

NEWS BRIEF

OMAN, SOUTH KOREA SIGN MOU TO BOOST INVESTMENTS

Abu Dhabi, UAE - Oman's Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion and the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Energy of South Korea inked a memorandum of understanding (MoU) in Abu Dhabi on Tuesday. The pact, signed on the sidelines of the World Trade Organization Ministerial Conference, aims to enhance investment promotion and cooperation between the two nations.

The agreement focuses on diminishing trade barriers, streamlining customs procedures and promoting transparency and clarity in policy-making. Additionally, the MoU is designed to reinforce and establish supply chain channels, ensuring a robust economic partnership.



02 Oman-Iran Consultative Committee calls for end to Israel's 'war of genocide'



16 Special edition launched to mark Hublot-Mistral partnership anniversary

TRA advances telecom services, early warning system in coastal areas

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA) has announced the successful implementation of an early warning system in coastal regions in a collaborative effort with Civil Aviation Authority and service operators.

Additionally, TRA has granted Starlink Muscat a Class 1 licence to offer telecommunications services via satellite systems, marking a significant stride in enhancing connectivity and emergency response capabilities.

At TRA's annual media brief on Tuesday, Omar Hamdan al Ismaili, CEO, unveiled the authority's ambitious agenda for 2024, which includes conducting 29 field surveys across several wilayats to evaluate the quality of telecommunications services available to consumers. "This initiative reflects TRA's commitment to elevating service standards and ensuring easy access to advanced telecommunications," he said.

A key focus for TRA is aug-



The allocation of new frequency bands to operators is set to revolutionise communication services in Oman

OMAR HAMDAN
AL ISMAILI

mentation of Oman's telecom infrastructure through the expansion of 5G networks and fibre optic connectivity, alongside expediting the shift from traditional copper networks to more advanced technologies. Such advancements are geared towards fostering sustainable growth within the sector while maintaining affordability for consumers.

Depression to bring rains over 3 days in several governorates

Muscat - The National Early Warning Centre has forecast a depression affecting the sultanate from Wednesday until Friday.

Clouds are expected to gradually form over the northern governorates, with scattered moderate to heavy rainfall predicted in North Batinah, South Batinah, Muscat, Dakhliyah, North Sharqiyah and South Sharqiyah.

Additionally, strong northwesterly winds ranging from 15-35 knots are expected to impact most governorates, leading to reduced visibility due to dust and dirt.

Sea conditions are expected to be moderate

to rough, with waves rising to 3.5m on the western coast of Musandam and along the Sea of Oman with noticeable drop in temperature.

According to the met office, isolated rain of 5-15mm is expected in most northern governorates on Wednesday, with moderate to active southeasterly winds.

Thursday and Friday may see more rain (10-40 mm) in North Batinah, South Batinah, Muscat, Dakhliyah, North Sharqiyah, and South Sharqiyah, with chances of flooded wadis and active northwesterly winds, the met office stated.

According to Ismaili, telecommunications companies are at the forefront of artificial intelligence (AI) and laying down essential infrastructure. Efforts are being concentrated on establishing robust data centres that facilitate high-speed data processing, crucial for AI services and the exploration of new technologies.

He highlighted the sector's fi-

nancial health, noting a 12% revenue increase in 2023, reaching RO851mn. The sector's workforce comprised 4,167 employees, boasting Omanisation rate of 94%. Additionally, the number of postal companies saw a 31% growth, with total revenues of licensed postal firms touching RO20.7mn, up 14% from 2022.

Looking ahead, TRA aims to

enhance telecommunications services across various sectors, including education, healthcare, tourism, industry and transportation, while underscoring its commitment to environmental sustainability, innovation and scientific research. "The transition from 3G to 4G and 5G services, along with the allocation of new frequency bands to operators, is

set to revolutionise communication services in Oman."

TRA data indicates a positive trend in the communications sector in 2023, with mobile phone subscriptions increasing 3%, mobile broadband 5%, fixed telephone services 3%, and fixed broadband 5%, indicating a continued upward trajectory in Oman's telecommunications landscape.

Muscat Municipality mulls special classes for autistic children in public schools

Our Correspondent
Muscat

To offer more educational options to children with autism, Municipal Council of Muscat Governorate will explore the possibility of opening special education classes in public schools in the capital area.

The plan was announced by the council at a meeting on Monday led by Sayyid Saud bin Hilal al Busaidi, Governor of Muscat and Chairman of Municipal Council. Discussions focused on devising effective mechanisms to ensure the provision of education for individuals on the autism spectrum. The council aims to

collaborate with relevant authorities to address challenges and enhance support for this specific category.

Additionally, it approved recommendations to enhance recreational projects, including Bausher Sands and Hawiyah Najm Park. Emphasis was laid on developing appropriate road networks



to mitigate potential traffic congestion around these projects.

The meeting also delved into sustainability initiatives aligned with the national strategy - specifically optimising waste management practices by recycling resources. The council highlighted the significance of cooperating with competent au-

thorities to convert used cooking oil into biofuel in the local market in accordance with legislative frameworks.

These initiatives underscore the council's commitment to sustainable development, environmental responsibility and inclusive education for children with autism in the governorate.

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LINCOLN

Oman, Iran call for end to Israel’s ‘war of genocide’

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Sultanate of Oman and the Islamic Republic of Iran convened the tenth meeting of the Strategic Consultations Committee in Tehran, Iran on Tuesday, calling for an end to Israel’s ‘war of genocide’ against the Palestinian people in Gaza.

The Omani delegation was led by H E Sheikh Khalifa bin Ali bin Issa al Harthy, Undersecretary for Political Affairs in Foreign Ministry, while the Iranian delegation was headed by Ali Bagheri, Deputy Foreign Minister.



The two sides engaged in discussions aimed at bolstering bilateral cooperation in several spheres, including economic, consular, cultural and maritime security.

The agenda emphasised the promotion of investments and regional exchanges to address common obstacles in a manner that aligns with the shared interests of both nations.

The participants exchanged views on a range of regional and international matters of common concern. They reiterated their joint call to the international community to bring an end to Israel’s actions in what they de-

scribed as a ‘war of genocide’ against the Palestinian people in Gaza.

