



His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq receives Sheikh Mishal al Ahmad al Jaber al Sabah at Royal Airport in Muscat on Tuesday (ONA)

Kuwait Emir gets rousing welcome

Muscat - Sheikh Mishal al Ahmad al Jaber al Sabah, Emir of the State of Kuwait, arrived on a two-day state visit to the Sultanate of Oman on Tuesday.

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq led the welcoming party for the Emir of Kuwait.

As the guest's jet entered the Omani airspace, it was escorted by a squadron of military aircraft till its arrival at Royal Airport.

When the jet touched down at Royal Airport, His Majesty the Sultan met the guest at the foot of the ramp, welcoming him and wishing him and his accompanying delegation a pleasant stay in Oman.

Then, His Majesty the Sultan and Sheikh Mishal headed to the airport hall, escorted by two rows of Royal Guard of Oman (RGO) personnel.

After a short break, the motorcade of the two leaders left the Royal Airport, heading to Al Alam Palace for an official reception.

As the motorcade passed Muscat Gate, Royal Camel Corps personnel flanked both sides of the road, welcoming the guest. Then, a cavalcade from Royal Cavalry and the RGO Cavalry escorted the official motorcade till the National Museum to the

accompaniment of a mounted military music band.

When the official motorcade arrived at Al Alam Palace, the artillery fired a 21- gun salute for the guest.

Upon arrival of the motorcade at the courtyard of Al Alam Palace, a welcome tune was played by the RGO band in an atmosphere of fanfare and festivities.

A reception was held at Al Alam Palace with participation of more than 600 male and female citizens. Folklore bands flanked the passage, chanting slogans welcoming the guest.

After that, His Majesty the Sultan accompanied Sheikh Mishal to the Dais of Honour where the National Anthem of the State of Kuwait was played,

followed by His Majesty shaking hands with members of the official delegation accompanying the emir and wishing them a pleasant stay.

On his turn, Sheikh Mishal shook hands with members of the Royal Family, Chairmen of State Council and Shura Council, ministers, commanders of Sultan's Armed Forces and Royal Oman Police.

After that, His Majesty the Sultan and the guest proceeded to the reception hall in Al Alam Palace for refreshments.



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OMAN, KUWAIT DEEPEN RELATIONS



H M, Emir of Kuwait hold talks

Muscat - His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and Sheikh Mishal al Ahmad al Jaber al Sabah, Emir of the State of Kuwait, held an official session of talks at Al Alam Palace on Tuesday.

At the outset of the session, His Majesty the Sultan reiterated his welcome to Sheikh Mishal, wishing him and his accompanying delegation a pleasant stay.

On his turn, Sheikh Mishal expressed his utmost thanks and appreciation to His Majesty the Sultan for the warm welcome and hospitality.

The session reviewed march of the deep-rooted and distinguished relations binding Oman and Kuwait. It also touched on various aspects of cooperation between the two countries and means of promoting them to serve the fraternal ties between their peoples and achieve further prosperity, progress and welfare.

The two leaders also discussed a set of topics, in light of the regional and international developments.

MUTUAL COMMENDATION



His Majesty, Sheikh Mishal exchange orders

Muscat - His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and Sheikh Mishal al Ahmad al Jaber al Sabah, Emir of Kuwait, exchanged orders and souvenirs at Al Alam Palace on Tuesday evening.

His Majesty the Sultan conferred the 'Al Said Order', Oman's highest accolade, on Sheikh Mishal, in commendation for Kuwaiti Emir and in manifestation of the deep-rooted fraternal relations binding the two countries and their peoples.

Meanwhile, Sheikh Mishal awarded His Majesty the Sultan the 'Order of Mubarak the Great', Kuwait's highest decoration, in commendation of His Majesty the Sultan and in acknowledgment of the distinguished fraternal ties between the two countries and their peoples.

His Majesty the Sultan also presented Sheikh Mishal an Omani dagger as a souvenir.



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On Monday, 5th February 2024, Majan University College hosted and organised a symposium on "Reflective Practice for Enhancing Professional Development in Higher Education" where educators, scholars, and professionals converged. The symposium was organised under the patronage of Her Excellency Professor Rahma bint Ibrahim Al Mahroogi, Minister of Higher Education, Research & Innovation, to discuss the transformative power of reflective practice in the field of higher education.

The symposium was co-sponsored by the Ministry of Higher Education, Research, and Innovation and Advance HE, a UK-based organisation that manages various initiatives, including the Higher Education Academy (HEA) Fellowships scheme, aiming to improve practices in higher education worldwide. Kristian Rumble outlined the HEA Fellowships scheme as a means of promoting reflection and enhancing professional practices, generating keen interest from the audience.

The Symposium on Reflective Practice for Enhancing Professional Development in Higher Education proved to be a successful event, and it is hoped that it will further increase awareness of the notion of reflective practice, as well as leading to greater collaboration between Advance HE and higher education institutions in Oman.

as a catalyst for positive change, allowing educators to refine their approaches through self-analysis. The symposium elucidated the impact of reflective practice on teaching, learning, and institutional growth. The two keynote speakers, Mr Kristian Rumble of Advance HE and Dr Peter Mitchell of MUC, along with representatives from other universities and colleges in the Sultanate, shared experiences and insights on the value of reflective practice in enhancing higher education.

The event was jointly sponsored by the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, and Advance HE, a UK-based organisation that manages various initiatives, including the Higher Education Academy (HEA) Fellowships scheme, aiming to improve practices in higher education worldwide. Kristian Rumble outlined the HEA Fellowships scheme as a means of promoting reflection and enhancing professional practices, generating keen interest from the audience.

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Estidamah signs pact to set up
Oman Business Growth Fund

Our Correspondent
Muscat

In a strategic move to fortify the financial sector and support business development, the National Programme for Fiscal Sustainability and Financial Sector Development - Estidamah - has partnered with the British Embassy and key commercial banks to lay the groundwork for the Omani Business Growth Fund.

A memorandum of cooperation was signed to this effect on Tuesday during the tenth session of the Oman-Britain Strategic Consultation Group in Muscat.

This move signifies a step towards fostering economic collaboration between the two nations, official said.

Jointly chaired by Nasser bin Khamis al Jashmi, Secretary-General at the Ministry of Finance and Head of Tax Authority; and Lord Gerry Grimstone, former UK minister for Investment, the meeting underscored their commitment to broaden the competitive landscape of Oman's banking sector and provide robust financial solutions for ventures seeking investments.

It is expected that the fund will expand the financial market's scope, in sync with the ambitious goals outlined in Oman Vision 2040.

Key discussions at the meeting revolved around the execution of national initiatives and projects aimed at furthering sustainable green finance, people in the know of things informed.

Participants exchanged insights on the financial sector's development, strategies to make Oman more inviting for foreign investments, and adopting the best practices in the decentralised management of governorates.

Jashmi lauded the Oman-Britain Strategic Consultation Group for its role in facilitating knowledge exchange and bolstering bilateral relations.

Lord Grimstone highlighted the critical nature of these meetings, celebrating the enduring partnership and friendship between Oman and the UK.

MARKET WATCH

MSX30	4,548.83
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FOREX RATES

(RO1 equals)

India	215.76
Pakistan	719.73
Bangladesh	285.17
Philippines	146.44
Sri Lanka	812.51

*Rates as on February 06
Source: xe.com

BRIEFS

Retail sales decline across Europe

The retail sales volume in December fell 0.8% in the euro area and 0.7% in the EU year-on-year, official figures released on Tuesday showed.

In the euro area, the volume of retail trade dropped 6.2% for automotive fuels and 1% for food, drinks and tobacco, while it grew 0.1% for non-food products, Eurostat said.

On the EU side, the retail trade volume lost 6.3% for automotive fuels and 0.7% for food, drinks and tobacco, while it rose 0.4% for non-food products.

The largest drops were seen in Slovenia (minus 15%), Estonia (minus 4.2%), and Slovakia (minus 3.8%).

The largest rises were seen in Croatia (8.9%), Greek Cyprus (3.8%), and Spain (3.4%).

Galfar wins RO100mn Qarn Alam contract from PDO

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman's leading construction and contracting firm, Galfar Engineering and Contracting Company, has been awarded a massive contract worth RO100mn by Petroleum Development Oman (PDO).

Galfar shares rose by 0.64% on Tuesday at the Muscat Stock Exchange following the announcement of the new contract award by the company.

'We are pleased to inform our esteemed shareholders that PDO has awarded Galfar the Project Delivery Contract Qarn Alam via a letter of award that was formally accepted by both parties on January 30, 2024, and approval from PDO to disclose was confirmed today,' Galfar said in a disclosure to the Muscat Stock Exchange on Tuesday.

As per the disclosure, the value of this call-off contract is approximately RO100mn for an execution period of five years, effective from January 30, 2024.

Galfar expects this contract to have a positive impact on the company.

'We take this opportunity to express our appreciation to PDO for the confidence vested in Galfar through this award,' the company added.



(Photograph for illustrative purpose only)

PDO has awarded Galfar its second major contract in less than a year's time. In June 2023, Galfar was awarded PDO's massive contract worth RO280mn for Off-Plot Delivery Contract Qarn Alam

This is the second major contract awarded by PDO to Galfar Engineering and Contracting Company in less than a year's

time. In June 2023, Galfar was awarded a massive contract worth RO280mn for Off-Plot Delivery Contract Qarn Alam by

PDO. The contract also included an additional three-year extension option worth RO120mn.

According to the company's preliminary financial results, Galfar's total revenues jumped to RO250mn in 2023 from RO177.62mn recorded in the previous year. However, the company's net profit sharply dropped to RO50,000 in 2023 compared to RO1.283mn recorded in 2022.

Total investment in Duqm zone reaches RO6bn

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD) has managed to attract various projects in diverse economic sectors, thanks to the zone's numerous investment advantages such as its geographical location, the incentives offered by the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ) to investors, and world-class industrial and logistics infrastructure.

Eng Ahmed Hassan al Dheeb, Deputy Chairman of OPAZ, explained that there are many indicators confirming the promising future of SEZAD and its potential to be a global investment hub contributing positively to economic diversification.

The OPAZ statistics indicate that there are investment projects currently under construction in SEZAD at a cost of about RO1.8bn, bringing the total volume of investments in Duqm to RO6bn, including investments worth RO4.2bn in existing projects.

In a statement to Oman News Agency (ONA), Dheeb said that SEZAD has attracted qualitative projects, including the Duqm Refinery and Petrochemical Industries. The zone has also been able to achieve new investments



Investment in SEZAD is likely to rise in the coming years, especially in green industries and renewable energy projects

ENG AHMED HASSAN AL DHEEB

by attracting a group of projects in renewable energy, green industries, and fisheries.

He added that due to the marketing and promotional efforts made by OPAZ, investment indicators have shown continuous progress and successive growth.

Dheeb affirmed that the volume of investments in SEZAD is likely to rise in the coming years with an increase in the number of projects wishing to invest in the zone, especially green industries and renewable energy projects.



Moody's assigns (P)Ba1 rating to NEDC's sukuk

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Moody's Investors Service has assigned a (P)Ba1 rating to the backed senior unsecured trust certificate programme (the sukuk programme) of Mazoon Assets Company, a special purpose vehicle established by Nama Electricity Distribution Company (NEDC).

Moody's has also assigned a (P)Ba1 rating to the senior unsecured GMTN issuance programme (the GMTN programme) established under Nama Electricity Distribution Company. The outlook is stable, according to a statement issued by Moody's.

The assigned (P)Ba1 rating on the sukuk programme is at the same level as NEDC's Ba1 corporate family rating (CFR). In Moody's view, the potential certificate holders (1) will be effectively exposed to NEDC's senior unsecured credit risk; (2) will not have any preferential claim or recourse over the trust assets, or rights to cause any sale or disposition of the trust assets except as expressly provided under the transaction documents; and (3) will only have rights against NEDC, ranking pari

passu with other senior unsecured obligations as provided in the transaction documents.

As such, Moody's said a change in NEDC's rating will be reflected in the ratings of the sukuk programme and any certificates issued under the programme. The sukuk is structured as an Ijara (asset sale and lease back transaction).

'Similar to the new sukuk programme, a (P)Ba1 rating has been assigned to the new GMTN programme. Bonds issued under the GMTN programme will rank pari passu with the other senior unsecured obligations of NEDC,' Moody's said.

As part of its funding plans, NEDC is expected to issue bonds and sukuk under these newly established programmes to refinance short-term debt and fund ongoing capital investment, the rating agency added.

Moody's views NEDC, formerly Mazoon Electricity Company, as a government-related issuer (GRI) whose Ba1 CFR reflects a Baseline Credit Assessment (BCA) of ba2, combined with a very high level of dependence and a high level of support from the Government of Oman.

CBO issues treasury bills worth RO68mn

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Central Bank of Oman (CBO) announced this week the issuance of two tenders of government treasury bills worth a total of RO68mn.

The value of the allotted treasury bills amounted to RO17mn for a maturity period of 28 days. The average accepted price was RO99.600 for every RO100 bill, with the minimum accepted price also at RO99.600. The average discount rate and yield reached 5.2142% and 5.2352%, respectively.

For the treasury bills with a maturity period of 91 days, the value of the allotted bills amounted to RO51mn. The average accepted price for every RO100 bill was RO98.662, with the minimum accepted price at RO98.660. The average discount rate and yield reached



5.3668% and 5.4396%, respectively.

The interest rate on repo operations with CBO is 6.00%, while the discount rate on the

Treasury Bills Discounting Facility with the central bank is 6.50%.

Treasury bills are short-term highly secured financial instru-

ments issued by the Ministry of Finance, providing licensed commercial banks with the opportunity to invest their surplus funds. The Central Bank of Oman acts

Interest rate on repo operations with CBO is 6.00%, while the discount rate on the Treasury Bills Discounting Facility with the central bank is 6.50%

as the issue manager and provides the added advantage of ready liquidity through discounting and repurchase facilities (Repo).

Furthermore, treasury bills promote the local money market by creating a benchmark yield curve for short-term interest rates. The government may also resort to this instrument whenever necessary to finance its recurrent expenditures.

