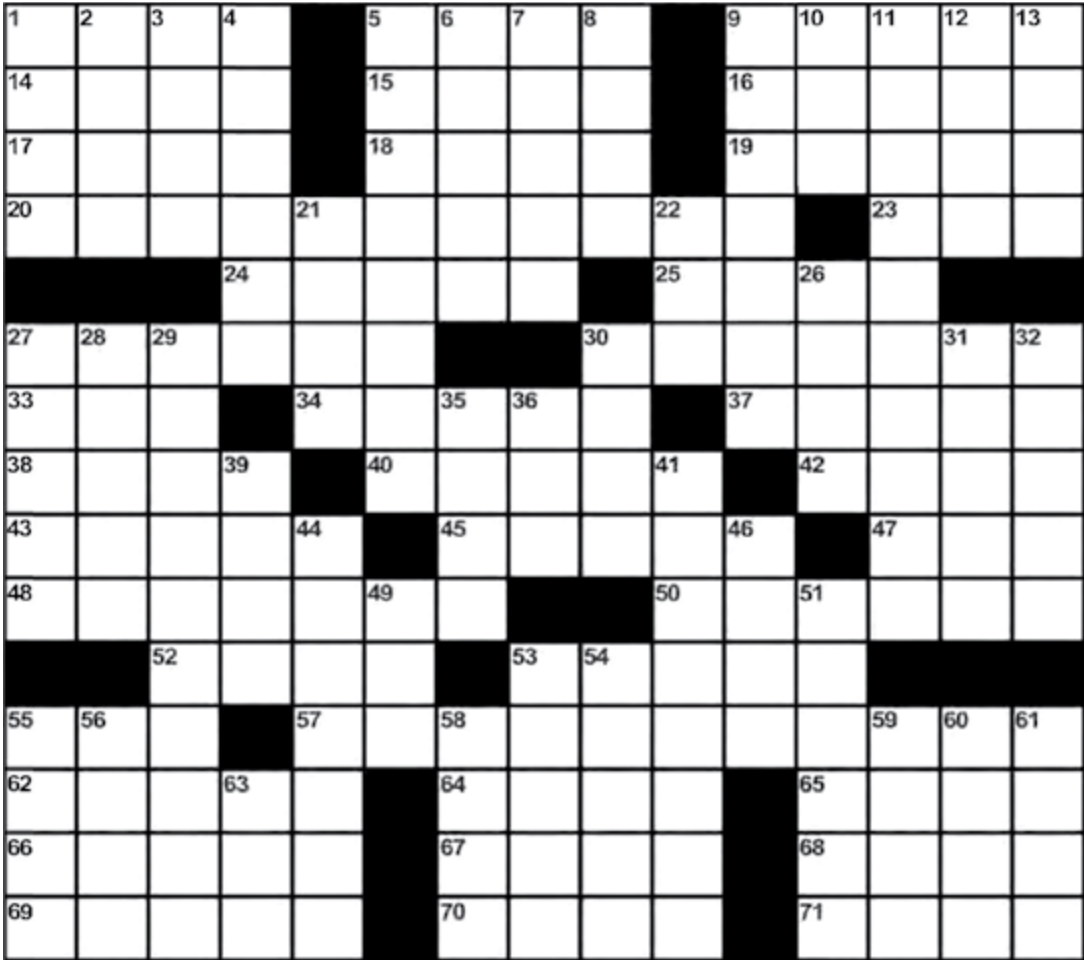
crete steps will be defined depending on what NATO systems will deploy in Sweden, she said.

On Thursday, the law passed by the Turkish parliament approving Sweden's NATO membership was published in Turkey's official gazette, finalising the ratification.

Admission of a new member requires the unanimous support of all NATO members, and Hungary is now the only ally not to have ratified Sweden's accession.

Anadolu Agency

DAILY CROSSWORD



ACROSS

- 1) Word with "-A-Rama"
5) Parting words
9) Errand runner
14) Common cosmetics ingredient
15) Prefix for "dynamic"
16) Caterpillar, initially
17) Turkish currency
18) Car wash supply
19) Had a home-cooked meal
20) Wild fights
23) Forest denizen
24) Breakfast staple
25) "... I care!"
27) Do more origami work
30) Visible blight
33) Geller with the spoons
34) Bear that's not really a bear
37) Indication of police action
38) Fail to see
40) Flounder in water
42) Easy dupes
43) Group of eight
45) Place for a barbecue
4 7) Romanian currency
48) Parents and some poker players
50) Car front
52) "Big Brother" host
53) Very pale

- 55) Brain of a PC
57) Feature of a disorderly fight
62) Certain shooting iron
64) Aquarium growth
65) Doing nothing
66) Like Santa's workers
67) Department store section
68) Exciting star
69) Some bridge seats
70) Young winged god of the Greeks
71) Happy and appreciative
DOWN
1) With no need to part?
2) Miscellaneous assortment
3) No longer new, as clothing
4) Primitive shelter
5) Bridgetown's place
6) Decade makeup
7) Grain bane
8) "Eh"
9) Spectacles
10) Horse's nibble
11) Wild meleé
12) There is no good in it
13) Captain or general, e.g.
21) Egg part
22) Mary_ cosmetics
26) Egyptian goddess