The parties urged immediate efforts towards a ceasefire, the lifting of the blockade on the Gaza Strip, provision of humanitarian needs, and accountability for Israel’s alleged violations of international law and human rights.

In conclusion, the meeting underscored the commitment of both Oman and Iran to collaborative efforts that contribute to regional stability, economic development and the resolution of pressing international challenges.

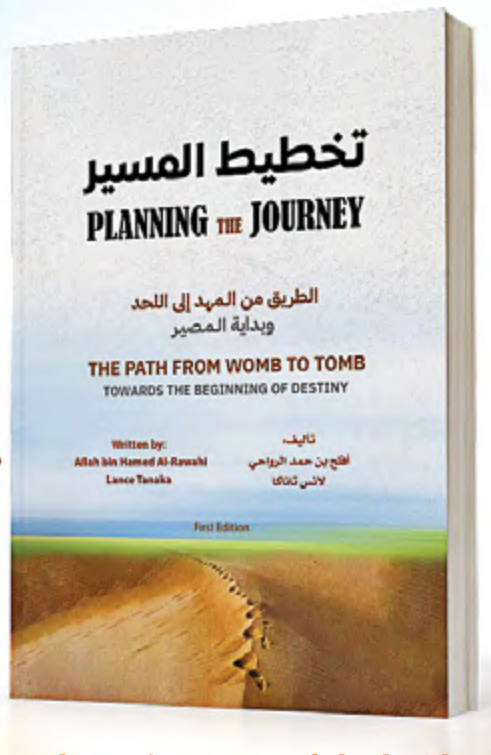
Book on leading a life of fulfilment launched at Muscat book fair

Muscat - A unique book titled *Planning the Journey - The Path from Womb to Tomb; Towards the beginning of Destiny* co-written by two prominent authors from very diverse backgrounds was launched with great fanfare at Muscat International Book Fair on February 25.

The uniqueness of the book lies in its ability to provide valuable insights for all human beings to discover their purpose and lead a life of fulfilment within the precincts of a religious framework. Using their own faith, resources and background, the authors have put together a manual which if followed can benefit not just an individual but society in general.

The book is written by Sheikh Aflah bin Hamed bin Salim al Rawahy, a prominent Omani businessman, and Lance Tanaka, an American national.

Sheikh Aflah is chairman of Al Rawahy Holdings LLC, a reputed business house in Oman, and former deputy president of State Council, Al Shura Council and State Consultative Council for 25 years. He is a well-respected speaker on Islam who uses excerpts from the *Holy Quran* to direct readers to prudently plan their journey ‘from womb to tomb’ and gain their final



The uniqueness of the book lies in its ability to provide valuable insights for all human beings to discover their purpose and lead a life of fulfilment within the precincts of a religious framework

reward which is heaven, a press release stated.

Tanaka, a Japanese-American born,

raised and educated in the US, is the CEO of Lance Tanaka Group. He is the author of many practical books on how to develop a life plan. Tanaka left a successful corporate career to follow his passion to support and mentor the development of others.

Using verses from Christian scripture, he explains that every human being has unique gifts which must be discovered and developed leading to a life of purpose and fulfilment. He uses a planning tool called DNA - or Dream and Achieve - to support individuals realise their dreams.

The book launch, held at the Al Farahidi Hall of Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre, was attended to by prominent personalities and bibliophiles. The book is available at a special promotional price of RO7 at the Al Kaleema al Tayba Kiosk, 5M1 and 5M2 at Muscat International Book Fair.

The two authors have also jointly established a coaching academy called Oman Strategic Leadership Academy in Watayah. Located in the Al Rawahy Building, the academy provides courses in DNA as well coaching for executives. Most of the programmes are taught online. Enquiries can be sent to farooqtoobi@alrawahyholdings.com

Book shedding light on medieval port city of Qalhat released

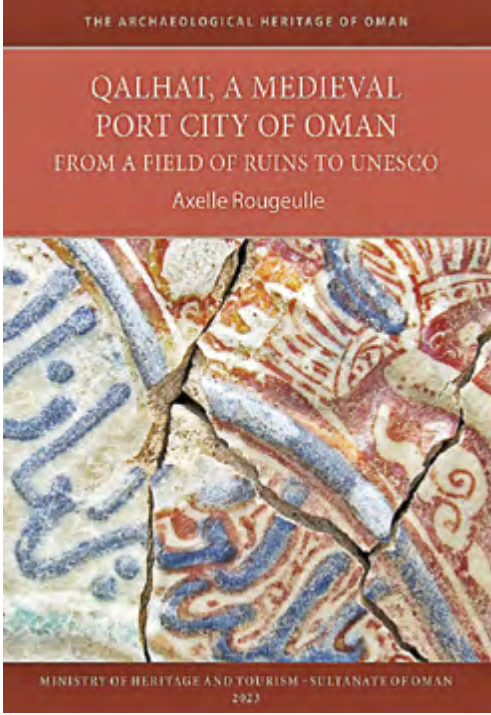
Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MHT) recently released a scientific publication titled *Qalhat, a Medieval Port City of Oman: From a Field of Ruins to Unesco*, authored by Axelle Rougeulle, featuring insights by renowned international archaeologists.

This important work, marking the 11th volume of the *Archaeological Heritage of Oman* series published by MHT, delves deep into the rich tapestry of Qalhat’s history, a coastal city of archaeological significance.

Published in collaboration with International House of Archaeology in Oxford, United Kingdom, the book has released globally, coinciding with its launch in Oman ahead of Muscat International Book Fair 2024. The book meticulously reconstructs Qalhat’s ancient narrative, a city that flourished during the Middle Ages and stands as a testament to Oman’s illustrious past.

The research initiated in 2008 by MHT shed light on the history of the harbour city, which was the twin cap-



The book meticulously reconstructs Qalhat’s ancient narrative, a city that flourished during the Middle Ages and stands as a testament to Oman’s illustrious past

ital of the Kingdom of Hormuz from the 13th to the 16th century.

Surface surveys and excavations

have revealed the plan and chronology of the city and its different districts. Mosques - including the Great Mosque built by Bibi Maryam around 1300 - and other religious buildings, fortifications and water supply systems have been identified and studied.