MENA markets witness 48 IPOs raising \$10.7bn in 2023

Dubai, UAE - The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) markets saw 48 initial public offerings (IPOs) in 2023, raising \$10.7bn in total, according to the EY MENA IPO Eye Q4 2023 report.

Five listings, mainly in the energy and logistics sectors, contributed 58% towards the total IPO proceeds raised, the report said.

The Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) saw the largest IPO in Oman to date with OQ Gas Networks raising \$772mn. Meanwhile, Oman Investment Authority (OIA), the country's sovereign wealth fund, is preparing to launch multiple IPOs and list state assets to strengthen its capital markets, according to the EY report.

During Q4 2023, 19 IPOs raised \$4.9bn in proceeds. ADES Holding Company raised the most funds and contributed 25% of the overall IPO proceeds in the



last quarter, followed by Pure Health Holding with 20%. All Q4 listing activity took place in the GCC region, with Egypt being the only non-GCC country that reported IPOs throughout 2023.

Investor confidence in the region continues, with 11 out of the 19 Q4 2023 IPOs recording a first-day gain in share price. At the end of 2023, 26 out of the 48 IPOs showed a positive return compared to their listing price, with Armah Sports Company

achieving the highest gain at 72%.

Last year recorded a 6% decrease in the number of IPOs and a 51% drop in proceeds, compared to 2022. Notably, 2022 witnessed a significant number of IPOs, such as Americana Restaurants International (Americana), Saudi Aramco Base Oil Company (Luberef) and Arabian Drilling Company, which played a role in the decline seen in 2023.

The 2024 pipeline includes 29

companies across various sectors announcing their intention to list, with Saudi Arabia and the UAE leading the way in terms of expected volumes. Outside the GCC, Egypt has four IPOs planned.

In a press release, Brad Watson, EY MENA Strategy and Transactions Leader, said, "In 2023, there were a total of 48 IPOs raising \$10.7bn, of which five listed companies contributed 58% toward the total IPO proceeds raised, mainly in the energy and logistics sectors. Investor confidence in the region continues with 11 out of the 19 Q4 2023 IPOs recording a first day gain in share price."

"The 2024 pipeline includes 29 companies across various sectors, announcing their intention to list with Saudi Arabia and the UAE leading the way in terms of expected volumes."

Once again, Saudi Arabia reaffirmed its dominance in

terms of IPO activity in the region with 14 of the 19 listings in Q4 2023. ADES Holding Company marked the highest proceeds at \$1.2bn, followed by SAL Saudi Logistics Services Company at \$0.7bn. Both IPOs were listed on the Tadawul Main Market. The remaining 12 IPOs, raising \$140mn in total, took place on the Nomu - Parallel Market, which also witnessed the quarter's only direct listing in the MENA region - Almutajma Al-raida Medical Co.

Gregory Hughes, EY MENA IPO and Transaction Diligence Leader, said, "The MENA IPO market delivered a healthy number of IPOs across various sectors in 2023, despite the subdued global economic backdrop and the rising geopolitical tensions in the Middle East. A number of reputable large state-owned companies listed in 2023, including the Dubai Taxi Co and OQ Gas Networks."

Fitch Affirms Saudi Arabia's rating at 'A+'; outlook remains stable

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Fitch Ratings has affirmed Saudi Arabia's Long-Term Foreign-Currency Issuer Default Rating (IDR) at 'A+' with a stable outlook.

Saudi Arabia's ratings reflect its strong fiscal and external balance sheets, with government debt-to-GDP ratio and sovereign net foreign assets (SNFA) considerably stronger than both the 'A' and 'AA' medians, Fitch said in a press statement.

As per the rating agency, the kingdom has significant fiscal buffers in the form of deposits and other public sector assets.

"Oil dependence, low World Bank governance indicators and vulnerability to geopolitical shocks remain relative weaknesses. Nonetheless, governance is improving with social and economic reforms and efforts to bolster effectiveness across government institutions," Fitch said.

Saudi Arabia's foreign reserves excluding gold declined moderately in 2023, to \$437bn, as financial account outflows in the form of investments abroad outweighed the current account surplus, which narrowed to an estimated 4.5% of GDP due to lower oil revenue and high imports.

Fitch forecasts reserves to decline to an average of \$420bn in 2024-2025, as the current account surplus narrows on the as-



Fitch expects Saudi Arabia's oil dependence to remain a rating weakness. Oil revenue will account for around 60% of total budget revenue in 2024-2025 and oil GDP 30% of total nominal GDP

sumption of lower oil revenue, but that outward investments by large institutions such as the Public Investment Fund (PIF) and pension funds moderate.

As per Fitch's analysis, Saudi Arabia's gross government debt-to-GDP ratio rose to 26.5% of estimated GDP in 2023, but remained low, at roughly half the

'A' median of 50%.

The rating agency forecasts that government debt-to-GDP ratio will increase to 28% in 2024 and 30% in 2025. This assumes that Brent crude oil prices average \$80 per barrel in 2024, \$70 per barrel in 2025, contributing to budget deficits and constraining nominal GDP. Fitch

assumes deficits are funded by borrowing, rather than asset drawdowns.

"We estimate that government deposits at the Saudi Central Bank, comprising the government current account and the fiscal reserve, were close to SAR450bn (11.4% of GDP) at end-2023. This represents a significant fiscal buffer and puts net government debt at 15.1% of GDP."

Saudi Arabia's 2024 budget projects fiscal deficits over the medium term, of around 2% of GDP, marking a shift away from the previous set of medium-term figures that projected annual sur-

pluses and a decline in government debt-to-GDP ratio.

According to Fitch, spending ran 14% ahead of budget in 2023 and in the latest projections spending in 2025 will be 15% higher than previously planned. This policy recalibration reflects a decision to make more use of the fiscal space to support strong non-oil economic growth and press ahead with economic and social priorities under the Vision 2030 strategic development plan.

"We forecast a budget deficit of 2.3% of GDP in 2024, similar to 2023 and slightly ahead of the 1.9% of GDP budget plan. We

expect spending 3.5% above budget, at SAR1.3tn on higher capex and procurement," the rating agency said.

Fitch noted that Saudi Arabia's oil dependence remains a rating weakness. Oil revenue will account for around 60% of total budget revenue in 2024-2025 (albeit down from 90% 10 years ago) and oil GDP 30% of total nominal GDP.

"Saudi Arabia's fiscal breakeven oil price for the budget has risen in recent years and we forecast it will remain above \$90 per barrel in 2024 before falling to \$85 in 2025. A \$10 per barrel movement in oil prices impacts our budget forecast by 2%-2.5% of GDP, holding other factors constant. A change in oil output by 500,000 bpd impacts the budget by around 1% of GDP," Fitch expalined.

However, as Fitch said, an increase in public sector investments, combined with a raft of social and economic reforms has boosted the country's non-oil economy. Fitch projects real growth of 4.5% in the non-oil sector (excluding government) in 2024-2025, following an average of around 5% in 2022-2023.

"Growth will be supported by public sector investments, business environment reform, gradually lower interest rates, robust credit growth, ongoing development of retail and tourism sectors and employment gains among Saudis and expats," the rating agency added.

US business activity growth climbs to 7 month high

New York, US - Business activity growth in the US accelerated in January to its highest level in seven months, S&P Global said in a report on Tuesday.

"The US services economy signalled a stronger start to the year as business activity expanded at the fastest pace since June 2023," the report said.

"Contributing to the upturn was a quicker rise in new orders. Improved demand conditions were reported in the domestic market, but new export orders also increased, rising at the steepest rate since August 2023," it added.

The S&P Global US Services PMI Business Activity Index came in at 52.5 in January, up from 51.4 in December.

The figure, however, is slightly lower than the earlier released flash estimate of 52.9.

"The key driver of faster growth was the financial services sector, where looser financial conditions tied to expectations of lower interest rates spurred greater activity in January," said Chris Williamson, Chief Business Economist at S&P Global Market Intelligence.

Global chip sales fell 8.2% in 2023: Report

Istanbul, Turkey - Global semiconductor sales fell 8.2% in 2023, the Semiconductor Industry Association (SIA) said in a report on Monday.

Semiconductor industry sales totalled \$526.8bn last year, down from \$574.1bn in 2022, the highest annual level on record, the SIA said in a statement.

While sales picked up during the second half of 2023, fourth-quarter sales totalled \$146bn - 11.6% more than the same period of 2022 and 8.4% higher than the third quarter of 2023.

On a monthly basis, global semiconductor sales in December 2023 were \$48.6 billion, up 1.5% compared to November.

"Global semiconductor sales were sluggish early in 2023 but rebounded strongly during the second half of the year, and double-digit market growth is projected for 2024," SIA President

and CEO John Neuffer said in the statement.

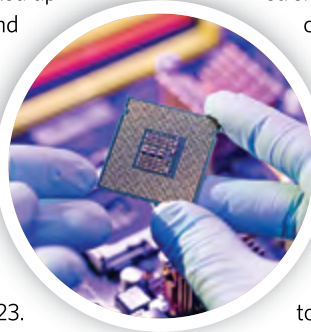
"With chips playing a larger and more important role in countless products the world depends on, the long-term outlook for the semiconductor market is extremely strong," he said.

"Advancing government policies that invest in R&D, strengthen the semiconductor workforce, and reduce barriers to trade will help the industry continue to grow and innovate for many years to come."

Europe was the only regional market that experienced annual growth in 2023, with 4%, according to the report.

Annual sales into all other regional markets fell last year, with China plummeting 14%, Japan 3.1%, the Americas 5.2%, and Asia-Pacific and other regions declining 10.1%.

Anadolu Agency



Qatar signs 20-year deal to supply LNG to India

Doha, Qatar - QatarEnergy announced that it has entered into a 20-year LNG sale and purchase agreement (SPA) with Petronet LNG Limited for the supply of 7.5mn tonnes per annum (MTPA) of LNG destined to India.

Pursuant to the terms of the SPA, the contracted LNG volumes from Qatar will be delivered ex-ship to terminals across India onboard QatarEnergy's vast LNG fleet starting May 2028.

The signing of the SPA was celebrated during a special ceremony held in Goa, India under the patronage of Saad Sherida al-Kaabi, Minister of State for Energy Affairs, President and CEO of QatarEnergy, and Hardeep Singh Puri, Minister of Petroleum and Natural Gas, and Housing and Urban Affairs in India.

In attendance were Pankaj Jain, Secretary, Ministry of Petroleum & Natural Gas and Chairman of Petronet LNG, Sandeep Kumar Gupta, Chairman and Managing Director of GAIL (India) Limited, Shrikant Madhav Vaidya, Chairman of Indian Oil Corporation, and Krishnakumar Gopalan, Chairman and Managing Director of Bharat Petroleum Corporation Limited (BPCL).



To mark this important achievement, a document commemorating the occasion was signed by Akshay Kumar Singh, Managing Director and CEO of Petronet LNG Limited and Abdullah Ahmad al-Hussaini, QatarEnergy's Executive Vice President for Marketing.

In a press statement, Kaabi said, "This agreement is another key milestone in the long-standing energy partnership between Qatar and India and comes on the heels of the 20th anniversary of the first LNG shipment to India."

He added, "We believe that

this new agreement, with our valued customers Petronet LNG and its esteemed shareholder companies, will further strengthen the relationship with India and support its vision to increase the contribution of natural gas in its energy mix."

Petronet first entered into an

agreement for the supply of LNG from Qatar in 1999 for the delivery of 7.5MTPA. It was followed in 2015 by another agreement for the supply of an additional 1MTPA of LNG, raising the total annual long-term volumes contracted between the two sides to 8.5MTPA.

Samsung chairman Lee acquitted in controversial 2015 merger case

Seoul, South Korea - Samsung Electronics Co Chairman Lee Jae-yong was on Monday acquitted by a Seoul court, in connection with a case involving the controversial 2015 merger of two Samsung affiliates, allegedly conducted to help him take over control of South Korea's biggest conglomerate, reported Yonhap News Agency.

According to the news report, the Seoul Central District Court

delivered the not-guilty sentence for Lee, three years and five months after he was indicted on charges of involvement in market irregularities in the merger of Cheil Industries Inc and Samsung C&T Corp to solidify his managerial control of the group at a lower cost. Lee was charged with stock price rigging, breach of trust and accounting fraud in the course of the controversial 2015 merger, where three Samsung C&T



Samsung Electronics Chairman Lee Jae-yong

shares were offered for one Cheil share.

The merger was seen as crucial to Lee's succession as the heir of the family-controlled group, as his father, Lee Kun-hee, had suffered a heart attack the previous year.

According to the Yonhap News Agency, prosecutors suspected that the group manipulated the stock market to inflate the prices of Cheil and drive

down Samsung C&T prices through various unfair practices, including disseminating false market information, mass purchasing the affiliates' stocks and illegally lobbying the National Pension Service, a major Samsung C&T shareholder, to support the merger.

Prosecutors suspected that such irregularities had been pursued since 2012 in favour of Lee, who was the biggest shareholder

in Cheil with a 23.2% share, and with the intent to help him tighten his control of Samsung C&T, the de facto holding company of Samsung Group.

Announcing the acquittal on Monday, the court found no illegalities in Lee's succession process, the news report said. The court concluded that Lee's succession as the group chairman or the solidification of his control of the group was not the sole pur-

pose of the 2015 merger, nor was there any evidence showing that the merger inflicted financial losses on shareholders.

The court also found Lee not guilty of charges of involvement in the suspected accounting fraud at Samsung Biologics, a subsidiary of Cheil Industries.

"None of the criminal charges in this case have been proven," the court said, as per the report. ANI

Occupational health summit begins in Muscat

Under the patronage of the Ministry of Energy and Minerals (MEM), H E Dr Mahad bin Said Baowain, Minister of Labour, opened the International Occupational Health Summit (IOHS 2024), at a ceremony held at the Oman Convention & Exhibition Centre in Muscat.

The exhibition, being held in collaboration with Oman Energy Association (OPAL) under the theme 'Towards Sustainable Health Excellence at the Workplace', drew industry leaders, senior officials, and subject matter experts from various sectors, along with professionals interested in occupational health and industrial hygiene.

The event, which will come to an end on Wednesday, reflects the country's unwavering commitment to advancing occupational health concerns and implementing best practices, a release said.