- 27) Bit of gossip
28) Longtime "All My Children" character
29) Brawl ingredients
30) Point to the right?
31) Drive away
32) Follow, as a consequence
35) High mountains
36) Hawaii's Mauna_
39) Window frame
41) Elaborate Catholic ritual
44) Intensifies
46) Black-and-white cookie
49) Biochemistry abbr.
51) What six outs constitute
53) Freud contemporary
54) Music-score sign
55) Ship workers
56) Carpet feature
58) Everyone has one
59) Heroic person, to some
60) Edible seaweed
61) Honey-based drink
63) On, as a candle

NOTE PAD



YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE



ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

The hardest thing for you to do is accept help when it's offered, and this is an obstacle you have to learn how overcome. Today, reach out and take the hand that is being offered to you, especially if it feels like the hardest thing to do. Your pride can handle it, and your future may very well depend on it. So if someone asks if you need help, say yes. You have helped many people get past difficult situations, so why would you refuse them the opportunity to return the favour?



LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

Your relationship with an authority figure is entering a very positive growth phase lately. The two of you are on the same wavelength. In fact, you're almost communicating without speaking. This gives you a distinct advantage over your coworkers, but it's an advantage that you shouldn't take for granted. Just because you are getting along well with an influential person does not mean that you can do no wrong in their eyes. Don't forget the other dynamics at work here.



SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

If you are getting overwhelmed by the details of a project you've been working on for a really long time, today could bring good news. Plus, you'll get a huge burst of energy. Positive thinking will help you feel like you're back on track and ready to make that final sprint to the finish line. This change in attitude will help you put your best foot forward and impress a certain someone whose opinion matters a lot to you. You are more motivated than you have been in a long time.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

01. Who sang, backed by U2, as the first song in the Live 8 concert in Hyde Park, London, in 2005?

- A. Mick Jagger
B. Elton John
C. David Bowie
D. Paul McCartney

02. What concept was described and highlighted in a 1983 book edited by European-British historian Eric Hobsbawm and British Africanist Terence Ranger?

- A. Pizza effect
B. Invented tradition
C. Imagined community
D. Folklorismus

03. Which of these entertainments was introduced to the western world last?

- A. Sudoku
B. Frisbee
C. Chess
D. Mah Jong

Answers: 1.D 2.B 3.A



TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

If you're feeling bored with life, the reason could be that there's no wiggle room. You've done such a good job of getting organized and putting everything into its place that you forgot to leave room for disruption. It might seem illogical to schedule in free time, but this could be the only way to ensure that your life always has a few question marks in it. And it's in those question marks that adventure lies. So make sure you always have a couple hours to go exploring.



VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

Your relationship with an authority figure is entering a very positive growth phase lately. The two of you are on the same wavelength. In fact, you're almost communicating without speaking. This gives you a distinct advantage over your coworkers, but it's an advantage that you shouldn't take for granted. Just because you are getting along well with an influential person does not mean that you can do no wrong in their eyes. Don't forget the other dynamics at work here.



CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

If you are starting a new romance, make sure you are giving it all the energy it requires. Giving only half your attention because you fear it might not work out isn't going to save your feelings. It's going to all but guarantee your failure. If something is important to you, you have to act like it. Put it at the top of your priority list and show the Universe that you are willing to work for what you want. Solid efforts you make today will take things a lot further than you hoped.



GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

Try to have longer, more in-depth conversations with other people today. Be more inquisitive and ask a lot of questions of all of the friends, coworkers, and strangers you encounter today. Skip the small talk and try to create a real connection, and keep in mind that sometimes disagreements and friendly conflict can help a relationship grow in significant ways. You will impress people with your curiosity and encourage them to be more open with you.



LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

You will feel a magnetic pull toward a new person today, and it's one you should follow. For some reason, your gut is telling you that you need to know more about this person, and you have to find out why. Let yourself go where they go and do what they do. They have something to teach you even if they don't realize it. This accidental mentor will help you find a whole new goal in your life or discover a new part of yourself you didn't understand before.



AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

You are starting to realize that your older relatives can bring new insight to your life, which means that it's a great time for you to renew communication with an uncle, grandparent, or even older sibling. The reasons they've been out of your life for a while do not need to be addressed. Just pick up where you two left off and get back into learning what they're doing. Soon enough they'll give you some advice that puts everything into perspective.



CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

Today, you need to get as active as you can as early as you can. Get involved and do something! At work, speak up in a meeting or volunteer to take a larger role on a new project. At home, reorganize the furniture or give the kitchen a thorough cleaning. It needs it! And socially, isn't it time you put together a dinner party or ambitious outing? Pick some dates and send out an email to your favorite people. You need to have something to look forward to.



SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

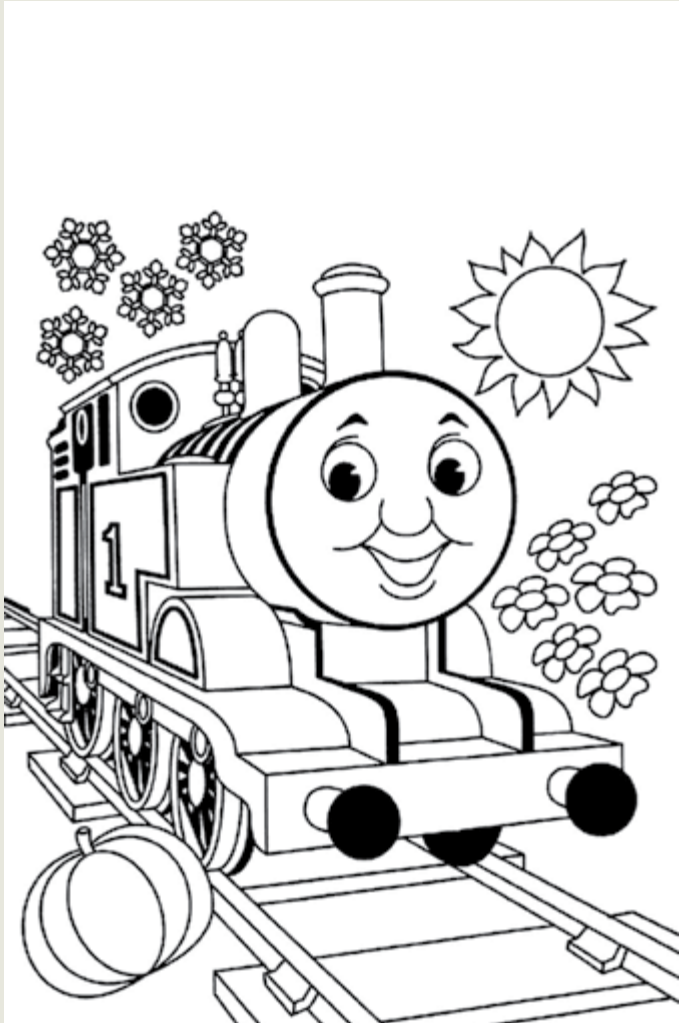
Greediness isn't just about money. People can be greedy about time too. And it is just as negative. So if you feel like someone is demanding too much of your time, it's perfectly fine to say something to them about it. Make it clear that while you enjoy spending time with them, you have your own life to lead. Too many people tie their identity to the identity of someone else, and you shouldn't encourage that. You're your own person, and they should be too.



PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

Try to expose yourself to a different kind of music or visual art than you usually are drawn to. It could spark an idea or urge deep inside of you that you never even knew was there, or at the very least it will work your mind in a new way. Your artistic sensibilities are heightened now, which is making you much more open to hearing or seeing things in a new way. You are ready to think differently, and all you need to do is find something new thing to think about.

KIDS COLOURING



BOGGLER

M	U	C	S
N	O	G	D
O	E	S	G
O	U	I	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

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

WORD BUILDER



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

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

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER

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

ROD LAVER ARYNA

Sabalenka cruises past Zheng in the final to retain Australian Open title

Melbourne, Australia - Aryna Sabalenka continued to be an ir-repressible force at the Australian Open as she powered to a 6-3, 6-2 victory over Chinese 12th seed Zheng Qinwen on Saturday to successfully defend her title and add a second Grand Slam trophy to her cabinet.

The Belarusian has barely put a foot wrong at what has turned into her happiest hunting ground as she became the first woman to retain the Melbourne Park crown since compatriot Victoria Azarenka in 2013.

"It's been an amazing couple of weeks and I couldn't imagine myself lifting this trophy one more time," Sabalenka said.

"I want to congratulate you Qinwen on an incredible couple of weeks here in Australia. I know it's really tough to lose in the final but you're such an incredible player.

"You're such a young girl and you're going to make many more finals and you're going to get it."

Sabalenka came into the

match without dropping a set at the year's first major and stayed perfect to join Ash Barty, Serena Williams, Maria Sharapova and Lindsay Davenport in the elite club of players to have managed the feat since 2000.

She unleashed monster groundstrokes to grab the final

by the scruff of the neck with an early break and thousands of Chinese supporters and millions back home watched Zheng fall behind 3-0.

Sabalenka did not have her nation's flags in the stands due to a ban over her country's role in Russia's invasion of Ukraine but

the charismatic 25-year-old has a big Melbourne fan base and she rode the Rod Laver Arena support to take the first set.

Zheng, who had saved four set points, showed she was slowly growing in confidence in her second meeting with Sabalenka by firing up her own big forehand amid the rallying cry of "Jia You" from her compatriots in the crowd. A clean crosscourt winner earned Sabalenka a break point in the opening game of the second set and Zheng's double fault handed it to her on a platter.