The craft and economic activities of the city and the regional and international commercial links of the port have been reconstructed, as well as the daily life of its inhabitants, revealing the wealth and cosmopolitan character of this ancient Omani metropolis.

These findings were led by Prof Axelle of the French National Centre for Scientific Research (CNRS), whose expertise in medieval port cities and the trade history of the eastern Islamic world and the Indian Ocean has been instrumental in shedding new light on Qalhat.

This collaboration not only broadened existing understanding of the city but also played a crucial role in Qalhat’s recognition as a Unesco World Heritage Site in 2018. The publication is available at the MHT pavilion in Muscat International Book Fair 2024, where readers are invited to explore the legacy of one of Oman’s most significant archaeological treasures.

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CPA seized over 89,000 banned goods in Muscat



Our Correspondent
Muscat

Consumer Protection Authority (CPA) seized 89,300 banned goods in Muscat in 2023.

According to CPA data, the authority recovered over RO1.2mn to compensate consumers and received 18,428 complaints in 2023.

CPA stated that the recovery of money aligns with the authority’s keenness to preserve

the rights of consumers stipulated in the Consumer Protection Law and its executive regulations.

CPA called on all to cooperate to create a safe market that reassures and satisfies consumers. The authority and its departments in various governorates are working to meet its objectives of preserving the rights of consumers according to legal procedures in place in this regard, it stated.

Development of Hadash, Wakan to boost tourism

Our Correspondent

Muscat

The villages of Hadash and Wakan, nestled in the Western Hajar Mountains in the wilayat of Nakhal, South Batinah, have long captivated nature enthusiasts with their pristine beauty. However, the lack of proper road access has been a significant barrier, hindering the exploration of these villages known for lush greenery, fresh produce, rare bird sightings and clean air.

Recently, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik issued directives to develop Al Jabal al Abyad and the village of Wakan with the primary objective of providing infrastructure to leverage their tourism potential.

Salim Mansoor al Hadhrami, Managing Director of Hadash Guest House and Cafe, underscored the urgent need of development activities. "The enchanting landscapes of Hadash and Wakan have remained largely hidden due to inadequate roads. The challenging journey, often necessitating four-wheel drives and experienced drivers, poses a considerable obstacle and expense for visitors, underscoring the critical need for road development," he stated.

Hadhrami also highlighted issues with water supply that demand immediate attention for the sustainability of these communities and the growth of tourism.

Residents and stakeholders have expressed optimism following the government's com-



The enchanting landscapes of Hadash and Wakan have remained largely hidden due to inadequate roads

SALIM MANSOOR AL HADHRAMI

mitment, evidenced by multiple visits from ministry officials to the villages and anticipate sig-

nificant improvements in the near future.

Wakan resident Mohammad

Suleiman emphasised the importance of a reliable water supply for the community's prosperity, agricultural sustainability and tourism enhancement. "For Hadash and Wakan to flourish as tourist destinations, there is urgent need of more hotels and improved infrastructure. Adequate accommodation and facilities are

essential to transform these mountainous areas into sought-after retreats," Suleiman said.

Developing the infrastructure of Hadash and Wakan are poised to not only make these hidden gems more accessible to tourists but also stimulate local economies and promote sustainable tourism in Oman's rugged terrains.

40% of service road for Dibba to Khasab carriageway complete



Muscat - The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MTCIT) has informed that 40% of the service road for the Dibba-Lima-Khasab carriageway project is complete.

MTCIT signed an agreement with Al Sarooj Construction Company in December 2023 worth more than RO151mn for the design and implementation of the 70km Dibba-Lima-Khasab road and a road link to the niyabat of Lima in Musandam.

Designed to be an all-weather
conditions road that will allow

passage of all types of vehicles, the project aims to stimulate the economy and tourism in Musandam. According to Abdul Aziz al Shehi, a resident of Khasab, the new road will ease traffic and allow people to travel between wilayats easily. "It will trigger economic development and help urban and tourism expansion."

Ahmed Ali al Aqbi, head of the fishing port in Dibba, described the new road as a "quantum leap in logistics" considering the governorate has five fishing and a commercial port.

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Bottled water industry expands to 81 plants

Our Correspondent

Muscat

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources (MAFWR) has stated that the sultanate's bottled drinking water industry has expanded. Currently 81 plants are operational producing approximately 7.7mn lt of bottled water daily.

The growth underscores the sultanate's response to the increasing demand for clean drinking water, fuelled by

socio-economic growth.

These factories are strategically located across the sultanate. South Sharqiyah has 15 plants, North Batinah has 12, South Batinah 11, Muscat and Dhofar ten each, Dakhliyah eight, North Sharqiyah five, Dhahirah and Buraimi four each, and Al Wusta has two.

This geographical spread is indicative of MAFWR's commitment to ensuring availability of bottled drinking water throughout the sultanate.

In a move to regulate this burgeoning industry, the ministry has set technical regulations and conditional approvals for new projects. These preliminary approvals are crucial for completing further processes with other government bodies, ensuring that all projects meet the country's stringent health and safety standards.

To further bolster local entrepreneurship in the sector, MAFWR is actively encouraging Omani investors to explore

opportunities in the bottled water industry. It is also advocating allocation of water resources for these projects aligning with Oman's national priorities and regulatory frameworks.

Additionally, the ministry informed that 864 water licences were issued in January 2024 for a range of activities - burrowing wells, constructing dams, developing aflaj and drilling projects across the governorates.

State Council debates draft law on wildlife trade

Muscat - The State Council, under the leadership of Deputy Chairman Salem Muslim ali Qatan, convened on Tuesday to deliberate on a draft law aimed at regulating the trade of wildlife.

The legislation, forwarded by the Council of Ministers, underscores Oman's commitment to biodiversity conservation, a principle observed since the march of the renaissance.

During the session, Dr Muhammad bin Saeed al Hajri, Chairman of Social and Cultural Committee of the State Council, articulated the sultanate's longstanding dedication to preserving its rich biodiversity. He highlighted the nation's diverse wildlife, including species at risk of extinction, underscoring the draft law's objective to safeguard these precious resources.

Hajri emphasised the significance of the legislation, noting its critical role at local and international levels. He pointed out that the law aims not only to conserve biodiversity but also to enhance Oman's legal framework related to wildlife trade.