The summit attempts to highlight Oman's efforts and role in occupational health on local, regional, and global scales, aiming to achieve world-class occupational health standards and practices across various industries. It shall reinforce Oman's commitment to fostering a safe, healthy, and highly productive workforce, the organisers asserted.

The primary objective of IOHS 2024 is to establish a global plat-



form for occupational health excellence in the region, showcasing global standards, best practices, innovation, and technology. The summit brings together international occupational health leaders, medical officers, professionals, regulators, hygienists, academics, consultants, students, and other stakeholders with a focus on protecting labor and creating a healthy work environment.

The summit hosts insights from local, regional, and international experts, specialists, and academics representing diverse organisations. The comprehensive programme encompasses four keynote sessions, six leadership panel discussions, 18 technical sessions, and three pre-conference workshops. Topics covered include worker wel-

fare, leadership and sustainability in occupational health, policies and standards, innovation and technology, mental health at the workplace, occupational health surveillance, and various specialised subjects.

The accompanied exhibition of IOHS 2024 witnesses the participation of various companies from diverse local, regional, and international entities. This exhibition serves as a platform to showcase global standards and cultures in Occupational Health, spotlighting best practices, innovation, and technology within the field.

It promises to be a comprehensive exploration of advancements in occupational health, fostering collaboration and knowledge exchange among participants.

The summit witnesses participation from various government entities and global organisations including Ministry of Energy & Minerals, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Labour, Muscat Municipality, Oman Energy Association (OPAL), Civil Aviation Authority, Capital Market Authority, Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry, General Federation of Oman Workers, as

well as prominent industry players like Petroleum Development Oman, OQ, Oman LNG, ASYAD, Occidental Oman, Oman National Engineering and Investment Company, CC Energy Development, RTITB, Seeh Al Sarya Engineering (SAS), Petroleum, Daleel Petroleum, Sohar Aluminium, Takaful Oman, and various other local, regional, and international companies.

MoE hosts meeting on education for Business Administration, IT

The Ministry of Education (MoE), represented by the School Education Development and Structuring Project Management Office, on Tuesday organised an awareness meeting on the path of vocational and technical education for business administration and information technology majors.

The meeting took place at the Modern College of Commerce and Science.

The meeting aims to spread awareness of this path of education and the ministry's directions in implementing it to keep pace with economic transformations and meet the changing needs of the labour market.

The sultanate's efforts in this field reflect its commitment to providing comprehensive and advanced educational opportunities for young people to develop their skills and achieve sustainable development.

The meeting was organised in



cooperation with the Modern College of Commerce and Science, which is the partner in implementing vocational and technical education for business administration and information technology majors in four schools in Muscat and North Batinah governorates.

Teams from the governorates of Muscat and North Batinah, in addition to the principals of the

schools implementing vocational education took part in the meeting, a release stated.

The meeting was also attended by a group of administrators and stakeholders from the Modern College of Commerce and Science.

The technical team of business administration and information technology specialists from the ministry reviewed several

topics, most notably student levels and analysis of results for the first semester, evaluation controls, student affairs list, the most prominent developments and challenges, and the ministry's procedures for welcoming a new batch in the academic year 2024-25 of grade 11 students with the same majors in the same schools.

Dr Atom al Khatri, head of the technical team for vocational and technical education for business administration and information technology majors, said that these meetings aim to identify the most prominent challenges in implementing such education in the sultanate, and as a new experience at the level of post-basic education, the current situation of students' levels must be analysed and appropriate solutions developed to ensure the success of this experiment and achieve the desired goals of this programme.



ISD celebrates 31st annual day

Indian School Darsait on Thursday (February 1) organised a great event to celebrate its 31st annual day with much pomp and fair.

The event was graced by Sheikh Hashil bin Habib al Hasani of Darsait as the chief guest, while Al Azhar Saud al Salmi, former assistant director of the Foreign Schools Office, Ministry of Education, was the guest of honour.

Mohammed Salim al Abri, senior studies and follow-up specialist from the South Batinah governorate, Ministry of Education, was present as the special

guest, a release stated.

Among the other dignitaries present in the event were members of Board of Directors, school management committee vice president Shalimar Moideen, convenor Nishanth P P, treasurer Ashraf V and members of the school management committee, the principal and administrators. Parents and well-wishers joined the celebration apart from the teachers and students.

The function commenced with the Royal Anthem of Oman followed by the National Anthem of India and the ceremonial light-

ing of the traditional lamp. An invocation dance performed by the senior students added a special ambience to the event.

Aysha Davood, head girl of the school, extended a warm welcome to the gathering.

Chief guest Sheikh Hasani felicitated Halima Khudabaskh Eid Mohd al Balushi for completing 25 years of service as well as those teachers, who completed 12 years of service.

He also honoured the teachers who won the prestigious 'Navin Asher Kazi Awards for Excellence in Teaching'.

Ford range of vehicles continues riding on 'New Year Delights' campaign

Ford's range of exciting vehicles is having a great ride on exclusive 'New Year Delights' campaign with benefits such as services for three years/60,000km and one-year registration.

Ford has some of the finest dependable vehicles in its range. They include the Everest, Territory, Taurus and Explorer.

With capability at its core, the Ford Everest is engineered to take on tough tasks with ease. Inside, premium levels of craftsmanship have created a quiet and refined seats for up to seven, while class-leading technology and safety features offer driver and passengers comfort and peace of mind on every journey.

Powering the Ford Everest is a 2.3L EcoBoost Turbo petrol engine, mated to an efficient 10-speed SelectShift automatic which delivers Best-in-Class 296HP power and 420Nm of torque. In addition to a more refined and comfortable interior, Ford focused on incorporating



the latest connectivity and technology features into the Next-Gen Ford Everest.

It comes with an 8" digital instrument panel that replaces the traditional analogue cluster, in addition to large, high-resolution portrait 10.1" or best-in-class 12" touchscreens.

The Territory SUV combines

a modern and striking look, ample cabin space, and confident driving with smart, safe technologies and empowering experiences for young professionals and small, busy families.

Ford Territory's interior provides a convenient and sophisticated experience space that caters to a wide range of cus-

tomers needs, whether for work, play, or family. The horizontal coast-to-coast design evokes a connecting space in an embracing gesture, creating openness and spaciousness.

Comfort and function are maximized through Premium Leather seats, with a 10-way adjustable ergonomic driver's seat.

Ford Territory is equipped with an EcoBoost 1.8L engine, delivering 320Nm torque using moderate fuel and impressive power up to 190hp. The vehicle is equipped with an advanced dual clutch Seven-Speed automatic transmission providing smooth, responsive gear shifting. The Ford Taurus blends seam-

less connectivity, high on-road performance, and an entirely new sleek modern design. Boasting an all-new design, on an entirely different platform, the all-new Taurus still exudes refinement with numerous premium touches.

Featuring 19", 10-spoke polished alloy wheels, a new flatter streamlined hood, and a power-

deployable door handle, Taurus is sleeker in its stance. Under the bonnet, Ford's proven 2.0-litre EcoBoost engine powers the all-new Taurus, mated to an eight-speed automatic transmission, producing 232 Hp and 388 Nm of torque. Offered with front-wheel drive and three driving modes - Normal, Sport, and Eco - the Blue Oval's flagship sedan enjoys an impressive economy of as much as 15.3 km per litre.

The Ford Explorer looks impressive and performs amazingly well too. Equipped with 4x4 capability, impressive space, comfort and a host of features and technology, the Ford Explorer is a trusted partner for the outdoors and routine journeys too.

The Explorer is equipped with a revised 2.3-litre turbocharged EcoBoost engine that produces 300 horsepower and 420Nm of torque. The engine is matched to an all-new 10-speed transmission and intelligent all-wheel-drive system.

Gen X driving GCC outbound travel, says ATM

The GCC outbound market is forecast to grow exponentially over the next five years, driven by Gen X travellers, according to recent research, says Arabian Travel Market (ATM) which takes place from May 6 to 9 at the Dubai World Trade Centre.

Generation X, those people born between 1965 and 1980 - are leading the significant growth in outbound travel from the GCC countries, according to findings by New York headquartered Research Nester.

The report highlights numerous reasons why this generation has a dominant share of the GCC's outbound market, particularly in the UAE and Saudi Arabian markets.

Commenting on the report, Danielle Curtis, exhibition director, Arabian Travel Market said, "Within an age range of approximately 43 years to 58 years, many Gen Xers hold senior positions within companies and as such tend to travel overseas regularly on business trips.

"In addition, with responsibility comes reward and therefore many have high earning potential and disposable income. Many



successful entrepreneurs at this stage in their careers also have built significant wealth and can afford to travel frequently.

"Many industry commentators are focused on Millennial

and Gen Z travellers, but it is perfectly logical that Gen X would dominate the GCC outbound market value given the region's demographics, particularly expatriate senior management."

Members of Gen X are also changing their lifestyles, with considerable numbers now looking for a more sustainable work life balance. This often means spending more leisure time with

their families, including holidays and combining business with leisure, which is significantly growing the bleisure segment of travel. To illustrate these points, Gen X will be responsible for

US\$11.1bn, 41% of Saudi Arabia's total outbound market value of US\$27bn by 2028 according to the report. It is a similar picture in the UAE. Gen X will spend US\$18.2bn, 60% of the total

market value of US\$30.5bn by 2028.

"It is also worth considering that as this generation begins to age and subsequently retire, naturally it will be Millennials who will begin to dominate outbound market share in the decade ahead," added Curtis.

Overall, Saudi tourists favour Europe as a destination, accounting for US\$13.2bn in market value by 2028, compared with just US\$7.4bn in 2019.

Other top destinations for GCC travellers include the UK, Germany, Italy, Switzerland, the US, India, Australia, Malaysia, Singapore and South Africa.

The trend of increasing outbound GCC business has certainly not gone unnoticed by many international destinations.

"In 2023 we welcomed 76 national pavilions covering approximately 55% of the total show floor space, with 1,350 participating companies. This year with the return of national pavilions from Spain and China, as well as a number of African destinations, we have allocated additional floor space to accommodate this growth," added Curtis.



Third edition of CyberSafe: Good Game launched

Observing Safer Internet Day on Tuesday, Xbox is thrilled to announce that Minecraft Education is launching CyberSafe: Good Game, the third addition in its immersive, safety-themed learning worlds.

Through unique scenarios and challenges, this one-hour story-based adventure helps players understand the responsibilities, tools, responses, and strategies that enable healthy online interactions, collaboration, and rewarding digital experiences.

Players will learn to navigate through common situations and emotions encountered online -

and of course, keep the fun in gaming!

The Xbox Wire blog announcement can be accessed at <https://news.xbox.com/en-us/2024/02/05/minecraft-education-good-game-cybersafe/> which includes a trailer and imagery to get a good look at the game. One can visit Minecraft Education (<https://news.xbox.com/en-us/>) to learn more about its game-based learning approach.

Microsoft is also recognising Safer Internet Day with the release of its annual Global Online Safety Survey.

Bank Nizwa supports value building symposium

Bank Nizwa, the leading and most trusted Islamic bank in the Sultanate of Oman, served as the strategic partner of the Second Family and Value Building Symposium, themed 'Opportunities and Challenges', which ended on Tuesday.

Organised by the Imam Jabir bin Zaid Waqf Foundation, the symposium that began on Sunday at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Center (OCEC) witnessed the presence of eminent scholars and influential decision-makers from the Islamic knowledge and culture realm within Oman and its neighbouring regions.

Geared at driving meaningful dialogue to address the various challenges faced by families, Bank Nizwa's support of the family symposium reflects the bank's prioritisation of events that promote societal unity, ethical values, and the overall well-being of the community.

This commitment encapsulates the essence of preserving Oman's cultural heritage, nurtur-



ing familial bonds, and fostering values deeply ingrained in the nation's ethos.

Commenting on the importance of supporting this cause, Khaled al Kayed, Chief Executive Officer at Bank Nizwa said, "Events like the Family Sympo-

sium stand as distinctive gatherings aimed at cultivating a profound cultural identity. Such forums provide educational, religious and cultural organisations with a framework to help individuals better navigate modern challenges, thereby serving as a

stabilising force amidst the shifts on a global scale."

Elaborating further on Bank Nizwa's pivotal role in the event, he said, "Central to the ethos of Bank Nizwa is a dedication to community engagement, epitomized through strategic partner-

ships that aim to foster critical thinking, and broaden intellectual horizons. By aligning with initiatives such as the Family Symposium, Bank Nizwa seeks to exert a positive influence on society."

The symposium, hosting more than 14 esteemed speakers and delving into several topics, saw the participation of over 20,000 attendees across diverse groups such as parents, families, teachers, and students from colleges and universities.

In adherence to the theme 'The Family: Values and Challenges of the Era', the symposium shed light on Omani principles rooted in Islam, and raised awareness about the challenges brought upon by globalisation on families. This initiative aimed to empower individuals intellectually, providing them with the vital knowledge needed for societal resilience and progress.

Extending beyond its role as a trusted financial partner, Bank Nizwa maintains a resolute commitment to preserving and promoting Oman's rich culture.

Malabar Gold becomes first Indian jewellery brand to have showroom in Australia

Scripting history as the first Indian International jewellery brand to begin operations in Australia, Malabar Gold & Diamonds, the 6th largest jewellery retailer globally, has launched their new showroom in Australia at Sydney.

The showroom marks Malabar Gold & Diamonds' expansion into the 13th country of operations.

Currently, the brand has an extensive retail presence of over 340 showrooms spread across India, the UAE, Qatar, Kuwait, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Singapore, Malaysia, the US, the UK, Canada and Australia.

The new showroom was inaugurated by renowned Australian cricketer Brett Lee in the presence of Shamlal Ahamed, MD - International Operations, Asher O, MD-India Operations, Ajith M, regional head - Far East & Australasia, Ameer C M C, head of Finance & Admin, Faisal A K, head of Manufacturing, Shaji Kakkodi, Chief Digital Officer, Malabar Group; representatives from the Sydney government, other senior management team members from Malabar Gold & Diamonds, customers and well-



The new showroom was inaugurated by renowned Australian cricketer Brett Lee in the presence of Who's Who of the Malabar Gold & Diamonds

wishers.