The 21-year-old first-time finalist, bidding to match her idol Li Na - the Melbourne Park champion 10 years ago and first Asian and Chinese player to win a major - saw her hopes fade after two more errors on serve left her 4-1 down.

Sabalenka shrugged of shaky service game to close out the most one-sided final since Azarenka beat Maria Sharapova 6-3 6-0 in 2012 by smashing a forehand winner.



Aryna Sabalenka celebrates with the Australian Open trophy



Jannik Sinner defeated Novak Djokovic in the semifinals

Sinner-Medvedev final ensures rise of a new champion

Melbourne, Australia - Jannik Sinner has sprinted past opponents at the Australian Open in his quest for a maiden Grand Slam but could end up running a marathon in the final against Daniil Medvedev on Sunday, when Melbourne Park will crown a new king.

The winner of the title-decider at Rod Laver Arena will become the first new men's champion at the Australian Open since Stan Wawrinka won his only Melbourne Park title in 2014.

It will be the first final since 2005 not to feature at least one of the three players who have dominated men's tennis for two decades - Novak Djokovic, Roger Federer or Rafa Nadal.

Sinner made sure of that by dismantling reigning champion Djokovic in the semi-finals to end the world number one's bid for a

record 25th major. It was the Italian's third victory in four matches against Djokovic since November, confirming a red-hot run of form that, Sinner says, has primed him for his first run to the business end of a major.

"After last year, especially the end of the year, it gave me confidence that I could potentially do some good results in the Grand Slams," said the 22-year-old, who has dropped only one set on his way to the final.

Sinner's game has moved to another level since he began working with Darren Cahill, who believes the fourth seed has all the weapons to land one of the game's four big prizes. "He's got the qualities I believe that a lot of the great champions in the game have, but you've got to start winning to let that come to fruition," the Australian coach said.

India's Rohan Bopanna makes history

Melbourne, Australia - India's Rohan Bopanna and Australian Matthew Ebden dug deep to win the Australian Open men's doubles title on Saturday with a 7-6(0) 7-5 victory over Italian duo Simone Bolelli and Andrea Vavassori.

The second seeds fell to the ground after overcoming their Italian challengers before bowing to the crowd at the Rod Laver Arena.

Bopanna becomes the oldest male player at 43 to win a Grand Slam title, and the Indian finally tasted success in Australia in his 17th consecutive Open, having lost the mixed doubles final last year and in 2018.

"Age truly really is not even a number for this guy. He's young at heart, he's a champion, he's a warrior. He's fought hard by my side this whole past year" Ebden said.

Bolelli and Vavassori held their own in the opening set and earned their first break point at 5-5, but the Indian-Australian pair rallied to save serve and ran out easy winners in the tiebreak, backed by the crowd.



Rohan Bopanna (R) and Matthew Ebden celebrate after their victory against Simone Bolelli and Andrea Vavassori

The second set looked to be headed the same way, going with serve and locked at 5-5, until Vavassori's serve was broken leaving Ebden to serve for the match.

"This could not have been possible if I did not have a fantastic Aussie partner by my side," Bopanna said.

It is the first Major win for the pairing, who lost last year's U.S. Open final, and Bopanna will be world number one when the rankings are updated on Monday, with Ebden at number two having played three more tournaments during the ranking period.

Ebden won the Australian Open mixed doubles in 2013 and the Wimbledon men's doubles in 2022 - when he lost in the men's doubles final in Australia the same year - while Bopanna won the 2017 French Open mixed doubles.

Vavassori was making his first appearance in a Major final, while Bolelli won the men's doubles title in Australia in 2015.

India on road to victory despite Pope hundred

Hyderabad, India - England vice-captain Ollie Pope produced an unbeaten 148 but India remained on course for victory in the opening test at the end of day three at Rajiv Gandhi International Stadium on Saturday.

The tourists had risked a defeat inside three days after India, having built a lead of 190, reduced England to 163-5 in their second innings in the second session of the day.

But Pope dug his heels in, hitting 17 fours in a 274-minute masterclass to produce arguably



English hopes rest on Ollie Pope who is unbeaten on 148

his finest knock even though India are confident of going 1-0 up in the five-match series.

Rehan Ahmed was keeping Pope company on 16 with England finishing the third day on 316-6, putting them 126 ahead with four wickets in hand.

"The way that Pope played in particular has been an absolute masterclass on how to score runs in this part of the world, when you're not used to playing here," England batter Joe Root said.

India, who have not lost a test series on home soil since 2012, amassed 436 in their reply to England's first innings 246.

That left England with a mountain to climb and the touring batters did not retreat into any defensive shell.