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India	215.29
Pakistan	718.72
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Sri Lanka	806.52

*Rates as on February 27

Source: xe.com

BRIEFS

Moody's affirms 4 Saudi corporates

Moody's Investors Service on Tuesday affirmed the A1 ratings of Saudi Basic Industries Corporation (SABIC), Saudi Telecom Company (stc) and Saudi Electricity Company (SEC), and Baa1 rating of Saudi Arabian Mining Company (Ma'aden).

Moody's also affirmed Ma'aden's A3.sa national scale rating (NSR). SABIC's, stc's, and SEC's outlooks remain positive. Ma'aden's outlook remains stable.

Concurrently, Moody's has assigned a1 baseline credit assessment (BCA) to stc, a2 to SABIC, baa1 to SEC, and baa3 to Ma'aden, following the publication of Moody's updated Government-Related Issuers (GRI) methodology on January 25, 2024.

Moody's has expanded the scope of the updated methodology to include certain state-owned enterprises that are indirectly owned by the government.

GCC to outperform global economy in 2024: Report

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The economies of the GCC countries are projected to outpace global growth forecasts for 2024, supported by the domestic multi-year investment cycle in the region, according to First Abu Dhabi Bank's (FAB) Global Investment Outlook 2024 Report released on Monday.

Despite recent geopolitical challenges and a subdued global recovery, FAB anticipates regional growth to be driven by robust demand in the tourism, real estate, transportation, and manufacturing sectors, as reported by the Emirates News Agency (WAM).

FAB predicts the UAE's GDP to expand by 3.7% in 2023 and 4% in 2024, and the GCC's by 3.4% in 2024 — surpassing the IMF's global forecast of 3.1% and 2.1% for the United States in 2024.

The Global Investment Outlook 2024 Report, authored by FAB's industry experts, examined the current global economic and investment landscape, providing insights into key macroeconomic trends.

FAB's outlook highlights that the GCC region continues to benefit from strong growth in non-oil GDP, with an expected growth rate of 3.4% in the medium term as countries in the



First Abu Dhabi Bank predicts the GCC economy to expand by 3.4% in 2024, surpassing the IMF's global forecast of 3.1% and 2.1% for the United States in 2024

region diversify their economies.

In financial markets, FAB recommends that investors diversify their asset allocations in their portfolios, as market and economic volatility are likely to persist in 2024, and build a defensive portfolio to enhance flexibility.

The report indicated tailwinds such as increased fiscal spending, rapid disinflation, and a tight labour market supporting con-

pact economies, and geopolitical risks, which could increase volatility. Global economic growth is expected to decelerate in 2024. However, our regional markets appear resilient, with economic growth expected to accelerate, driven by successful economic diversification and reforms."

"In the ESG investing space, MENA markets offer some intriguing opportunities along with diversification benefits for global portfolios. This year's Global Investment Outlook theme identifies these investment opportunities and addresses key issues that will drive returns for investors," he added.



Oman's import price index falls 4.7% in 2023

Muscat – Oman's general Import Price Index (IPI) saw a decline of 4.7% by the end of the third quarter of 2023 compared to the corresponding period in 2022, attributed to a collective decrease across most segments comprising the general index.

The breakdown of the IPI decline is as follows: a 0.8% decrease in the group of machinery and transportation equipment, a 5.4% decrease in the group of manufactured goods, a 3.1% decrease in the group of food and livestock, a 16.2% decrease in the group of mineral fuels, mineral lubricants, and similar materials, a 2% decrease in the inedible raw materials group (excluding fuel), and a 2.9% decrease in the beverages and tobacco group.

Conversely, the group of chemicals and related materials witnessed a 3.8% increase in their IPI, while the group of miscellaneous manufactured products experienced a 1.4% decrease in their IPI.

Compared to the second quarter of 2023, the IPI dropped by 7.2%.

The group of machinery and transportation equipment experienced a 16.1% decline in their IPI, while manufactured products' IPI decreased by 9.9%. Following this decline were miscellaneous products (5.3%), mineral fuels, mineral lubricants, and related materials (6.2%), and beverages and tobacco (3.2%).

In contrast, the index for the food and livestock group posted a 4.1% rise, while the index of the inedible raw materials group (excluding fuel) registered a 1.5% increase.

ONA

OQ showcases strategic directions, priorities at Suhar Investment Forum

Sohar – OQ, the sultanate's global integrated energy group, participated as a strategic sponsor in the Suhar Investment Forum. The group's participation reflects its commitment to supporting investment and creating opportunities for investors in the plastics industry.

Ashraf bin Hamed bin al Mamari, Acting Group CEO of OQ, presented a paper at the forum in which he discussed the group's strategy. This strategy reflects OQ's mission to enable energy transformation and its vision to maximise the value of Oman's energy resources, transition to a sustainable future, and achieve the government's goals of promoting sustainable economic diversification in the energy value chain.

Mamari also highlighted OQ's values of performance, collaboration, and care.

Highlighting OQ's strategic priorities, Mamari said that OQ's strategy for Oman's energy transition includes reduc-



Ashraf al Mamari speaks at Suhar Investment Forum

OQ is diversifying its portfolio by including a number of low-carbon investment projects, while reducing the carbon footprint

ing carbon emissions by improving energy efficiency, investing in renewable energy, and using carbon capture, storage, and utilisation technologies. He added that the group continues to focus on developing, evaluating, and applying new technologies to improve

operations and businesses.

According to Mamari, OQ's upstream business continues to grow and maintain a successful investment portfolio with strong cash flow. For downstream, he noted that the group is doubling the value of current investments and partnerships and continuing to grow by doubling the value of the hydrocarbon sector in Oman through competitive investment and low carbon emissions.

Highlighting OQ's focus on alternative energy, Mamari said the group is focusing on excellence in the alternative energy sector by reducing the impact of energy emitted from OQ's existing assets while improving energy intensity. The group is working on diversifying its portfolio by including a number of low-carbon investment projects, while reducing the carbon footprint.

Mamari also highlighted OQ's commitment to environmental, social, and governance (ESG) practices.