"This is a proud moment for us as the first Indian International jewellery retailer to begin operations in Australia. We have been a strong proponent of 'Make in India; Market to the World', showcasing the artistry of Indian jewellery on a global stage and expanding into Australia is an-

other testimony of our commitment to this initiative," said Malabar Group chairman M P Ahammed.

"This is also a great success story leveraging the strong trade relationship and recent bi-lateral free trade agreement between Australia and India. Our growth plan in Australia will lead to sig-

nificant investments into jobs and local economy in Australia over the next few years. On behalf of Malabar Group, I would like to thank all our customers, management team members, shareholders, and other stakeholders for their invaluable contribution towards helping us craft this historic moment and move

one step closer towards our goal of being crowned as the world's no.1 jewellery retailer."

Located at 109 Wigram Street in Harris Park within the Little India Precinct, Malabar Gold & Diamonds' new outlet will be the largest jewellery showroom in Sydney.

With an extensive collection

of jewellery in 18K, 22K gold and diamonds, the showroom will showcase over 30,000 designs across bridal wear, daily wear & and occasional wear.

Malabar Gold & Diamonds has also facilitated a customized jewellery design facility at their showroom, enabling jewellery enthusiasts in the region to bring to life their jewellery design assisted by expert designers & craftsmen from the brand.

"We are extremely excited to begin our operations in Australia. Being our 13th country of operations, our venture into Australia will mark a significant shift in the country's jewellery landscape. With a large diaspora of immigrants from the Indian Sub-continent, the jewellery sector in Australia remains a largely untapped one.

"Marking a significant shift in the country's jewellery landscape, we aim to leverage our experience of over 30 years to bring forth an exceptional array of gold, diamond & precious gem jewellery. With our time-tested commitment towards providing customers with an exceptional and transparent jewellery shopping experience, I am sure that

we will be able to replicate our global acceptance in Australia as well," said Shamlal Ahamed, MD-International Operations, Malabar Gold & Diamonds.

With the exclusive usage of 100% traceable raw materials in their jewellery, the brand ensures strict compliance with international standards for transparent gold and diamond sourcing set by globally recognised organisations such as LBMA (London Bullion Market Association) and World Gold Council. The principles of sustainability and responsibility are incorporated into its core business through practices such as zero tolerance on compliance to the rule of law, Anti-money Laundering (AML) & Combating the Financing of Terrorism (CFT), usage of FSC (Forest Stewardship Council) wood for packaging, LEED Gold certified offices and outlets.

"In addition to adding another country to our global operational map, our expansion into Australia further solidifies Malabar Gold & Diamonds' stature as a truly global enterprise with an expansive outreach across boundaries," Abdul Salam K P, vice chairman of the group said.

Challenges mount for Joe Biden as election nears

Istanbul, Turkey - As the November Presidential elections draw near, US President Joe Biden's administration grapples with escalating challenges on both the domestic and international fronts. The crisis in Texas, stemming from issues of unauthorised immigration and border security, significantly undermines his stance in domestic politics. Concurrently, assaults on American forces in Iraq and Syria have complicated the US posture in the region, leading to severe criticism from Republican quarters. All these challenges raise questions about the ability of the incumbent administration to prevail in the upcoming elections.

Texas issue, border security

After Texas Governor Greg Abbott announced plans to erect new barbed wire fences along the border despite the recent decision of the Supreme Court, he immediately garnered backing from 25 Republican states and former US President Donald Trump.

According to the US Customs and Border Protection report, in the 2023 Fiscal Year, a total of 2,475,669 individuals entered the US from Mexico through unauthorised means. This figure represents an increase of over 40 per cent compared to the 2021 Fiscal Year and 4 per cent more than the 2022 Fiscal Year.

Following the harsh criticisms and humanitarian scandals surrounding the unauthorised immigration policy of the Trump administration, Biden declared himself a candidate who would restore the honour and respect of the presidency by partially constructing a fair and humane immigration system.

However, since Biden took office, his immigration and border security policy has led to an additional 7.5mn unauthorised entries nationwide, in addition to the known 1.7mn crossings. Along the southwest border, this policy has resulted in 6.2mn unauthorised entries.

Especially along the Ciudad Juarez - El Paso route, one of the most preferred routes used by immigrants, unauthorised migration to the state of Texas has brought about inflation, a housing crisis, and security concerns. Additionally, it has imposed extra responsibilities on the border, making conservative Republicans more apprehensive about illegal immigrants and border security.

According to a June 2023 report by the Pew Research Center, nearly 47 per cent of Americans consider illegal immigration a significant issue in the country. The likelihood of Republicans considering illegal immigration a very big national problem is much higher, at 70 per cent, compared to



US President Joe Biden

Biden's administration grapples with escalating challenges on both the domestic and international fronts. Assaults on American forces in Iraq and Syria have complicated the US posture in the region

Democrats, at 25 per cent.

This places the Biden administration at a perceived disadvantage on immigration matters as the election approaches, threatening the federal-state constitutional relationship and potentially solidifying the Republican base. The impact of this issue has already raised red flags amongst the tenets of the

Democratic Party, and Biden seems more amenable to compromise, stating that he is ready to close the border if Congress passes a bipartisan bill granting him such authority.

Challenges in Middle East

Since October 7, more than 150 attacks have been launched on

US soldiers in the Middle East. The latest incident involved a drone attack on a military base in Jordan, resulting in the loss of 3 soldiers and injuries to 34 others. Biden attributed the attack to Iran-backed militias saying: "We will respond at a time and place of our choosing." This statement indicates that a limited retaliation will take place but the general modus vivendi with Iran is not under threat.

Despite initial efforts to focus on adversaries like Russia and China, Israel's war on Gaza has reengaged the US in Middle Eastern politics. Initially, the Biden administration had focused on containing its potential adversary Russia in the conflict

in Ukraine and was pursuing a similar strategy to contain China. Such policies allowed the US to maintain its global supremacy without actively engaging in warfare.

The US re-engagement in the Middle East provides a guarantee for Israel. For Russia, it means diverting the attention and interest of the US public away from the conflict in Ukraine. Other players have different standpoints often at the opposite end of the spectrum than Washington's.

Republican criticism of Biden's response to attacks on US forces portrays him as weak, contrasting with the Trump administration's decisive actions, such as the assassination of Qasem Soleimani. This narrative could contribute to a perception of failure in the Middle East, particularly if Trump re-enters the political arena with an isolationist stance, potentially allowing adversaries more freedom of action. The tensions in the Middle East are likely to persist to the election, denting the chances of the Biden administration, which is often depicted as weak and meek by Republican quarters.

Winning youth vote

Harvard Crimson Alumni in Professional Sports (CAPS)-Harris Poll showed Trump leading Biden by seven points in a one-on-one match-up 48 per cent to

41per cent, respectively. The value of each vote is crucial in the election.

Amidst significant challenges in both domestic and foreign policy, Biden's campaign efforts to appeal to younger voters, including seeking endorsements from pop culture figures like Taylor Swift, underscore the importance of the youth vote. Surveys suggest Swift's influence could sway younger voters. According to a survey conducted by the research firm Redfield & Wilton Strategies for Newsweek, one in five respondents stated that they would vote for a presidential candidate supported by the 34-year-old Swift, indicating a potential influence on young voters.

However, Biden's support of Israel in the ongoing case at the International Court of Justice poses a dilemma, with many young people disapproving of his handling of the situation in Gaza. According to a New York Times Siena College poll, about three-quarters of individuals aged 18 to 29 express their disapproval of Biden's handling of Israel's onslaught on Gaza.

The Biden administration navigates a complex landscape of domestic immigration issues and foreign policy challenges in the Middle East, with the upcoming election casting a spotlight on these critical areas.

Anadolu Agency



South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol

South Korean president pardons 450,000 people

Ankara, Turkey - South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol granted special pardon to over 450,000 people, including a former defence minister and presidential chief of staff, local media reported on Tuesday.

The presidential order came on the occasion of Lunar New Year to be marked on Saturday, February 10 this year.

Among those pardoned was Kim Kwan-jin, who served as defence minister from 2010 to 2014, and Kim Ki-choon, a former chief of staff for ousted former President Park Geun-hye, Seoul-based Yonhap News reported.

Kim Kwan-jin had been serving a two-year sentence given last year for ordering the military's cyber command to post online comments in favour of the government at the time ahead of polls in 2012.

Kim Ki-choon had also been sentenced to two years, over charges that the Park government ordered the creation of a list of dissenting cultural bodies and artists to exclude from government subsidies.

Yoon said the list was prepared with a focus on reviving the economy as they included exemptions from various administrative penalties on drivers, restaurant industry workers, fishermen, and passenger and cargo transport operators.

"The government will continue to take measures helpful to everyday economic activities," the agency quoted Yoon as saying. "I hope these pardons that are being granted ahead of the holiday will add vitality to the people's economies," he added.

In South Korea, the government often grants special pardons to convicted politicians, business executives, and others at the start of new year or around Liberation Day on August 15.

On Monday, a South Korean court also acquitted Samsung Electronics Co. Chairman Lee Jae-yong and cleared him from charges of stock price rigging, breach of trust and accounting fraud in connection with the controversial merger of Cheil Industries Inc. and Samsung C&T Corp in 2015.

Anadolu Agency

Senegal's National Assembly passes bill postponing presidential election

Kigali, Rwanda - Senegal's National Assembly passed a bill late on Monday postponing the country's presidential election until December 15 during a tense session where opposition lawmakers were forcibly removed from the chamber.

Lawmakers from President Macky Sall's ruling Benno Bokk Yakaar (BBY) coalition and from an opposition coalition Wallu Senegal backed the election delay following a heated session characterised by chaotic scenes.

The bill was passed with 105 votes in favour and one against.

The vote came days after Sall announced the indefinite suspension of the presidential election, citing a dispute over the candidate list and the alleged corruption of constitutional judges.

Chaotic scenes broke out after a group of opposition lawmakers tried to block a parliamentary vote when they rushed the central dais and refused to leave, effectively interrupting the plenary session for more than an hour.

As tempers flared, footage



showed some lawmakers brawling after trading insults.

The Parliament Speaker withdrew from the chamber. In the end, the opposition lawmakers were forcibly removed from the chamber by security personnel

before the session resumed.

Outside the National Assembly, dozens of gendarmes patrolled the area to prevent crowds that had wanted to protest against the postponement of the election. President Sall's term of

officially ends on April 2. But after Monday's vote, Sall, who announced in July that he would not seek a third term in office, will hold office until elections.

Senegal has been in political chaos since Sall announced the

indefinite postponement of the presidential election.

Protests erupted across the country on Sunday, led by opposition political parties and some civil society groups.

Anadolu Agency

King Charles III diagnosed with cancer: Buckingham Palace

London, UK - Britain's King Charles III has been diagnosed with cancer and has started receiving treatment, Buckingham Palace announced on Monday.

The diagnosis came shortly after the 75-year-old monarch was treated for an enlarged prostate. "His Majesty has been treated for benign prostate enlargement. It was during this intervention that the separate issue of concern was noted and subsequently diagnosed as a form of cancer," a Palace spokesperson said.

A statement from Buckingham Palace said the King has 'today commenced a schedule of regular treatments, during which



Britain's King Charles III

time he has been advised by doctors to postpone public-facing duties'. According to the statement, throughout the period, the King will continue to 'undertake State business and paperwork as usual'.

The monarch 'remains wholly positive about his treatment and looks forward to returning to full public duty as soon as possible', it said.

"His Majesty has chosen to share his diagnosis to prevent speculation and in the hope it may assist public understanding for all those around the world who are affected by cancer," it added.

British Prime Minister Rishi

Sunak has issued a statement, saying he wishes 'His Majesty a full and speedy recovery'.

"I have no doubt he'll be back to full strength in no time and I know the whole country will be wishing him well," he said.

The King travelled from Sandringham in Norfolk to London on Monday morning to begin treatment as an outpatient. He was seen at a church service in Sandringham on Sunday, where he waved to crowds.

The monarch is at home in London this evening, according to Sky News. No further details are shared on the stage of the cancer or a prognosis.

Xinhua

International groups urged to stop Israel's planned 'massacres' in Rafah

Ramallah, Palestine - A day after Israel's defence minister announced that his army's next target would be the southern city of Rafah in the Gaza Strip, head of the Palestinian National Initiative party warned on Tuesday of 'brutal massacres' against displaced Palestinians, urging the international community and rights organisations to stop Tel Aviv from carrying out the plan.

"Any military operations in Rafah, with its limited space and crowdedness with over 1.5mn Palestinians displaced by the Israeli army, would lead to brutal massacres unprecedented in modern history," Mustafa Barghouti said in a statement.

The majority of Palestinians living in Rafah are displaced from other parts of Gaza.

Barghouti's statement came a day after Israel's Defence Minister Yoav Gallant announced Rafah as the army's next target in a press conference, claiming it is the last remaining stronghold of the Palestinian group Hamas.

The leader of the Palestinian National Initiative party blamed the US and its Western allies for allowing Israel to 'unleash fascism, which has so far led to the killing and injuring of 100,000 Palestinians'.

He urged the international



Any military operations in Rafah, with its limited space and over 1.5mn displaced Palestinians would lead to brutal massacres unprecedented in modern history

MUSTAFA BARGHOUTI

community and the international rights campaign to prevent Israel from carrying out the massacre in Rafah.

Several human rights organisations have already warned that any Israeli military offensive in Rafah could kill a large

number of people.

Israel's defence minister said on Monday that Hamas fighters and leaders are hiding in Rafah.

"We will also reach the areas where we have not yet fought in the centre of the Gaza Strip and in the south, and especially the

last remaining (stronghold) of Hamas in Rafah," he said.

Gallant reiterated that at the end of the fighting, Hamas will not be able to rule Gaza again.

He described the army's ground operation in Gaza as 'one of the most complex and complicated in the history of wars.'

Death toll in Gaza rises to 27,585

Meanwhile, the Palestinian death toll from Israel's deadly offensive against the Gaza Strip rose to 27,585 since October 7, the Health Ministry in Gaza said on Tuesday.

The Gaza-based Health Ministry made the statement as Is-

rael's deadly onslaught against Gaza enters its 123rd day.