Openers Zak Crawley (31) and Ben Duckett (47) scored freely, frequently employing the sweep shot - both traditional and reverse - to negate India's spinners. Crawley motored along at a run-a-ball rate but could not convert the start and edged a Ravichandran Ashwin ball to lone

'WE'RE NOT YOUNG RABBITS ANY MORE'

Klopp says tiredness led to his decision to leave Liverpool at end of season

Liverpool, England - The decision to leave Liverpool after a highly successful but demanding eight and a half years brought manager Juergen Klopp relief, he said, and that in itself confirmed it was the right thing to do.

The 56-year-old German sent shock waves through global football with his announcement on Friday that he would leave at season's end, and in a lengthy press conference reiterated that his energy for the job was waning.

"Relief was there when I made a decision for myself, to be honest, that was another thing I realised, I didn't know that that would be the case," Klopp said. "Today (feelings are) mixed. But I'm not as emotional as I will be when it comes to an end finally."

He led Liverpool to the League Cup final on Wednesday and has put the Premier League leaders in contention to win four trophies this season.

But excellence demands near-limitless energy, even for the best managers, and Klopp is statistically the most successful club has ever had in terms of win

percentage.

"With all the responsibility you have in this job, you have to be top of your game," Klopp said. "I am, but I've been doing this 24 years now."

"I realised my resources are not endless and I prefer to pack everything into this season and then have a break or stop or whatever. We're not young rabbits any more and we don't jump as high as we did."

Klopp, whose high-octane goal celebrations are beloved by fans, has a candour that is appreciated by the media. He answered reporters' questions for close to 40 minutes on Friday, prompting laughter with his off-the-cuff replies.

"I've had six press conferences a week since it feels like nine years pretty much. I have no problem with you - but I can't wait until I don't have to do that any more," he said.

"There are so many things in this job and you have to be the best version of yourself," he added. "And especially for a club like Liverpool, because it's so im-



Juergen Klopp

There are so many things in this job and you have to be the best version of yourself. And especially for a club like Liverpool, because it's so important for so many people

JUERGEN KLOPP

portant for so many people. I cannot do it on three wheels. It is not allowed. And I never wanted to be a passenger in all that."

Klopp has won the Champions League, Premier League, Club World Cup, FA Cup, League

manager Alex Ferguson announced in 2001 he planned to retire, but had a change of heart six months later. A reporter made that point to Klopp, but was just a few words into his question when the German interrupted.

"No, no, nothing (could change his mind)," he added. "If we won everything this season it wouldn't change my mind. And if we don't win anything, it wouldn't change my mind."

Liverpool's CEO Billy Hogan said he was surprised and sad-

dened by Klopp's decision, but understood it.

"It's hard to put into words how significant it is," Hogan said.

"When Juergen joined in 2015 he spoke about leaving the club in a better place to how he found it. If you look at where we are today there is no doubt he's done that."

Klopp said the fact Liverpool's foundation is solid means he will step away without reservations about the team's future and he won't be offering his two cents on the way out.



Juergen Klopp with Pep Guardiola

Guardiola: I'll miss him but I'll sleep better

London, England - Manchester City boss Pep Guardiola said he will miss old sparring partner Juergen Klopp when the Liverpool manager quits at the end of the season.

Asked if the news had been a shock, Guardiola said: "I am a little bit, he's an absolutely incredible manager and I know I don't know him closely but he's an incredible person."

"I had a feeling that he's leaving part of us too at Man City as Liverpool have been our biggest rival in his years. "Personally he has been my biggest rival from when he was at Dortmund and I was at Bayern Munich. He will be missed, personally I will miss. I am pleased because without him I will sleep a little bit better the night before we play against Liverpool! But I wish him all the best."

City have jousted with Liverpool in several epic title races since Guardiola and Klopp both took charge and look set to go toe-to-toe again this season.



Victor Osimhen

Osimhen set to leave Napoli, confirms De Laurentiis; Mourinho not on radar

Naples, Italy - Napoli president Aurelio De Laurentiis confirmed that Victor Osimhen will leave the club at the end of the season, while also ruling out that Jose Mourinho will come on board to coach the Serie A club.

Nigerian international Osimhen, who is in Ivory Coast for the Africa Cup of Nations, told CBS Sports on Tuesday that he had "already made a decision about the next step in his career".

"We knew about Osimhen since this summer. We knew perfectly well that he would go to Real Madrid, Paris St Germain or an English team," De Laurentiis told reporters at the end of the Serie A club assembly in Milan on Friday.

Osimhen, who moved to Napoli in 2020 for a club-record 70 million euros (\$76 million) potentially rising to 80 million

euros with add-ons, was a pivotal player last season as the club won their first league title in 33 years and finished as Serie A top scorer with 26 goals.

He signed a contract extension last month that runs until June 2026, with Italian media reporting that the new deal included a release clause of between 120 and 130 million euros.

Laurentiis also denied that Mourinho would replace Walter Mazzarri. The Portuguese coach's sacking by AS Roma earlier this month sparked numerous rumours about his future and has been linked with jobs in Saudi Arabia and Napoli.