Sohar Port and Freezone partners with TFG Marine for bunker fuel supplies

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Sohar Port and Freezone (SOHAR) announced on Tuesday the implementation of ISO 22192 international standards for marine fuel supplies, aligning with global best practices observed in ports like Singapore and Rotterdam.

This strategic move, which mandates the use of Mass Flow Meters (MFM) for fuel supplies, positions SOHAR as a pioneer in the Middle East, fostering enhanced operational efficiency and market competitiveness while supporting the development of the bunker market.

Sohar Port and Freezone signed an agreement with TFG Marine during International Energy Week in London, marking a significant step towards establishing an international bunker fuel supply operation within Sohar Port and Freezone. This strategic collaboration, coupled with the implementation of ISO 22192 international standards for marine fuel supplies, positions SOHAR as a global leader in the marine fuel sector.

In a press statement, Emile Hoogsteden, CEO of Sohar Port,



said, "This agreement reaffirms Sohar Port's commitment to building a digitalised and transparent bunker operation that meets international standards already introduced in Singapore and soon to be implemented in Rotterdam. This will enable TFG Marine to establish an international bunker fuel supply operation at Sohar Port and to offer all grades of bunker fuel to vessels."

The port's anchorage areas are located within 4 to 10 nautical miles offshore. With a depth of between 30 to 60 meters, more than 3,000 vessels of all sizes currently call at the port each year. This number will in-

crease as TFG Marine will be able to refuel the fleet of its joint venture owners, Trafigura, Frontline, and Golden Ocean, which collectively manage a fleet of more than 700 owned and chartered vessels.

"This is an ideal location for TFG to establish its first bunker fuel supply operation in the Middle East," said Kenneth Dam, TFG Marine's Global Head of Bunkering.

He said, "With the intention to emulate Singapore's best-in-class approach, there is the potential for SOHAR Port to quickly become a major new physical

bunkering procurement location in the Middle East for the world's shipping fleet."

TFG Marine intends to start deliveries with a local operating company, with its first bunker vessel arriving at Sohar Port in the coming months. The vessel will be fitted with a Mass Flow Meter (MFM), calibrated to the ISO 22192 international standard as required by Sohar Port.

TFG Marine has long been an advocate of the global adoption of calibrated MFMs to bring much-needed transparency to bunkering and encouraging digitalization in the long-term interests of the bunker industry and helping to further the decarbonization goals of the shipping industry.

SOHAR will conduct a comprehensive training program to equip its workforce with the necessary skills, contributing to the advancement of the marine fuel sector in the region.

TFG Marine is a leading international marine fuel supply and procurement joint venture between physical commodity trading company Trafigura Group Pte and ship-owning companies Frontline Ltd and Golden Ocean Group Ltd.

Oil prices slightly increase with demand boost from weak US dollar

Muscat – Oil prices increased on Tuesday, with trade boosted by a declining US dollar, while market players await the Federal Reserve's future decisions on interest rates based on insights gained with the release of key macroeconomic data.

International benchmark Brent crude traded at \$81.90 per barrel on Tuesday morning for a 0.28% rise from the closing price of \$81.67 a barrel in the previous trading session.

The US benchmark West Texas Intermediate (WTI) traded at \$77.80 per barrel at the same time, for a 0.28% gain after the previous session closed at \$77.58 per barrel.

The US dollar index, which measures the dollar's value against other currencies, fell 0.08% to 103.74 on Tuesday. The US dollar's decline supported trade by lowering oil prices for holders of other currencies, causing an increase in oil prices.



Analysts are awaiting the release of economic data in the US along with speeches from US Federal Reserve officials this week for cues on the Fed's interest rate policy.

In March, the Fed is anticipated to maintain the current policy rate. Nonetheless, there is a 60% probability that the first interest rate cut will be made in June and a 16% chance that it will happen in May.

Data released on Monday re-

vealed that new home sales in the country increased by 1.5% on a monthly basis to 661,000 in January, raising hopes of positive economic activity, although the numbers remained below market expectations. Oil prices rallied amid concerns that the conflicts in the Red Sea would negatively affect global oil supply.

Iran-backed Houthis in Yemen announced over the weekend that US and British warplanes bombed the Shamir region of the

city of Taiz in the southwest of the country.

A statement by the US Department of Defense revealed that the US and the UK, with the support of their allies, hit 18 Houthi targets in eight different places in Yemen.

The Houthis announced Monday that they targeted an American oil tanker in the Gulf of Aden and a number of American warships in the Red Sea.

Agencies



Global debt climbs to record \$313tn in 2023

Washington, US - The amount of global debt climbed to a record high of \$313tn last year, according to a report by the Institute of International Finance (IIF).

"Over \$15tn was added to the global debt mountain last year, bringing the total to a new record high of \$313tn," said the report.

Global debt is borrowing by governments, businesses and people, and it's at dangerously high levels.

"The global debt-to-GDP ratio declined for a third consecutive year, largely driven by mature markets," it said.

While global debt declined approximately \$7tn in 2022, it showed an increase of more than \$15tn in 2023, according to the figures.

Total global debt stood around \$210tn almost a decade ago, according to the Institute of International Fi-

nance.

Around 55% of total debt came from developed markets, such as the US, France, and Germany; while China, India and Brazil also showed a rise in debt among developing nations.

Total debt of developed countries climbed to \$208.3tn last year, and the combined debt of developing countries rose to \$104.6tn.

Household debt amounted to \$59.3tn, while public sector debts were \$89.9tn last year.

Debts of non-financial companies came in at \$94.4tn and debts of financial institutions were \$69.4tn, according to the Institute of International Finance.

"As higher rates and higher debt levels push government interest expenses higher, domestic debt strains are set to increase," the IIF warned.

Anadolu Agency

IMF says global economy on track for soft landing

IMF expects global economic growth to reach 3.1% this year

Washington, US - The global economy appears on track for a soft landing, but activity and growth prospects remain weak, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) said Monday in a report.

"The cyclical position of G20 countries has proven stronger than previously anticipated as disinflation has so far proceeded without triggering a recession and emerging market economies have demonstrated improved resilience," said the IMF's G20 Surveillance Note, which was published before the G20's Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors' Meeting in Sao Paulo, Brazil from February 28-29.

A soft landing is a situation where a central bank raises interest rates too much and too high, leading to an economic slowdown but avoiding a recession.