It also said 66,978 other people have also been injured in the ongoing offensive.

The statement noted that in the past 24 hours, the Israeli army committed 12 massacres across the Gaza Strip which left 107 people killed and 143 others

injured. Besides, on Tuesday, Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi held talks in Cairo with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, according to state media.

Al-Qahera News channel carried the news without providing any further details about the content of the talks.

Blinken arrived in the Egyptian capital early on Tuesday in his second stop in his latest regional tour to push for a cease-fire in the Gaza Strip. He visited Saudi Arabia on Monday and is scheduled to visit Qatar, Israel and the West Bank as part of the tour.

Also, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas and French Foreign Minister Stephane Sejourne have discussed the developments in Israel's ongoing offensive on the Gaza Strip.

Abbas received Sejourne in Ramallah late on Monday and discussed efforts made to stop the Israeli war on Gaza, according to the official Palestinian news agency Wafa.

During the meeting, the Palestinian president stressed the importance of increasing humanitarian and medical aid to Gaza under the current situation.

Abbas also told the top French diplomat his categorical rejection to any displacement attempt to Palestinians from Gaza, stressing it as 'an integral part of the Palestinian state'.

Anadolu Agency

FM Ahmed Awad bin Mubarak appointed as Yemen's new PM

Sanaa, Yemen - In a surprise move, Ahmed Awad bin Mubarak, Yemen's foreign minister, has been appointed as the country's new Prime Minister, according to Al Jazeera.

Yemen, a nation in the Arabian Peninsula, is experiencing increased tensions as a result of a wave of Red Sea attacks on ships by Houthis, which have triggered retaliatory strikes by the United States and the United Kingdom recently.

Bin Mubarak has notably replaced Maeen Abdulmalik Saeed amid the escalation of tensions in the Red Sea.

Bin Mubarak was named premier of Yemen on Monday, according to a decision issued by the country's Presidential Leadership Council, which was reported by the official news agency of the country. The former prime minister was given the position of presidential adviser, Al Jazeera reported.

However, there is no clarity on why the move was made.

Former Yemeni ambassador to the US, Bin Mubarak, is widely



Ahmed Awad bin Mubarak replaced Maeen Abdulmalik Saeed amid the escalation of tensions in the Red Sea

viewed as a fierce opponent of the Houthis, according to Al Jazeera.

He first gained prominence in 2015 when, amid a power struggle with then-President Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi, he was abducted by the Houthis while serving as Yemen's presidential chief of staff.

The seizure of bin Mubarak contributed to the political unrest in Yemen, which led to hostilities between the Houthis and Hadi's

presidential guards and the resignation of the government and the president.

In 2018, Bin Mubarak was also designated as the country's representative to the United Nations.

The Houthis, who are an Iran-aligned group, started the strikes in retaliation for Israel's Gaza conflict. The Houthis have said that they will not stop attacking until Israel ends the hostilities in Gaza.

Raids on Saada province

The Houthi group, meanwhile on Tuesday, said the US and UK carried out a series of fresh airstrikes on the northwestern province of Saada.

In a statement, the group said 'the American-British aggression aircraft launched three raids on eastern Saada city', according to the Houthi-run Saba news agency.

Agencies

UN to reach 15mn in need of aid in Sudan

United Nations, US - The United Nations is preparing a plan to reach 15mn of the 25mn people in need of aid in Sudan, a UN spokesman said on Monday.

Both Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Martin Griffiths and UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi will take part in an announcement of the goals in Geneva on Wednesday, said Stephane Dujarric, chief spokesman for UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres.

"After nearly 10 months of conflict, more than half of Sudan's population, some 25mn people, needs humanitarian assistance and protection," Dujarric said. "The war has also forced more than 1.5mn people to flee across Sudan's borders to countries already hosting large refugee populations."

Xinhua

UK announces \$125mn aid package for Ethiopia

Nairobi, Kenya - The UK pledged £100mn (US\$125mn) in new aid on Monday to provide life-saving assistance to more than three million Ethiopians in response to the escalating humanitarian crisis in the East African country.

The announcement was made by the UK's Minister for Development and Africa, Andrew Mitchell, following a two-day visit to Ethiopia, where he outlined a comprehensive plan to address the deepening crisis. "Millions are trapped in displacement, hunger and need. As ever, the most vulnerable people, particularly women and children, are the first to be hit," said Mitchell.

"The crisis is a wake-up call to the world. Food shortages are at a critical level," he added, noting that the number of critically food-insecure people is projected to reach 10.8mn in the coming months.

The aid package aims to target vulnerable groups, particularly children under the age of five and pregnant and post-natal women.

The programme seeks to improve access to essential health services for over three million



UK's Minister for Development and Africa, Andrew Mitchell

Ethiopians, with a primary focus on women and children.

The UK noted that aside from providing food, the funding will contribute to enhanced family planning support, the provision of medicines and childhood vaccinations. The emergency funding from the UK will also assist 75 health centres in addressing malnutrition and other preventable causes of death, including malaria and cholera.

The announcement comes as millions of people across northern Ethiopia are grappling with hunger.

Anadolu Agency

Poland building new fortifications in border zone with Belarus, Russia: Report

Warsaw, Poland - Poland is building new fortifications and shelters in the border zone with Belarus and Russia, according to a report published on Monday in a Polish economic and legal newspaper.

The Ministry of Defence did not disclose detailed information, but a ministry source told the Rzeczpospolita daily that the move was 'part of the overall national defence plan'.

The ministry said in a briefing that 'work is underway on the further expansion of engineering fortifications, including a shelter system and their improvement in the border zone'.

"The situation is dire; more and more countries feel it," Defence Minister Wladyslaw Kosiniak-Kamysz told the daily Super Express, adding he was preparing for a scenario in which Ukraine loses the war with Russia and Russian President Vladimir Putin decides to attack NATO countries, including Poland.

"I assume every scenario and take the worst ones most seriously. This is the role of the minister of defence in the situation we find ourselves in today. These are not words thrown into the wind. I try to weigh them very carefully," he said.

"You have to be prepared for



every scenario; that's why we are conducting an audit, drawing conclusions and filling in the gaps, in the case of weapons, for example. Large purchases are very important. But for me, the individual equipment of soldiers is equally important. Since taking power, we have concluded contracts for purchasing equipment worth PLN19bn (over US\$4bn) - most of it in Polish arms plants," he said.

The Polish Air Navigation Services Agency consulted with the Air Navigation Operational Command on February 4 and issued a navigation warning for airspace users.

The warning was initiated on

February 5 and will remain in force until May 5. It covers the airspace of the entire eastern part of Poland along the border with Ukraine and Belarus, the north-eastern part along the border with Lithuania and Russia (the Kaliningrad exclave) and the central part of the country, including Warsaw.

The message aims to warn civil airspace users about possible intensified military aircraft activity in the eastern area. The intensified actions are to respond to the 'threat situation on the eastern border', said the Operational Command in a statement.

Anadolu Agency

INDIA



Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah (ANI)

‘Chalo Delhi’ protest against Centre today

Bengaluru, Karnataka - Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, on Tuesday, gave a ‘Chalo Delhi’ call to protest against the alleged lack of tax devolution and grants-in-aid to the state by the Centre in the national capital.

The demonstration is scheduled for Wednesday at the Jantar Mantar in New Delhi.

The Karnataka CM said that the Congress government in the southern state will continue to raise its voice against discrimination in the fair tax share and grant distribution of Kannadigas.

“Tomorrow at 11am at Jantar Mantar, Delhi, we will raise our voice against the discrimination in the fair tax share and grant distribution of Kannadigas. This movement is not against anyone, it is for the benefit of Karunadu and Kannadigas. We request everyone to participate in this Dharani Satyagraha regardless of party affiliation,” Siddaramaiah wrote in a post on X.

State Deputy Chief Minister D K Shivakumar after holding a press conference on the matter at Vidhan Souda earlier on Tuesday said that the planned protest is not against the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and that all MLAs should forget party lines and participate.

“The entire government will protest, all MLAs should forget party lines and participate. We all have to fight together for the good of the state. We are in a union system. We have been giving cooperation to the central government, but we continue to be treated unfairly by the centre. We didn’t get proper relief even during COVID, we didn’t get grant even during heavy rains. Rs 5300 crore was not given for the Bhadra Meldande project. This is not a protest against BJP. Instead, it is a protest against the discriminatory attitude in financial distribution and drought relief,” Shivakumar said.

ANI

Uttarakhand: UCC bill mandates registration of live-in relationships

Dehradun, Uttarakhand - Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami on Tuesday tabled the Uniform Civil Code (UCC) bill in the Uttarakhand State Assembly after which the House was adjourned.

The Bill contains the laws relating to marriage, divorce, succession, live-in relationships, and related matters.

Among the many proposals, the UCC bill makes it compulsory for live-in relationships to be registered under the law.

Once the proposed UCC bill is in place, ‘live-in relationships’ will have to get registered under the law within one month from the ‘date of entering into the relationship’. To live in a live-in relationship, adults will have to obtain consent from their parents.

The Bill also imposes a complete ban on child marriage and introduces a uniform process for divorce. The Code provides equal rights to women of all religions in their ancestral property.

As per the UCC bill, the age for marriage will be 18 for women and 21 for men in all communities. Marriage registration is mandatory in all religions and marriages without registration will be invalid.

No divorce petition will be allowed to be filed for one year of marriage.

Highlighting the ceremonies for marriage, the proposed UCC bill noted that marriage may be solemnised or contracted between a man and a woman in accordance with the religious beliefs, practices, customary rites and ceremonies including but not limited to ‘Saptapad’, ‘Ashirvad’, ‘Nikah’, ‘Holy Union’, ‘Anand Karaj’ under the Anand Marriage Act 1909 as well as under, but not limited to, The Special Marriage Act, 1954 and Arya Marriage Validation Act, 1937.



Uttarakhand CM Pushkar Singh Dhami arrives at State Assembly to table the UCC bill on Tuesday (ANI)

However, nothing contained in the proposed UCC Bill will be applied to the members of any Scheduled Tribes within the meaning of clause (25) of Article 366 read with Article 342 of

the Constitution of India and the persons and group of persons whose customary rights are protected under Part XXI of the Constitution of India.

Meanwhile, CM Dhami said that after the UCC bill is passed, Uttarakhand will become a strong pillar of Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s vision of ‘One India, Best India.’

“With full responsibility, our government, taking all sections of the society along, has presented the UCC bill in the Assembly. That historic moment is near for Devbhoomi when Uttarakhand will become a strong pillar of PM Modi’s vision of One India, Best India,” Dhami posted on X.

The passage of the UCC bill will mark the fulfilment of a major promise made by the BJP to the people of the state in the run-up to the 2022 Assembly polls.

It was in March 2022 that the Dhami government decided to constitute a committee to prepare a draft for the UCC.

ANI

With full responsibility, our government, taking all sections of the society along, has presented the UCC bill in the Assembly

PUSHKAR SINGH DHAMI

Modi unveils projects worth over Rs 1330 crore in Goa

South Goa, Goa - Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday participated in ‘Viksit Bharat, Viksit Goa 2047’ programme and inaugurated and laid the foundation stone of projects worth over Rs 1330 crore.

The prime minister inaugurated the permanent campus of the National Institute of Technology Goa to the nation.

The newly built-up campus has various facilities such as tutorial complex, departmental complex, seminar complex, administrative complex, hostels, health centre, staff quarters, amenity centre, sports ground and other utilities to cater to the needs of students, faculty and staff of the Institute, the Prime Minister Office stated.



PM Narendra Modi meets the ONGC team during the inauguration of the ONGC Sea Survival Centre, at Betul, in South Goa on Tuesday (ANI)

The prime minister also dedicated the new campus of the National Institute of Water Sports. The institute will introduce 28 tailor-made courses aimed at fostering the development of water sports and water rescue activities catering to both the public and the armed forces.

Modi inaugurated a 100 TPD (tonnes per day) Integrated

Waste Management Facility in South Goa. It has been designed for the scientific treatment of 60 TPD wet waste and 40 TPD dry waste, while also featuring a 500 KW solar power plant that generates surplus electricity, the PMO stated.

The prime minister also laid the foundation stone for passenger ropeway, along with associated tourism activities, connecting Panaji and Reis Magos and for the construction of a 100 MLD (million litre per day) Water Treatment Plant in South Goa. Modi also distributed appointment orders to 1930 new government recruits across various departments under Rozgar Mela.

ANI

MP: 6 dead, over 50 injured in firecracker factory fire

Harda, Madhya Pradesh - Six people were killed and over 50 sustained injuries after a massive fire broke out in a firecracker factory in Madhya Pradesh’s Harda district on Tuesday morning, officials said.

The blaze broke out at 11:30am at the factory operated illegally on Magardha Road in Bairagarh village.

Due to the massive explosion, the entire area was engulfed in black smoke with windowpanes of houses and shops located in the vicinity getting shattered. Locals recounted that it felt as if an earthquake had hit Harda.

Taking immediate cognizance of the incident, Chief Minister Mohan Yadav directed Minister Uday Pratap Singh, DG Home Guard Arvind Kumar, and ACS Ajit Kesari to go by helicopter to the site.

“Six people have died and more than 50 people are injured in this incident. Over 50 ambulances were sent to the spot. Our minister, Uday Pratap Singh, DG Home and around 400 police officials have left for the spot. We are trying to control the fire and provide immediate assistance to the injured,” CM Yadav said

The chief minister also announced that Rs 4 lakh will be provided as ex-gratia to the families of the deceased, and the injured will be given free treatment. The cause of the fire is currently unknown.

Harda Collector Rishi Garg said that those injured in the fire were admitted to Harda district hospital.

ANI

12 fishermen from Tamil Nadu released from Sri Lanka

Chennai, Tamil Nadu - Twelve fishermen from Tamil Nadu, who were apprehended by the Sri Lankan Navy on January 13, have been released and they reached Chennai airport on Tuesday.

However, eleven fishermen are still detained in Sri Lanka.

According to officials, a total of 23 Indian fishermen and two boats were held by the Sri Lankan Navy from Rameswaram while they were fishing near Delft Island in the Palkbay Sea area, as reported by the Rameswaram Fishermen Association.