"Mourinho has nothing to do with Napoli. He is a very funny and impulsive coach, but I feel his destiny lies outside Italy. Surely not at Napoli," he added.

Ake's goal helps Man City edge Spurs; Chelsea held

London, England - FA Cup holders Manchester City left it late to book their place in the fifth round with Nathan Ake's scrappy 88th-minute effort clinching a 1-0 victory at Tottenham Hotspur on Friday.

City had never won at Tottenham since they moved into their new stadium in 2019, nor even managed to score a goal, but Ake flicked in from close-range after home keeper Guglielmo Vicario flapped at a Kevin De Bruyne corner and the ball fell loose.

Tottenham could have few real complaints as they were second-best for long periods against Pep Guardiola's side and barely forced Stefan Ortega into a save of note.

"Today we performed incredibly well. Everything pleased me, from minute one to 95 minute. We are trying to defend the title and coming here is difficult," Guardiola said.

"We create a lot in every game and have courage with or without the ball so I'm really pleased."

Three days after reaching the

League Cup final, eight-time FA Cup winners Chelsea were held to a 0-0 draw at home by Aston Villa while it also ended 0-0 at Ashton Gate between second-tier Bristol City and Premier League Nottingham Forest.

There were goals at Sheffield Wednesday although no winner as they drew 1-1 with Coventry City. Manchester City's record at Tottenham has been something

of an anomaly considering their success everywhere else.

They had lost their last four Premier League games there without scoring and also suffered a 1-0 defeat there in the Champions League semi-final of 2019 before going out in a thrilling second leg they won 4-3.

By the time the latest duel

Today we performed incredibly well. Everything pleased me

PEP GUARDIOLA



Nathan Ake scored the winner for Man City against Tottenham

reached the dying minutes, efforts by Bernardo Silva and De Bruyne meant City had gone unrewarded for 101 efforts at goal at Tottenham's grand new arena which on Friday welcomed 9,000 visiting City fans.

But when Vicario was unable to hold the ball in a crowded area under pressure from Ruben Dias, Ake pounced.

City had dominated the first half with Oscar Bobb having an effort ruled out early for offside while Tottenham, usually so attack-minded, were forced to defend desperately.

The second half was more even until City upped the ante by sending on De Bruyne and Jeremy Doku with 25 minutes remaining. Silva was denied by Vicario and De Bruyne fired inches wide after a mistake by Pierre-Emile Hojbjerg.

Not even the arrival of playmaker James Maddison off the bench for his first appearance since sustaining an ankle injury in November could inspire the hosts who had just one shot on target.

Morocco coach Regragui's Cup of Nations ban lifted

Abidjan, Ivory Coast - Morocco coach Walid Regragui's two-match suspension at the Africa Cup of Nations has been dismissed after an appeal, his country's football federation said on Friday.

Regragui had been given a four-match ban, with two games suspended, and fined for bringing the competition into disrepute.

The decision means Regragui, who had to watch his country's last group game against Zambia on Wednesday from the stands, will be back on the bench for the last-16 clash against South Africa on Tuesday.



Walid Regragui

Regragui, who led his country to the World Cup semi-finals in 2022, was involved in an on-field spat with Democratic Republic of Congo captain Chancel Mbemba at the end of their Group F match in San Pedro on Sunday.

The incident led to scuffles between opposing players and staff on the pitch and alleged fighting in the tunnel at the stadium, but out of public view.

Regragui had gone to shake Mbemba's hand at the end of the match but held on to it as he tried to remonstrate with the defender, who repeatedly tried to pull away before breaking loose.

That set off mayhem at the end of a 1-1 draw. "He insulted me and my assistant on the sidelines before the end of the match," Regragui told reporters.

"And in the end, despite that, I went to shake his hand but also to ask him: 'Why are you talking to me like that?'. Then he looked away like he didn't want to shake my hand," he added.

"He claimed I had called him an idiot but I never said that. He should be a little honest with himself." Morocco's football federation denounced the decision, but its appeal came only hours before the Zambia game.

END OF THE ROAD

Oman sack coach Branko Ivankovic after crashing out of Asian Cup

Muscat - Oman sacked national team coach Branko Ivankovic after they crashed out of the AFC Asian Cup in Doha on Thursday, the Oman Football Association (OFA) announced on social media.

Oman conceded a late equaliser against Kyrgyzstan to crash out in the group phase.

Oman had promised a lot after fighting displays against Saudi Arabia and Thailand but Kyrgyzstan's Joel Kojo found the net late in the game to dash Oman's hopes.

With Kyrgyzstan also failing to advance, Indonesia advanced to the Round of 16 as one of the best four third-placed finishers.

Needing a win to confirm their knockout stage spot, Oman settled quickly and went ahead in the eighth minute through Muh-sen al Ghassani.

Kyrgyz Republic goalkeeper Erzhan Tokotaev could only parry Jameel Al Yahmadi's free-kick, with Al Ghassani taking advantage of the ensuing chaos to slot the ball home.