"Looking ahead, monetary policy is expected to loosen somewhat in 2024. However, medium-term growth prospects remain subdued - reflecting secular trends and challenges including weak productivity growth, ageing, geoeconomic fragmentation and climate vulnerabilities," said the report.

"After several years of shocks,



we expect global growth to reach 3.1% this year, with inflation falling and job markets holding up. This resilience provides a foundation to shift focus to the medium-term trends shaping the world economy. As our new report to the G20 makes clear, some of these trends - such as AI - hold promise to lift productivity and improve growth prospects. We badly need it - our projections for medium-term growth have declined to the lowest in decades," IMF said.

The IMF said global economic

growth could be higher than expected if the pace of disinflation is faster than anticipated and brings forward easing in monetary policy.

The institution, on the other hand, warned that additional spikes in commodity prices, persistent tightness in the labour market, or renewed supply chain tensions could reignite inflationary pressures.

"An appropriate combination of fiscal and monetary policy will be critical to delivering debt, price, and financial stability," the

report said.

The IMF, in addition, said G20 policymakers must step up efforts to mitigate the threat of climate change, help unlock Africa's growth potential, strengthen the resilience of the international monetary system, and ensure the benefits of artificial intelligence adoption.

To achieve an economic soft landing, the central banks increase interest rates to a level that causes an economic slowdown, thus preventing a recession from occurring.

Finishing job on inflation

As per the IMF, central bankers are rightly focused on finishing the job of bringing inflation back to target. That's especially important for poor families and low-income countries who have been disproportionately hit by high prices.

"But the welcome progress on reducing inflation means that the question of when and how much to ease interest rates will need to be carefully considered by major central banks this year," IMF said.

As core inflation remains elevated in many countries, and upside risks to inflation remain, IMF said policymakers must carefully track underlying inflation developments and avoid easing too soon or too fast.

"But where inflation is clearly moving toward target, countries should ensure that interest rates are not kept high for too long. Brazil's early and resolute response to surging inflation during the pandemic is a good example of how nimble policymaking can pay off. The Central Bank of Brazil was among the first central banks to raise its policy rate, then loosen policy as inflation fell back toward its target range," IMF added.

Mubadala, Goldman Sachs sign \$1bn credit partnership to invest in APAC

Abu Dhabi, UAE - Goldman Sachs and UAE's Mubadala Investment Company have signed a \$1bn separately managed account (Partnership) in which Mubadala and Goldman Sachs Alternatives will co-invest in private credit opportunities throughout the Asia Pacific region.

The partnership will be managed by Private Credit at Goldman Sachs Alternatives, with a dedicated on-the-ground team across multiple Asia Pacific markets.

This mandate will enable both firms to continue scaling their investment activity in the large and growing Asia Pacific credit market. The Partnership will aim to deploy \$1bn of long-term capital, offering customised private credit solutions to high-quality companies and sponsors throughout the Asia Pacific region. The Partnership will invest across the private credit spectrum and is expected to invest across multiple Asia Pacific markets, focusing on India.

In 2023, Goldman Sachs an-



nounced that it is expanding its footprint in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region by opening a new office in Abu Dhabi Global Market (ADGM), the international financial centre of the UAE's capital city.

The new office will complement the firm's growing regional presence, allowing it to deepen relationships with clients and meet them where they are. Establishing a new office in ADGM is part of the firm's long-term strategy to continue growing its footprint and client offering in the region.

Marc Nachmann, Global Head of Asset and Wealth Management at Goldman Sachs, said, "We are pleased to announce the Partnership between Mubadala and Goldman Sachs Alternatives. This Partnership bolsters the expansion of our Asia Credit platform and investment in new opportunities across the Asia Pacific region where bespoke credit solutions are needed."

Greg Olafson, Global Head of Private Credit at Goldman Sachs Alternatives, said, "The opportunity in private credit in Asia Pacific is expansive. With strong economic growth in the region and favourable conditions for private lenders to support the growth of leading companies by providing flexible, long-term capital, we believe we are at the early stages of a defining era for private credit in Asia Pacific. Through this Partnership with Mubadala, we look forward to expanding our long-established investment focus on the region."

WAM

Bitcoin surpasses \$57,000 as crypto rally remains strong

New York, US - The price of bitcoin went past \$57,000 on Tuesday as the rally in cryptocurrencies remain strong.

Bitcoin surpassed that level at 7.30 am EDT and it was trading at \$56,730 at 8.34 am EDT for a daily gain of a massive 10.7%.

The world's biggest cryptocurrency saw its price climb above \$54,000 on Monday for



the first time since December 3, 2021.

Bitcoin has been on a rally since January 11, when the US Securities and Exchange Commission approved spot Bitcoin ETFs, or exchange-traded funds. The move allowed investors, especially financial institutions, to trade Bitcoin without owning it.

In addition, Bitcoin will see its halving in the second half of April

as traders adopt a bullish stance.

Ethereum, the world's biggest altcoin by market cap, was up 6.2% to \$3,260 at 8.37 am, gaining a whopping 9.2% in the past week.

The price surge in Ethereum is a result of the potential approval of a spot Ethereum ETF and its upcoming Dencun upgrade on March 13.

With the rally, some altcoins saw their prices rise as much as 25%.

Anadolu Agency

WTO chief urges cooperation amid global challenges

Abu Dhabi, UAE - The head of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) on Monday urged member countries to cooperate and deliver concrete results at the ongoing Ministerial Conference, highlighting the importance of trade in addressing global challenges.

Opening the WTO's 13th Ministerial Conference (MC13) in Abu Dhabi, Director-General Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala acknowledged the complex global situation, marked by geopolitical tensions, rising inflation, and economic uncertainty.

However, she emphasised the continued resilience of trade and the WTO's role in promoting stability and tackling shared issues like poverty and climate change.

"Despite everything we have



been through, global goods and services trade remain at or near record highs, with nearly ten percent of the global population still undernourished," Okonjo-Iweala said.

"International markets anchored in the rules-based global trading system have stayed broadly open, helping businesses, households, and economies adapt and adjust to one shock after the other."