“They were apprehended by the Sri Lankan Navy while fishing near Delft island, and subsequently taken to Myalati Naval Camp, Jaffna for further investigation,” an official stated.

In a similar incident last



This file photo shows fishermen arrested by Sri Lankan Navy in Mannar on January 17 (ANI)

month, the Sri Lankan Navy apprehended 18 Indian fishermen and confiscated two Indian poaching trawlers within Lankan waters. The detained Indian fishermen and the confiscated trawlers were later transported to the Thalpadu Pier in Mannar and handed over to the Talaimannar Fisheries Inspector for further legal proceedings.

The recurring arrests of Indian fishermen by the Sri Lankan navy have become a source of concern, not only for the Central government but also for the authorities in Tamil Nadu.

On Monday, in a move aimed at drawing attention to their longstanding grievances, Rameswaram fishermen held a symbolic strike and outlined a series of demands to address the challenges they face.

The fishermen also declared

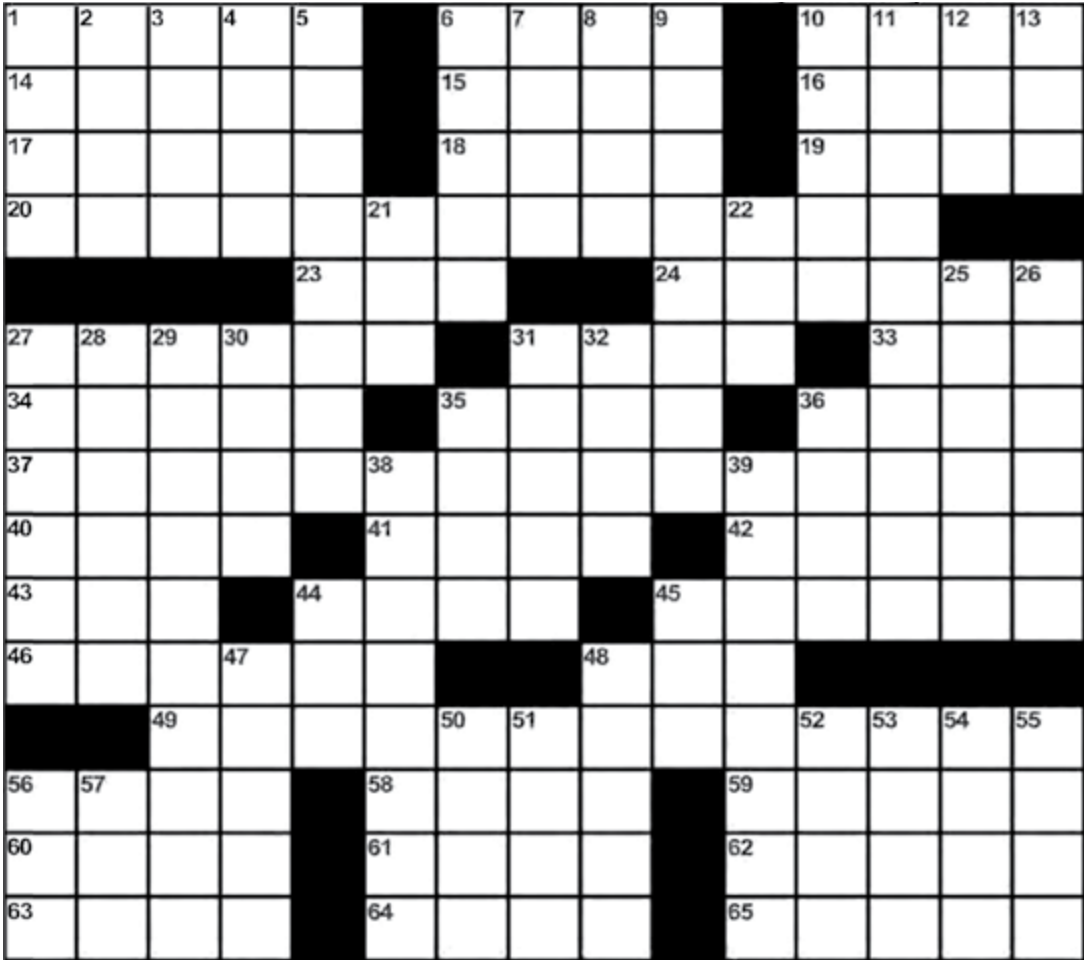
their intent to return their voter ID cards to the central government and boycott the elections if their demands remain unmet.

The Rameswaram All Boats Fishermen’s Association highlighted the plight of fishermen, claiming that over 150 mechanised boats from Tamil Nadu, seized by the Sri Lankan Navy between 2018 and 2024, remain in the possession of the Sri Lankan government.

The fishermen demanded immediate intervention from both the central and state governments to secure the release and restoration of seized boats in good condition. They emphasised the need for adequate compensation for damaged vessels and permission for rescue teams to retrieve boats held by the Sri Lankan Navy.

ANI

DAILY CROSSWORD



- ACROSS**
- 1) Once... (quick appraisals)
 - 6) " 'Tis a pity!"
 - 10) Spherical hairdo
 - 14) Plains roaming grazers
 - 15) Expansive Asian desert
 - 16) Cross the threshold
 - 17) Related maternally
 - 18) "... your pardon?"
 - 19) Aftleck's Oscar-winner
 - 20) Overstuffed quip (part 1)
 - 23) Beer bash barrel
 - 24) Believer in only one god
 - 27) Relative of " Skoal!"
 - 31) Operatic solo
 - 33) Baby's first word, sometimes
 - 34) Composer of "Bolero"
 - 35) Do a checkout chore
 - 36) Barber's quick cut
 - 37) Overstuffed quip (part 2)
 - 40) King, to his subject
 - 41) "Sooney!" comeback
 - 42) Human resources person, often
 - 43) Clairvoyant's claim, briefly
 - 44) Chest drawer?
 - 45) Thicket
 - 46) Oar holders
 - 48) To's partner
 - 49) Overstuffed quip (part 3)
 - 56) Popular cookie
 - 58) Iraq's neighbor
 - 59) Deteriorate, as rock or shoreline
 - 60) Bald, as tires
 - 61) Wee salamander
 - 62) Encourage
 - 63) Inappropriately inquisitive
 - 64) Spaces between teeth
 - 65) Flipped performers
- DOWN**
- 1) Comply with
 - 2) "In... veritas"
 - 3) Brother of Jacob, in Genesis
 - 4) Campus military org.
 - 5) In a furtive manner
 - 6) Effect of time
 - 7) Wolf with a gray coat
 - 8) Act as lookout, e.g.
 - 9) Spotting
 - 10) Tequila's origin
 - 11) Outsiders
 - 12) 18-wheeler, e.g.
 - 13) The avant-garde's Yoko
 - 21) Tennis court divider
 - 22) "So that's it!"
 - 25) Evening party
 - 26) Barflies
 - 27) Readied beforehand
 - 28) Hold spellbound
 - 29) Conquers with superior force
 - 30) Dry to the bone, as earth
 - 31) Breezing through, as a test
 - 32) Put in order of significance
 - 35) Much-kicked body part
 - 36) Send, as merchandise
 - 38) Disarranging or disheveling
 - 39) Some shouts of joy
 - 44) Romanian currency
 - 45) Grand... (wine label words)
 - 47) A few bricks shy of a load
 - 48) Baptism basins
 - 50) " The Sopranos" actress de Matteo
 - 51) Sharp, harsh cry
 - 52) Encourage
 - 53) Attire for Caesar
 - 54) "American..." (TV program)
 - 55) Simple change for a 20
 - 56) Possess
 - 57) Australian hopper, informally

NOTE PAD

T O D O S R U G S O M E N
A R E N T E P E E R I L E
S C H O O L H O M E M A M A S
K A Y N A A N D O C E N T
D R E S S C L O D
T H R O T H E L I K E
R O A S T M E N U E Y E
A L T A R C A B I N P A P E R
P E E U R G E S L I T S
V E T E R A N A D I T
S C A R V E R S E
I T A L I C C I A O R N A
B A L L B A B Y D R U M M E R
I S L E R I A L N A I V E
S H A Y B O N Y D O S E S

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE

ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

Peace and calm will be hard to maintain in a group today. There are too many agitators, and they are having way too much fun making waves. You can choose to join in with them or step into the role of disciplinarian. Follow your mood on this one. If you feel like getting things back on track, crack the whip. But if time isn't pressing and you feel like taking it easy right now, hop onto the goof-off bandwagon and contribute your own zany ideas.

LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

This is a day to play it safe and keep your cards close to your vest, so listen to your more conservative impulses. Don't offer your time or money to anyone. As much as you would like to be of service to someone, you need to let them fend for themselves right now. It's better for everybody. Helping them out today will only encourage them to come back to you again. You will prevent them from learning how to fend for themselves. You can be a supportive person without being an enabler.

SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

In a big meeting or at an event today, make sure that you appeal to people's intellect, not to their emotions. People are likely to get suspicious if you are not talking about facts and only talking about feelings. They could think you're hiding the facts because they are unfavorable. So avoid making too many jokes. Try not to use charm or flirtation to get your point across. You will only end up making yourself look less believable. You might gain a few admirers, but you could lose some respect..

TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

A friend has been chiding you for being too hard on yourself, and they are right. It's time that you realized just what a rock star you are! Beating yourself up over something that happened in the past (that you can't change now) doesn't do anything except hurt your self-esteem. It also keeps you from taking important risks in the future. You've got to be honest with yourself today. You have all the charm, good looks, and smarts to add up to one fantastic person. Pat yourself on the back.

VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

You've gotten a significant achievement under your belt recently, and you deserve to brag about it! There are people in your life who love you to death and they are waiting for a chance to pat you on the back. Why not give it to them? Call or email all of your closest friends and invite everyone to get together for a celebration. It doesn't have to be a big deal. You can just order in some pizza. As long as there is a reason to hang out, they will all be happy!

CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

Use whatever free time you have today in order to reconnect with someone from your past, or someone who is living a long distance away. Set aside the right amount of time for a long phone call. Don't call them when you're waiting in line or at the grocery store. Sit down, get comfortable, and give them the kind of time and focus they deserve. You might not think you have any news to share, but as soon as you start talking, the amusing anecdotes will come.

GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

Don't opt for convenience today. It's easy, but it's not the best way. Too often, convenience requires you to pay too much, waste too much, or fail to challenge yourself. So if you need to go shopping, seek out the best bargains, not the nearest store. If you are going on a date, think of a creative outing that reflects part of who you are, not just the old dinner-and-movie gambit. And if you need to have a difficult conversation with someone, do it in person.

LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

In the mood to have a little bit of fun? Of course you are! And guess what? The only thing standing in the way of you having fun is you! There is no reason you can't start getting out there and mixing it up, and today is as good a time for socializing as any. Your friends are itching to get out there and tear it up too, so find out what is on their minds. Send out a message to your group and start cooking something up. You can be the match that starts a hot night of fun.

AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

If you are on one side of an issue and everyone else seems to be on the other side, you shouldn't feel the need to change their minds. Having everyone totally agree all of the time is just not necessary! If you disagree with them, that doesn't have to mean that you think less of them, and vice versa. So learn how to agree to disagree. Avoid pushing your agenda or suspecting that they are pushing theirs. Everyone just thinks differently and that's okay.

CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

Someone you work with or are close to socially has made a mess of things, and they don't appear to be in any hurry to clean up what they've done. It's no fun to nag, but you might have to be the bad cop with them today. Let them know the negative repercussions are on their head if they don't shape up and fulfill their responsibilities. If you don't, then you could end up being the one who gets blamed. Put yourself first and be firm with them. When it's coming from you, they will listen.

SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

One of your friends has been saving some sweet news for you. Today, they will finally be able to come clean and let you in on it! Suddenly something they said a few days ago makes sense. The two of you have something to celebrate. Get out your social to-do list and take a look at what's next. Act impulsively and do something you've been waiting a long time to do. It's a perfect time to check out that new restaurant or club you've been hearing so much about.

PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

Your values are precious to you, but you also have to acknowledge that another person's values are just as important to them. It's usually not an issue unless you two clash, and today you can expect a bit of a conflict to erupt. But whatever you do, you cannot force them to agree with you. If they are going to be in your life, you need to respect them for who they are and let them know that you aren't trying to fix them. Take them for who they are or not at all.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

01. The national coat of arms of Portugal consists basically of a shield in front of a sphere; what is the sphere called?
- A. Antikythera globe
B. Sextant
C. Armillary sphere
D. Earthapple
2. The composer of the music for "Blue Eyes", "Three Sisters" and "The Cat and the Fiddle" also composed the music for which of these other musicals?
- A. Oh, Kay!
B. Showboat
C. A Connecticut Yankee
D. No, No Nanette
3. What is the mathematical result of taking a number, squaring it, multiplying by double the first prime number, quartering the result, dividing by the first number, and then taking away the first number?
- A. 10
B. 1
C. The first number
D. 0

Answers: 1.C 2.B 3.D

KIDS COLOURING



BOGGLER

E	T	R	N
J	O	A	S
K	E	R	E
S	C	R	S

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

WORD BUILDER



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

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

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER

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

WIN-WIN SITUATION

Lewis Hamilton’s Ferrari move, the biggest driver signing in F1 history, carries delicious prospects for both the team and the ace racer

London, England - Lewis Hamilton’s recent move to Ferrari is probably the biggest driver signing in F1 history.

We’ve seen big-name moves before, of course, but few come close to being quite this meaningful. Emerson Fittipaldi leaving Lotus for McLaren, Alain Prost’s defection from McLaren to Ferrari and Nigel Mansell’s sensational switch to IndyCar were all worthy of note.

Ayrton Senna’s move from McLaren to Williams and Michael Schumacher’s from Benetton to Ferrari were seismic as they were both, at the time, the only active champions in the sport. Schumacher’s was even more so as he moved from the title-winning team to one in the midst of a rebuild. Hamilton’s move from McLaren to Mercedes was huge news, but although highly regarded he was, at the time, only a one-time title winner.

Nicki Lauda, Prost and Schumacher were all pulled out of retirement for high-profile returns with McLaren, Williams and Mercedes respectively, and one

can’t overlook Sir Jack Brabham’s decision to go it alone and set up his own team in 1962 as a two-time champion.