Boosted by the goal, Oman took a firm grip on proceedings with Kyrgyz Republic having to work hard to not concede again.

The Central Asian side, however, should have equalised in the 27th minute when Gulzhigit Alykulov set up Farkhat Mus-



Oman took the lead against Kyrgyzstan through Muhsen al Ghassani but conceded late to crash out

abekov, only for the unmarked midfielder to send his shot high over the crossbar.

The White Falcons survived another scare just before the break when Oman came close to doubling their lead through Ahmed Al Kaabi's free-kick but the attempt was cleared by Kyrgyz custodian Tokotaev.

Kyrgyz Republic started the second half with more determination and thought they had restored parity when substitute Beknaz Almazbekov's cross into

Unfortunately, we did not achieve the desired result, which was victory and qualification. We were the better team for most of the match, and had many opportunities

BRANKO IVANKOVIC

the penalty box was neatly headed into the back of the net by forward Kojo, only to have it overturned by the VAR.

Oman responded with an ef-

fort of their own, Salaah al Yahyaiei sprinting down the left flank before presenting Ghassani with an opportunity but the Al Seeb defender was too slow to



Branko Ivankovic

react, allowing Tamirlan Kozubaev to hook the ball to safety. Oman ramped up the pressure with Abdul Rahman Al Mushaifri and Arshad Al Alawi both having efforts but it was Kyrgyzstan who found the back of the net in the 80th minute, Kojo taking advantage of a defensive misunderstanding to net the equaliser.

Ivankovic expressed regret over Oman's missed opportunities.

"Unfortunately, we did not achieve the desired result, which was victory and qualification. We were the better team for most of the match, and had many opportunities, but we did not exploit them well," said the head coach.

"Mistakes happen in football and despite predominantly being in control, we ended up conceding because of miscommunication in the final third."



Talal Haji

History-maker Haji determined to help Saudi Arabia win fourth title

Al Rayyan, Qatar - It was a historic moment for Asian football on Thursday when Saudi Arabia's Talal Haji etched his name in the record books, becoming the youngest player ever to play in an Asian Cup match at the age of 16 years and 131 days.

Haji took to the stage in Saudi Arabia's Group F fixture against Thailand, which ended in a 0-0 draw at the Education City Stadium.

The talented teenager nearly made an instant impact, rising to meet Nasser Al Dawsari's cross with a header only to be denied a goal by agile Thai goalkeeper Saranon Anuin.

"I can't describe my feelings at being called to the national team and getting the chance to play in the AFC Asian Cup.

I hope the next stage will be better for me and the team," said Haji who plays for Saudi Pro

League side Al Ittihad Club.

"Being with such a great group of experienced players at the national team has helped me learn and develop. We hope to win the AFC Asian Cup title."

Haji wasn't even born when Saudi Arabia won the last of their three Asian Cup titles in 1996 but the youngster believes they can go all the way in Qatar 2023.

"There is potential to learn and develop, especially in terms of discipline. I hope to help the Saudi Arabian national team secure multiple titles."

Haji's appearance on Thursday meant he surpassed the milestone held by Syria's Munaf Ramadan, who was selected in the squad for the 1988 edition.

The forward's rapid rise doesn't come as a surprise, having scored an impressive 10 goals in 11 games for Saudi Arabia's U17 national team.

Experience will help UAE against Tajikistan, says Al Hashemi

Doha, Qatar - Past encounters against central Asian teams will help the United Arab Emirates find solutions against their Asian Cup last 16 opponents Tajikistan, according to defender Khalid Al Hashemi.

In the 14 months leading up to the tournament, the UAE played friendly matches against Central Asian sides Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan.

They also faced Kazakhstan.

"It is an important match in the Round of 16, no team reaches this stage if they were an easy team to face," said Al Hashemi.

"Most of our friendly matches were similar teams, so we know their style and we know what to expect. We know they can be physical and tough to challenge.

The friendlies help us a lot in preparing for how to play and how to get the win on the pitch.

"We have to remain focused, follow the coach's instructions and hopefully we can get the result." Back in 2019, the Whites faced another debutant side from central Asia in the Round of 16; the clash against Kyrgyzstan at Zayed Sports City proved to



Khalid Al Hashemi

be a hard-fought battle, with the Emiratis needing an extra-time goal from an Ahmed Khalil penalty to win it after the 90 minutes ended 2-2. The UAE went on to reach the semi-finals.

With Tajikistan the next opponents at Ahmad bin Ali Stadium on Sunday, Al Hashemi drew parallels with the previous tournament which he watched

as a supporter, with his international debut only arriving three years later.

"It was a good tournament which made us proud as Emiratis in 2019. "In these tournaments, it is always about winning and qualifying, rather than performance. You could play the best game in your history and still not win, so it will not matter. You can

play a game that doesn't look great but you get that important result. For us, what matters the most is to win.