She pointed to the success of

Despite everything we have been through, global goods and services trade remain at or near record highs, with nearly 10% of global population still undernourished

the previous Ministerial Conference (MC12) in 2021, where members reached ten consensus agreements, and called for similar leadership and compromise at MC13.

Key issues on the agenda include finalising the Fisheries Subsidies Agreement, which aims to curb the estimated \$22bn in annual harmful subsidies, addressing development concerns of least-developed countries, and making progress on WTO re-

form, including dispute settlement.

Okonjo-Iweala also highlighted the Secretariat's efforts to support member countries through research, capacity building, and promoting inclusivity in trade.

She expressed gratitude for a recent small budget increase for the Secretariat, which had faced funding constraints for over a decade.

WAM



FINCORP AL AMAL FUND

Invitation for attending The Ordinary General Meeting

The Board of Directors of FINCORP AL AMAL FUND (the "fund") has the pleasure to invite the shareholders to attend the Annual General Meeting, which will be held on Tuesday at 03:00 PM on 19/03/2024, via the electronic platform which can be accessed through the website of Muscat Clearing & Depository Company (www.mcd.om). If the quorum requirement for holding the Annual General Meeting is not fulfilled, a second Annual General Meeting shall be held on Thursday at 03:00 PM on 21/03/2024, via the electronic platform which can be accessed through the website of Muscat Clearing & Depository Company (www.mcd.om) to discuss the following agenda:

1. To consider and approve the fund's management body report for the financial year ended December 31, 2023.
2. To consider the Auditors' Report and to approve the Financial Statements, Balance Sheet and Profit & Loss Account, for the financial year ended on December 31, 2023
3. To consider and approve the proposal to distribute cash dividends of 75 baisas for each unit to unitholders on the date of the general meeting.
4. To approve the sitting fees of the fund's management body meetings paid to them for previous financial year, and to determine the sitting fees for the next fiscal year.
5. To consider and approve the proposal for the annual remuneration for the Fund Management amounting to RO 25,000 for the fiscal year ended on 31 December 2023.
6. To consider and approve the transactions entered into by the fund with related parties during the financial year ended 31 December 2023.
7. To consider and approve the transactions that will be entered into by the fund with related parties during the financial year ended 31 December 2024.
8. To appoint the fund's auditors for the financial year ending on 31 December 2024 and to approve their fees.

According to the Company's Articles of Association and the controls for holding General Meetings using modern technology issued by the capital market authority, we would like to draw your attention to the following:

(A) Legal person, exclusively, has the right to delegate a natural person to attend the General Meeting and vote on its behalf through technical means, provided that this natural person has an investor number in MCDC.

(B) Voting on any of the agenda items begins no more than three days before the date of the General Meeting until the voting process ends on the day of the General Meeting. If the shareholder's shares are increased or decreased, the voting process will be canceled, and the shareholder will have to vote again on the day of the General Meeting.

For further information please contact on telephone No **24822327** or email: **harsha@fincorp.org**.

Chairman	Legal Advisor	External auditor
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Investment Manager & Administrator

 **FINCORP**
شركة الركن المالي للمراجعات
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Brokerage | Asset Management | Corporate Finance and Advisory | Research

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Huawei focuses on unlocking 5G potential at growth summit

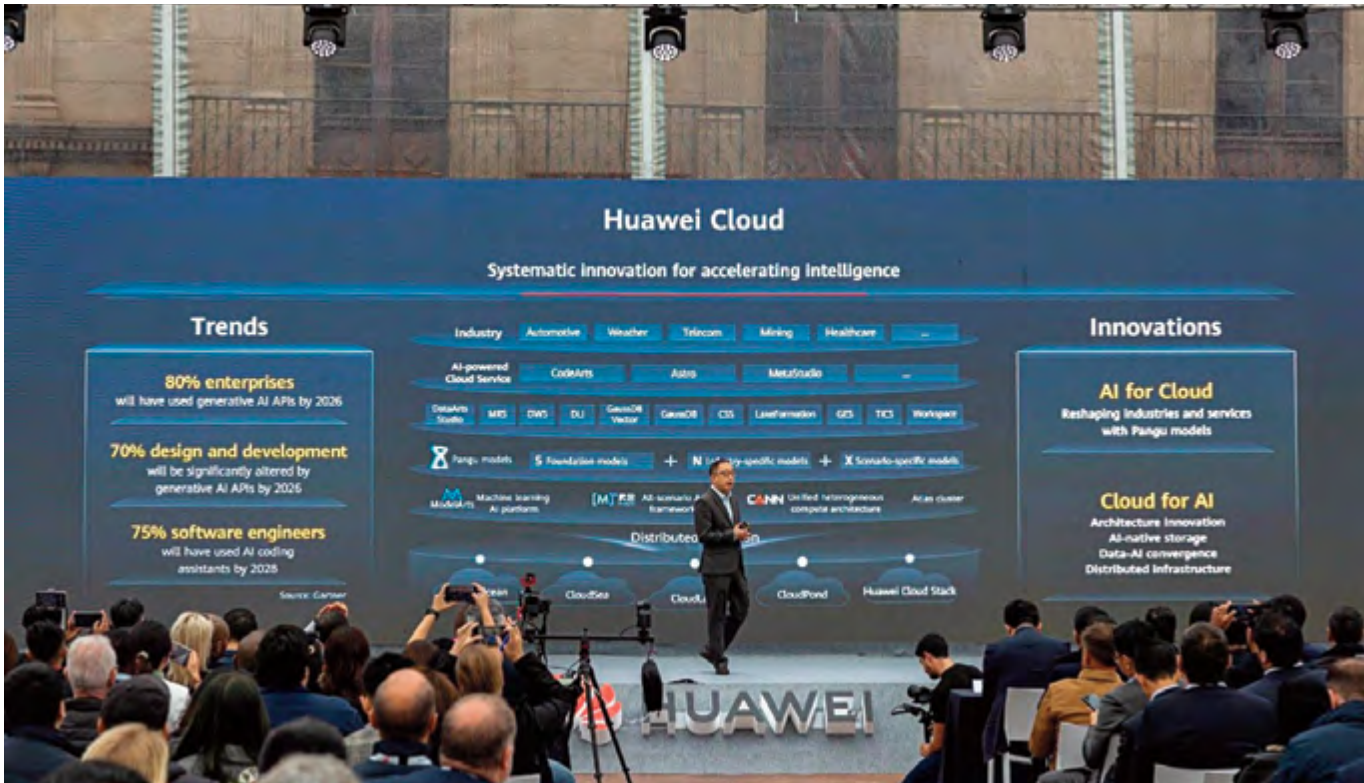
At the 5G Beyond Growth Summit, hosted by Huawei at MWC Barcelona 2024, Li Peng, Huawei's Corporate senior vice president and president of ICT Sales and Service, discussed how carriers can achieve business success in 5G and how 5.5G will further unlock the potential of networks and create new growth opportunities.