But this is different. This is the most successful driver in the history of the sport moving to the most successful team in the history of the sport.

The last time that happened? Over seven decades ago, when Juan Manuel Fangio, then a three-time champion and the most successful driver in the then only six-year-old world championship, also joined Ferrari from Mercedes.

While the constructors’ championship didn’t exist back then, Ferrari’s 20 wins over those six years made them, at the time, the most successful team in the sport’s young history.

Hamilton was never going to race for Mercedes forever. Indeed, the short-term nature of his only recently penned Mercedes deal is what seemingly allowed a well-timed phone call from Maranello to bring the previously unbreakable alliance to an end.

Had Hamilton won an eighth



Lewis Hamilton

While Lewis Hamilton is already hungry to return to the top step of the podium and the fight for the world crown, don’t underestimate the increased desire a change in team can also create

title in 2021, there’s every chance he might have walked off into the sunset. Perhaps, then, this is the best for both, to enable them to finally move onto the future.

Hamilton’s detractors will say

nando Alonso and Max Verstappen.

For all the accolades we can bestow on their rivals, none can yet claim to be at the same level.

And while Hamilton is already hungry to return to the top step of the podium and the fight for the world crown, don’t underestimate the increased desire a change in team can also create.

So what Ferrari gains is what Mercedes loses. While George Russell could be presented with a great opportunity, what

Charles Leclerc gains is the ultimate benchmark. The ability to compare and contrast with one of the greatest and discover from whence that sprinkling of magic dust comes, and if he can recreate it.

But it’s not just championship-winning know-how behind the wheel that Ferrari is set to gain. With a world champion driver comes the magnetic appeal of star quality. The best engineers, designers, mechanics – even sponsors – gravitate to the best drivers.

Even though it’s a year away, attention will quickly swing to Hamilton and Ferrari.

Because F1 now has its dream duo: a fact best illustrated by the seven per cent jump in Ferrari’s share price soon after the news broke, equating to a £4bn increase.

Ferrari has already started making plays in its recruitment drive, so expect to see even more big names join Hamilton’s quest at the Scuderia.



Kane Williamson

Williamson helps New Zealand build lead of 528

Mount Maunganui, New Zealand - Kane Williamson scored his second century of the match as New Zealand dismissed South Africa for 162 before extending an already substantial lead to a mammoth 528 runs on the third day of the first Test at Bay Oval in In Mount Maunganui on Tuesday.

The hosts will resume on 179 for four on day four after deciding not to enforce the follow-on on the inexperienced Proteas despite holding a first-innings lead of 349 runs when they bundled the tourists out before tea.

Williamson’s 109 from 132 deliveries on another sun-kissed day at Mount Maunganui made him only the fifth New Zealander to score a hundred in each innings of a Test.

Oman women cricketers all set for ACC Premier T20 Asia Cup

Muscat - With anticipation mounting, the Oman women’s cricket team is primed for competition in the inaugural ACC Women’s Premier T20 Cup 2024, scheduled to take place in Malaysia from February 10-18.

A total of sixteen teams, including Oman, will fiercely contend for a coveted place in the final, where the finalists will clinch qualification for the ACC Women’s T20 Asia Cup 2024.

Experienced campaigner Priyanka Mendonca has been bestowed with the captaincy, while Akshada Gunasekar is her deputy. The team’s journey commences on February 10 with a clash against Japan, as they navigate through Group B alongside UAE, Japan, and China.

Head Coach Damith Warusavithana exuded confidence in his squad, highlighting their rigorous preparation spanning over the past 6-7 weeks, comprising conditioning camps, skill enhancement sessions, and intense practice matches.

Warusavithana said: “The team boasts a blend of vibrant talent and seasoned campaign-



Thorgan Hazard of Borussia Dortmund battles for the ball with Marcus Rashford of Manchester United

ers, who have showcased their mettle in various ACC and regional tournaments. We remain optimistic and are geared to exhibit our finest cricket to secure advancement into the competition’s knockout phase.”

The newly appointed women’s team head coach lauded Oman Cricket’s Cricket4Her initiative, attributing it as instrumental in fostering women’s cricket across Oman.

He said, “The softball tournament held earlier saw the partic-

ipation of 16 teams and allowed us to bring in more women playing the sport. The ongoing hard-ball domestic league, featuring ten participating teams, not only bolsters our player pool but also ensures the integration of top-tier talent into the national fold.”

Oman previously graced the stage of the ACC Women’s T20 Championship in June 2022 in Malaysia, but the tournament was discontinued by the ACC.

In addition to the four teams in Group B, the tournament fea-

tures opponents across Group A (Thailand, Myanmar, Kuwait, Singapore), Group C (Indonesia, Malaysia, Bahrain, Qatar), and Group D (Nepal, Hong Kong, China, Maldives).

Oman Squad: Priyanka Mendonca (Captain), Akshada Gunasekar (Vice-Captain), Cynthia Saldanha, Sakshi Shetty, Nitya Joshi, Trupti Pawde, Alifiya Sayed, Sani-e-Zehra, Sameera Khan, Shreya Prabhu, Amanda DCosta, Hina Javed, Sushama Shetty, Sahana Jeelany.

Bank Muscat, PDO, Ideal International and TECS reach A Division T20 League semifinals

Muscat - The A Division T20 League saw thrilling action and close contests in the quarter-finals, with Bank Muscat, PDO, TECS, and Ideal International securing their spots in the semi-finals.

Bank Muscat faced a shaky start after Sarco LLC posted a modest 110, losing six wickets within the powerplay. But thanks to Adnan UI Haq’s crucial 46 and Saumya Sampat’s fighting 33, they chased down the target with four wickets to spare, booking their place in the next round.

PDO dominated their quarterfinal with a mammoth 215 runs on the board. The partnership between Abdul Naveed (75) and Azhar Habib (116) laid the foundation, while disciplined bowling restricted ABL Task to 174, securing a 41-run victory for PDO.

TECS beat Douglas/Al Jadidi by seven wickets while Ideal International defeated AER, also by seven wickets.

BRIEF SCORES:

Sarco LLC 110/5 in 19 overs (Nazish Mohammed 26(37); Zeeshan Tufail 2/10) lost to Bank Muscat 112/6 in 17.5 overs (Adnan UI Haq 46(35), Saumya Sampat 33(35); James Mathew 4/15) by 4 wickets.

PDO 215/2 in 20 overs (Azhar Habib 116(53), Abdul Naveed 75(50)) beat ABL Task 174/7 in 20 overs (Amal Rajan 35(20); Awais Mohammed 2/31) by 41 runs.

Douglas/Al Jadidi 113/9 in 20 overs (Manikandan Rajagopal 41(37); Shanidh KT 4/23) lost to TECS 116/3 in 12.5 overs (Ali Muhammed 40(26); Nabeel Boota 1/17) by 7 wickets.

AER 104/10 in 19.2 overs (Tafsirul Islam Riaz 18(16); Deepak Bhandari 3/20, Syed Farwa 3/24) lost to Ideal International 107/3 in 9.1 overs (Wasim Jamadar 46(14); Amandeep Singh 2/17) by 7 wickets.

Magic of Bumrah helps India get the better of England’s Bazball

New Delhi, India - England came prepared for the usual trial by spin that greets touring sides in India but a “magical” seam-bowling masterclass by Jasprit Bumrah in Visakhapatnam saw their hopes of victory in the second Test vanish into thin air.

To deal with the expected conditions, England picked spin-heavy attacks complemented by a lone fast bowler both in Hyderabad and Visakhapatnam.

The frequency with which their batters played the sweep shots also indicated their resolve to conquer the spin challenge.

And after their spinners accounted for 18 of India’s 20 wickets en route to winning the first Test, the tourists would have been anticipating another spin-fest in Visakhapatnam.

What they probably did not expect is that Bumrah would emerge as their main threat de-

Armed with an unorthodox sling-shot action and a reversing ball, Jasprit Bumrah went wide off the crease to create angles and operated with pinpoint accuracy to torment the batters

spite having hardly any assistance from the pitches so far in the series. Armed with an unorthodox sling-shot action and a

reversing ball, Bumrah went wide off the crease to create angles and operated with pinpoint accuracy to torment the batters.

His 9-91 on a spin-friendly track saw him named Player of the Match, despite Yashasvi Jaiswal’s maiden double hundred.

Joe Root has become Bumrah’s “bunny”, the England batter falling to the Indian for the eighth time in Test cricket and prompting former England captain Alastair Cook to say he feared it had become a “mental game”.



Jasprit Bumrah

Paraguay shock reigning Olympic champions Brazil in Paris Games qualifier

Caracas, Venezuela - Olympic champions Brazil suffered a setback in their bid to secure a place at this year's Paris Games after their under-23 team slumped to a shock 1-0 defeat by Paraguay on Monday in the final four South American qualifying tournament.

Brazil, Paraguay, Argentina and Venezuela are competing in a round robin final qualifying stage for the 2024 Games, with only the top two securing berths in Paris. . Fabrizio Peralta's header in the final seconds of the first half was enough to give Paraguay, who last competed at the Olympics in 2004, an unexpected victory.

Brazil's teenage prodigy En-



Paraguay's Fabrizio Peralta celebrates after scoring against Brazil

drick, who will join Real Madrid later this year, squandered a chance to put the 2020 Tokyo Games gold medalists ahead when he missed a penalty after 29 minutes.

In a later qualifying game, a last-gasp penalty from substitute Kevin Kelsy snatched a 2-2 draw for Venezuela against Argentina.

Javier Mascherano's side finished the game with nine men after Valentin Barco and Gonzalo Lujan were sent off, while Venezuela's Bryant Ortega also received a red card.

Brazil will next face Venezuela, who beat them 3-1 in the preliminary stage earlier this month, on Thursday.

PHIL UP TO THE BRIM

Foden hat-trick helps Manchester City fight back and beat Brentford



Manchester City's Phil Foden celebrates after scoring against Brentford on Monday

London, England - Phil Foden scored a brilliantly composed hat-trick as Manchester City turned on the style to earn a 3-1 comeback win at battling Brentford on Monday and close to within two points of Premier League leaders Liverpool with a game in hand.

Despite almost constant City pressure, Brentford led with a Neal Maupay goal after 21 minutes, only for Foden to level just before halftime then add two more excellent goals as the visitors took control with another classy display of possession and probing.

Liverpool, beaten by Arsenal on Sunday, lead the table on 51 points from 23 games but City

are up to 49 from 22 and Arsenal on 49 from 23.

"He always had an eye for a goal," City manager Pep Guardiola said of Foden. "He's got 250 games already and he's had an impact with goals this season. He's incredible.

"I think we deserved it but they are a really tough opponent. We had a lot of chances and their keeper was sensational."

Remarkably Brentford did the double over City last season, beating them 1-0 in London in the last game in May when the title was already secure, having won 2-1 at the Etihad in November.

Another win looked unlikely after the one-way early ex-

He's got 250 games already and he's had an impact with goals this season. He's incredible. I think we deserved it but they are a really tough opponent

PEP GUARDIOLA



changes on Monday as Julian Alvarez, twice, and Kyle Walker had curling shots pushed wide by Brentford keeper Mark Flekken.

It was Brentford though who struck first, via a Sunday football goal, as Flekken launched a goal kick that Nathan Ake, under pressure from Ivan Toney, failed to touch. Maupay was left with a clear run on goal and calmly

tucked the ball into the bottom corner after 21 minutes.

Maupay could not buy a goal while at Everton but has now scored five in the last five games in all competitions while on loan at Brentford.

Erling Haaland had a chance to equalise immediately but Flekken again came to the rescue with his feet, before saving yet

again from Josko Gvardial.

Brentford then won a series of corners and provided the remarkable sight of nine of their men in the six yard box with only one outfield player from each side occupying the remaining 90 metres of grass.

They came to nothing though and City levelled in first-half stoppage time when Foden seized on a weak clearance header, calmly chesting the ball down and sweeping it in with his side's 17th attempt on goal in the half. It was the ever-elusive Foden again who put them ahead after Kevin de Bruyne clipped in a perfect cross for the unmarked midfielder to glance home in the 53rd minute.

Osimhen star of the show for Nigeria despite lack of goals

Abidjan, Ivory Coast - If the call from Nigeria's coach for more goals from his team at the Africa Cup of Nations is to be heeded then the recently crowned African Footballer of the Year Victor Osimhen has to strap on his scoring boots.

It has been the only gap in Osimhen's immense contribution as Nigeria have powered their way to the semi-finals at the tournament in the Ivory Coast, where they will meet South Africa in Bouake on Wednesday for a place in the final.

Osimhen, 25, has been the standout performer at the finals with his impressive work rate, pressing high on defenders and forcing turnovers, running off the



Victor Osimhen

Osimhen doubtful

Osimhen is a doubt for Nigeria's semi-final against South Africa due to a stomach complaint, officials said.

The striker did not fly with the squad from Abidjan, where they beat Angola in the quarter-finals on Friday, to Bouake where the first of Wednesday's semi-finals will be played.

"Team medics confirmed that he (Osimhen) has been placed under close watch with a member of the medical team staying behind in Abidjan with him.

"If cleared by tomorrow morning, he will join the rest of the squad before 5 p.m.," a Nigerian Football Federation statement said.

ball into space and keeping it up for the entire game despite the soaring heat and humidity. Those in the stands have marvelled at his fitness and fight.

But last season's top Serie A scorer, whose 26 goals took Napoli to their first title since 1990, has only netted once at the tournament where the much

fancied Super Eagles have scored six times in five games to reach the last four.

Nigeria got past Angola in the quarter-finals with a 1-0 win for a fourth clean sheet in a row.

"Once again, we played without conceding and scored a goal, but I would have liked to see more. The team had the potential to generate more chances," coach Jose Peseiro said. "We possess a talented team, but I want us to be more efficient."

It has not been without trying for Osimhen and his team mates.

"All of us are desperate to make up for failing to reach the 2022 World Cup. The only way we can achieve that goal is by winning the Cup of Nations," Os-

imhen said earlier in the tournament.

"We are capable of winning this tournament because the squad is packed with players who are performing exceptionally well for their European clubs," added the striker who has himself struggled with injury this season and been involved in a row with his club over social media posts.