"There have been some mistakes in previous matches which we are looking to avoid and working on that in training. You see things on the pitch and the analysis from the coach helps us a lot."

CLASSIFIEDS

BIRTHDAY WISHES

SAOUD SARWAR

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ART IN MOTION

OMAN-ITALY TIES

Hubert Vaz

In elite audience in Muscat were witness to a unique artistic presentation of *The Faerie Tale of Venice and the Incense Trade Route* created by Italian artists Lucia Oliva, Luca Moretti, and Luca Rajna, a master of narrative photography, as a celebration of friendship between Oman and Italy, at Bait Al Zubair on January 22.

The play, held to highlight an exhibition of intriguing artistic exhibits, was staged under the patronage of H E Sayyed Said bin Sultan al Busaidi, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Youth, as Guest of Honour. Those who attended the event included Their Highnesses Sayyida Susan al Said, Afra al Said, Mouad Al Said, H E Pierluigi D'Elia, Ambassador of Italy, Cinzia Farisé, CEO of Oman Cables, prominent artist Mariam al Zadjali and others.

Created by Italian artists in Oman Luca Moretti, Lucia Oliva and Luca Rajna, the fairy tale sought to connect Oman and Italy, though far flung from each other yet close in sentiments. It was the result of the fruitful collaboration between Omani and Italian professionals and amateurs in different fields, working side by side with passion and enthusiasm, with a clear vision and purpose - creating a bridge between cultures.

Patronised by the Italian Embassy in Oman and UNESCO International Action Art, the event was supported



Luca Moretti

A unique presentation of 'The Faerie Tale of Venice and the Incense Trade Route' enlightened people in Muscat of the special bonds – cultural and historic – between Oman and Italy



Lucia Oliva

Was the event staged to mark any milestone?

This was the World Premiere of an event which will be staged in many countries, the first of a series of stories and fairy tales, like *One thousand and one nights*, many of which are connected to Oman. We have already written the plot for the second leg of the story which will be shot entirely in Oman. We have also written the story for Bahrain and UAE which will be presented as a film and photo essay like this one.

How much of preparation went into this project?

The project started almost three years ago. First, we shot in Italy, then in Oman on three different occasion. Some scenes were shot at Bait Al Zubair. We also had the support of

the Ministry of Information - Directorate of Electronic Media that provided technicians and cameras to support a high-quality product. The scripting was a tedious job that took almost 6 months.

What message does this presentation have for people in Oman?



Some of the exhibits



The message is very powerful. Many Omanis appreciated it as an enlightening presentation. As a documentary, it aims at conveying useful information but in a pleasant way. The story talks about the connections between Italy and Oman, since the Middle Ages. At that time, Venice was a very powerful city and

it was the only one that had an Arabic name, not a transliterated one, such as Paris, London or Madrid. Venice had a name of its own - Al Bunduqiaa - and this was because of the strong relationship with the Arab world. This fact is explained very well in the movie clips.

Likewise, we tell about Marco Polo - the famous Venetian explorer like Ibn Battuta - who also visited Dhofar 800 years ago and wrote of it in his book *The travels of Marco Polo*. So the connections with Oman in our story are many and very important (and people thanked us for showing it to them). We had the ability to create a project (film, exhibition and story) that could be pleasant but at the same time convey a very high cultural message, in our style.

by the Ministry of Information - Directorate of Electronic Media, and Bait Al Zubair Museum. The three Italian authors of the show were also presented gold medals and certificates of appreciation for their contribution by Ioannis Maronitis, world General President of UNESCO International Action Art.

The proceedings of the evening began with a short documentary film

followed by a storytelling sequence through 24 photographic images and poems inspired by *Divine Comedy* - a medieval masterpiece of Italian literature.

The exhibition, which will be on at the museum till February 10, includes a selection of significant scenography items used in the film, few artworks by Lucia Oliva themed with the presenta-

tion as well as backstage photography by Erfan Arafat and Said al Riyami.

"The classic fairy tale was chosen for the presentation since it has its roots in the most ancient times of all cultures and deserves to be preserved. Like all fairy tales it can be read at two levels - the most immediate one tells of two-time travellers who, in an unknown era, experienced the enchantment of breathing a sublime fragrance (represented by Amouage Gold), so as to charm their senses and become unforgettable.

"Thus, guided by an Enigma that drives them to Venice (Al Bunduqiyya), they follow the clues to seek that treasure, which in the end will be delivered to them together with its precious formula, to be donated to future generations as a gift to mankind," explains Luca.

The key interpretation, however, is focused on the concept of the never ending journey that every human being is called to undertake - what is life if not a continuous search for elevation towards a higher goal, he asserts.

The project involved around 50 people, including Italians and Omanis - professionals and amateurs - besides those from USA, India, France, Sweden and others who worked on different aspects, from costume designs and props to research/translation and execution since the show consisted varied artistic expressions from video clips and poetry recitation to the theatrical presentation.

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