Osimhen has scored eight goals this term as seventh-placed Napoli have struggled in the defence of their title and he is set to leave at the end of the season.

There will be no lack of suitors, however, given how he has performed in the Ivory Coast.

Djokovic, Nadal to compete in Saudi 'Six Kings Slam' tennis exhibition

Riyadh, Saudi Arabia - Saudi Arabia will host a new elite tennis exhibition featuring Novak Djokovic and Rafa Nadal with three other Grand Slam winners in October, the country's General Entertainment Authority has announced.

Carlos Alcaraz, Jannik Sinner, Daniil Medvedev and Holger Rune will also play at the 'Six Kings Slam', which will form part of the Saudi cultural and entertainment festival Riyadh Season, organisers said. With Sinner having recently won the Australian Open, Dane Rune is the only player on the six-man roster without a Grand Slam title.

Spaniard Nadal, who signed up as an ambassador for the Saudi Arabian Tennis Federation last month, said he was looking



Novak Djokovic with Rafa Nadal

forward to the event.

"After some other tennis players have done so, I am very excited to play for the first time in Riyadh," the 22-times Grand Slam champion said in the press release

While exhibition events in the Gulf are nothing new, they are

usually played during breaks in the ATP season or after it has finished. The ATP has a full schedule in October, including mandatory Masters 1000 tournaments in Shanghai and Paris.

Saudi Arabia will also host the season-ending Next Gen Finals for men's under-21 players in Jeddah from 2023 to 2027, the ATP announced last August.

The oil-rich country has invested heavily in sports like soccer, Formula One and golf over the last few years.

The debate over Saudi Arabia potentially hosting the women's WTA Finals has intensified, with tennis greats Chris Evert and Martina Navratilova objecting to the move, prompting heavy criticism from Saudi ambassador to the U.S. last week.

Messi hopes to play in Tokyo friendly

Tokyo, Japan - After disappointing a legion of fans in Hong Kong with a no-show on the pitch at the weekend, Lionel Messi left open the possibility of playing in Inter Miami's friendly in Tokyo, saying he left "much better" than he did a few days ago.

The Argentine's benching for the highly anticipated match in front of a sellout crowd at Hong Kong Stadium has turned into a public relations debacle for his Major League Soccer side and organisers of the local event.

Speaking to media for the first time since the team and their co-owner David Beckham were booed off the field, Messi said on Tuesday it was "disappointing" that he was unable to play, citing swelling in his ad-



Lionel Messi

ductor muscle.

"In Hong Kong, we had an open-door training session and I went out because there was such a big crowd there and there was a clinic with the kids, and I wanted to be there and participate," the 36-year-old

told a press conference at a Tokyo hotel.

"But the truth is that the discomfort was still there and it was very difficult for me to play.

"I can understand that people were looking forward to it and I hope that there will be an-

other opportunity for me to play in Hong Kong."

The Inter Miami skipper, who led Argentina to a World Cup triumph in 2022, was coy about whether he would play in Wednesday's friendly against J-League champions Vissel Kobe.

"For tomorrow, I don't know, we'll need to see how it goes in training today," he added. "We still don't know if I would be able to or not, but I feel much better than I did a few days ago and really want to be able to play."

Messi spoke at the press conference alone after appearances by Beckham, coach Tata Martino and team mates Sergio Busquets, Jordi Alba and Luis Suarez were cancelled at the last minute.

MAGIC JORDAN

West Asian side stun favourites South Korea to march into Asian Cup final

Al Rayyan, Qatar - Goals from Yazan al Naimat and Mousa al Tamari secured Jordan a sensational 2-0 win over South Korea as the West Asian side advanced to the Asian Cup final at the Ahmad Bin Ali Stadium on Tuesday.

A dominant performance from start to finish saw Jordan upstage a South Korea Republic side who simply couldn't match the pace and determination of their opponents, who booked a spot in the AFC Asian Cup final for the first time in history.

Jordan didn't waste time in taking the game to Korea, with their fast start almost catching the East Asian side by surprise, Al Naimat's low strike in the fourth minute from just inside the area forcing goalkeeper Jo Hyeon-woo into a diving save.

The West Asian side looked dangerous every time they transitioned into attack with Al Tamari waltzing his way past three defenders before setting up Noor al Rawabdeh, who brought the best out of Jo. South Korea slowly grew into the match, with Son Heung-min's effort in the



Jordan's Mousa al Tamari (2R) celebrates with teammates after scoring against South Korea

19th minute ruled out for offside while Lee Kang-in failed to find the target from inside the box in the 24th minute.

Jordan, however, looked menacing each time they ventured forward but wasted a flurry of chances, with Al Naimat missing from inside the area before pulling his effort just wide in the 27th minute, while Al Tamari blazed his shot over the bar from just above the box. The West Asian side's positive play finally delivered dividends in the 53rd minute when Al Tamari pounced

on a poor back pass from Jung Seung-Hyunto to send a well-timed pass to Al Naimat, who lobbed the ball over the advancing Jo for the opening goal.

Korea sent on Cho Gue-sung but the No 9 failed to find the target at the hour mark when he sent his headed attempt off Kang-in's corner over the bar.

That was to prove costly as Jordan struck again six minutes later, Al Tamari brilliantly cutting inside from just above the area before unleashing a low drive past a despairing Cho.



Saeid Ezatolahi

Iran not happy with referee appointment for Asian Cup semifinal against Qatar

Doha, Qatar - Iran's Saeid Ezatolahi raised doubts about the AFC appointing an Arab referee for their Asian Cup semi-final clash against hosts and defending champions Qatar while he also complained about the lack of recovery time in the knockout stage.

Wednesday's semi-final will be officiated by Kuwait's Ahmad Al-Ali who has taken charge of two group games and a last-16 tie at the tournament.

"What is a little bit surprising for us is that the referee for tomorrow's match is from Kuwait, he's an Arab," Ezatolahi told reporters on Tuesday.

"We're just wondering how it's possible that they put an Arab as a referee for tomorrow's match.

"But we are the Iran national team, we are a very big team. We have a very good players, we are professional."

Iran reached the semi-finals after they beat Asia's top-ranked side Japan 2-1 despite having only two days to recover after their last-16 tie against Syria went to extra time and penalties.

"In this tournament the players didn't have enough time to recover, specifically in the knockout stage," he added.

"Many of the players came straight from the their clubs and are under a lot of pressure here."

Iran coach Amir Ghalenoei reiterated the rest period being "less than 72 hours" before they faced Japan while he also took a shot at the Video Assistant Referees. "In this tournament at least, I can say that VAR was not very kind to us."



Tarek Salman

Qatar 'committed to giving our all on the field', says defender Tarek Salman

Doha, Qatar - Tarek Salman says Qatar will give it their all to overcome Iran when the two sides meet in their Asian Cup semifinal at the Al Thumama Stadium on Wednesday.

Qatar are two wins away from defending their title with defender Salman saying that while they are braced for a tough encounter, the determination is to stay on track for a second successive title.

"The players are well prepared and morale is exceptionally high. Everyone in the team is determined and committed to giving our all on the field," said the 26-year-old Salman.

"We will be facing a team with players who play club football in top leagues.

"That alone serves as motivation for us to give 100 percent effort to win and bring joy to our fans."

"The motivation within our team is strong. Both sides are determined to reach the final. However, we won the title in the previous edition and we want to repeat that success again."

In the run up to the semi-finals, Qatar were only pushed to the limit at the last eight stage - needing a penalty shoot-out to see off the challenge of Uzbekistan but Salman said it was a valuable lesson.

"Despite doubts from some quarters about Qatar's chances of reaching the final, our team is filled with confidence and excitement, fueled by positive energy.

"Iran have not won the title in a long time and they will undoubtedly enter this match with heightened focus. Facing them will undoubtedly be another tough challenge but we are committed to deliver our best performance."

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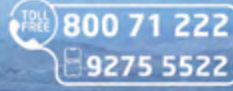
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MUCH EFFORT HAS BEEN PUT IN FOR STUDYING AND FILMING GREAT WHITE SHARKS BUT NO ONE HAS EVER WITNESSED ONE BEING BORN. NEW FOOTAGE OUT OF CALIFORNIA RECENTLY MIGHT BE THE NEXT BEST THING

On July 9, 2023, filmmaker Carlos Gauna and organis- mal biologist Phillip Sternes were following sharks with a drone off the coast of Santa Barbara. They'd already captured footage of a few larger great whites, but then some- thing completely unexpected drifted up out of the murk.

"Toward the end of the day this pecu- liar-looking white shark appeared, and we were both super excited," says Sternes, a PhD student at the University of California, Riverside.

At just under five feet long with chubby, rounded fins, the duo knew they were looking at a very young great white. (Adult great whites can stretch up to 21 feet long.) But as the drone zoomed in, it caught something never seen before - a milky white film that ap- peared to flake off the young shark's tail as it swam.

While no one can say for sure what the white material is, Sternes suggests it may be a sort of uterine 'milk' used to nourish newborn sharks in the womb. Another possibility is that the shark has a skin condition that has never been de- scribed before.

"Both scenarios are highly signifi- cant," says Sternes, who together with Gauna co-authored a study announcing the findings in the journal 'Environmental Biology of Fishes'.

White shark reproduction

"This is extremely rare. White shark birthing locations have remained ex- tremely elusive for the scientific com- munity," Sternes tells National Geographic in an email. "We think, we

have a piece to the puzzle now. If this is a birthing location, conservation as- pects must be considered."

To understand just how rare a sight- ing of a newborn great shark is, you need to first understand that we know surprisingly little about how the world's largest predatory shark reproduces.

"I think it's incredible," says Greg Skomal, a shark biologist with the Mas- sachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries, who was familiar with the footage but not involved with the new study. "Peo- ple don't realise that some of the most

basic questions about white shark re- production are unanswered."

Great white sharks may change their colour to sneak up on prey. However, Skomal cautioned against making any major conclusions based on the footage.

"It's like any observation. You only have so much information, right? You have the imagery. You got the date, the time, the location. And the rest is spec- ulation," says Skomal, who is also au- thor of 'Chasing Shadows: My Life Tracking the Great White Shark'.

That said, Skomal did acknowledge

that the facts presented would seem to point toward the shark being a newborn. For instance, the area where it was spot- ted has been thought to be a great white nursery, as first-year sharks have been documented there before. And Skomal says the shark's colouration, shape, size, as well as the appearance of the milky white fluid all suggest it's very young.

"That led researchers to think it's a newborn white shark, and it probably is," says Skomal. "The question is, when was it born? Is it hours, or days [old]? We don't know that."

A game changer

National Geographic Explorer Gibbs Kuguru, a scientist who studies the DNA of sharks, says that the sighting is 'a game-changer'- particularly if the white fluid is what researchers suspect it is.

"The fact that we have a shark in the process of shedding its 'amniotic fluid' is compelling evidence that we're look- ing at a newborn, which is critical be- cause it strongly suggests the shark hasn't strayed far from its birth site," he says. "Also, considering the decades of research about finding the elusive mat- ing and birthing locations of great whites, stumbling upon a potential pup- ping ground like this is nothing short of radical."

Because ocean animals spend the majority of their lives below the water's surface, sometimes discoveries must wait until scientists happen to be in the right place at the right time. That was certainly the case when scientists wit- nessed a humpback giving birth for the first time in March 2021.

"We very rarely ever get to see a live newborn white shark, which could have been born within hours," says Skomal. "And if that's the case, this is a really unique observation."

Great white sharks are listed as vul- nerable to extinction by the Interna- tional Union for Conservation of Nature, with the overall population thought to be decreasing. Learning more about where they start their lives would be critical information for scien- tists seeking to safeguard the future of the species.

(Courtesy: nationalgeographic.com)



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CAPITAL F FASHION

Grammys gals and guys

FLAMBOYANCE TOOK YET ANOTHER TURN AT THE 66TH ANNUAL GRAMMY AWARDS, HELD ON FEBRUARY 4, WHEREIN TAYLOR SWIFT, SZA, MILEY CYRUS, VICTORIA MONET, BILLIE EILISH AND FINNEAS O'CONNELL, DAVE CHAPPELLE AND THE BEATLES WERE AMONG THE WINNERS



Lisa Parigi and Lionel Richie



Suleika Jaouad and Jon Batiste



Victoria Monet



Terry Crews and Rebecca King-Crews

Flowers among them - were all up for awards. But before any gilded gramophones were handed out, the biggest names in music walked the red carpet in 'capital-F Fashion'. As years past have shown, the Grammys red carpet is a singular sartorial playground - one where a haute couture clamshell gown (worn by Cardi B in 2019), a hat seemingly made for storage (donned

by Pharrell in 2015), and a dress that plunges lower than any dress has plunged before (iconised by Jennifer Lopez in 2000) are all acceptable. The dress code is more or less 'Do You!' (even if doing you means arriving in an egg). Sunday night's nominated artist put pen to paper and laid vocals to tracks, communicating feelings and emotions that range from bliss to heartbreak, pride to insecurity. So, how they expressed themselves through fashion - on a night when their music is being celebrated in front of the world - was especially cap
Here are some of the captivating looks from the red carpet (courtesy - vogue.com):

KEY WINNERS

- Best pop solo performance
Miley Cyrus, *Flowers*
- Best música urbana album
Karol G - *Mañana Será Bonito*
- Best country album
Lainey Wilson - *Bell Bottom Country*
- Best R&B song
SZA - *Shooze*
- Best pop vocal album
Taylor Swift - *Midnights*

- Song of the year
***What Was I Made For?* (Barbie) - Billie Eilish O'Connell and Finneas O'Connell, songwriters (Billie Eilish)**
- Best new artist
Victoria Monét
- Record of the year
***Flowers* - Miley Cyrus**
- Album of the year
***Midnights*, Taylor Swift**



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The Contest is valid from 07/02/2024 to 07/03/2024. Employees and their families of the Towell group are not eligible to participate in the contest. Only one scratch & win card will be provided to each prospect, irrespective of the number of test drive taken on the same model / different models. Raffle will be conducted on 20/03/2024. The prizes are non-transferable and non-convertible to cash. By participating in the contest, participants agree to the use of their name and likeness for promotional purposes.



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