"5G is on the right path to business success," said Li. 5G began commercialisation in 2019, and over the past five years, it has already gained 1.5 billion 5G users around the world. It took nine years for 4G to make this happen. Currently, 20% of global mobile subscribers are using 5G. These users generate 30% of all mobile traffic and contribute to 40% of mobile service revenue, a press release said.

Li explained, "5.5G is entering commercial use in 2024, and as 5.5G, AI, and cloud converge, carriers can unlock the potential of new applications and capabilities."

He went on to say that carriers around the world should focus on high-quality networking, multi-dimensional monetization, emerging services, and generative AI to grasp these opportunities.

Mobile users have proven willing to purchase experience upgrades for their mobile pack-



ages if their networks are high enough quality. The traffic generated by these users is, therefore, expected to significantly increase, allowing carriers to maximise the value of traffic. This has led to more and more carriers proposing strategic goals that include the construction of high-quality 5G networks.

Some carriers in the Middle East, for example, have already deployed Massive MIMO networks, and the optimal experience delivered by these

networks has made the 5G FWA rollout a success. Currently, 5G FWA has connected nearly 3 million households, making it a powerful engine of revenue growth for carriers.

More than 20% of global 5G carriers have already adopted speed-tiered pricing models. One carrier in Thailand, for example, recently released a 5G Boost Mode add-on, which allows subscribers to select different speed tiers to best meet their usage needs. This model has

helped the carrier increase its ARPU by about 23%. Another Chinese carrier has launched a guaranteed uplink package to provide live-streamers with smooth, high-definition livestreaming experiences. The package has become quite popular and helped the carrier increase its ARPU by more than 70%.

New services like New Calling, cloud phones, and glasses-free 3D are getting more and more attention from consumers.

For example, New Calling's value-added functions, like virtual avatars, are becoming quite popular. Users are also willing to pay more for services that deliver real-time experience, such as one-stop car insurance claims.

Many industries have also adopted 5G. In China, more than 50,000 private 5G network use cases have entered commercial use in over 50 industries. The new capabilities of 5.5G, including deterministic latency, precise positioning, and passive IoT.



Quik Groceries offers unbeatable Ramadan deals

As the holy month of Ramadan approaches, Careem, the region's leading multi-service app, is delighted to announce unbeatable deals on Quik Groceries, ensuring customers can prepare for the occasion with ease and affordability.

From February 23, users can access incredible discounts of up to 80% off on all their Ramadan must-haves directly through the Careem App, a press release said.

Chase Lario, head of Groceries at Careem, said, "Grocery stores are typically bustling this time of year as families gather their essential items for Ramadan. We're thrilled to offer our customers un-

matched savings and convenience through Quik Groceries, as they prepare for the holy month, all while avoiding the long Ramadan queues. With discounts of up to 80%, customers can conveniently access a wide range of Ramadan necessities, including cooking essentials, refreshing beverages, and sweet snacks, all from the comfort of their homes."

Quik was launched in Dubai in November 2021 and uses a dense network of hyperlocal dark stores and advanced fulfillment and inventory management technology to prepare orders in under two minutes.



Social Development Committee holds first review meeting

The Social Committee in Muscat Wali's office held its first meeting aimed at discussing the tasks and developments of the committee.

The meeting was chaired by Ali bin Saeed al Saeedi, Wali of Muscat, a press release said.

The meeting began by talking about the Social Protection System. The wali was all praise for its positive effectiveness on the social and economic aspects of Omani families.

The meeting reviewed the national strategy to combat narcotics, drugs and psychotropic substances and its health, social, and economic implications on the Omani community.

The meeting also discussed

The meeting reviewed the national strategy to combat narcotics, drugs and psychotropic substances and its health, social, and economic implications

the support offered to low-income families by the Muscat Charitable Team, besides preparations for Ramadan and methods of distribution of food supplies and purchase vouchers to worthy families.

MG Motor launches all-new MG3 in ME

MG Motor has announced the introduction of the brand's all-new MG3 compact sedan in the Middle East, further diversifying MG's highly popular car lineup.

Boasting a striking design, state-of-the-art technology, and delivering impressive performance, the all-new MG3 comes with a 1.5ltr petrol engine and will be available to customers across the GCC, Lebanon and Iraq from March, a press release said.

Prices for the new MG3 start from USD10,700 (excluding VAT) while the new model also comes with a generous 6-year/200,000km manufacturer warranty. The new MG3, now in its third generation, is packed with new and innovative features such as a 360-degree camera and advanced driver-assistance systems, helping it deliver both style and substance on the road.

The new MG3 is redefining the hatchback experience without sacrificing good looks - from its dynamic front face to its athletic side body, it exudes both agility and style. The model's exterior features include a leopard-inspired hunting-eye headlamp and light-trailed taillamp, not only enhancing its stylish appearance but also ensuring visibility and safety in all driving conditions. Inside, there is a tech-



nologically advanced cockpit, characterised by a sophisticated design theme, a modular layout, and a racing steering wheel, that balances comfort and performance seamlessly.

MG's all-new compact sedan offers a host of convenient, technological features, including a 7-inch virtual instrument cluster and 10.25-inch infotainment touchscreen, and comes with Apple CarPlay and Android Auto compatibility for effortless connectivity. Prioritising both comfort and practicality, the MG3 is designed to provide ample interior space and optimal vision, with 25 thoughtful storage com-

partments and plenty of boot space.

Offering a wide range of active safety features and having been subjected to rigorous testing across climatic extremes, the MG3 ensures peace of mind on the road for all occupants.

Among the advanced driver-assistance systems available, depending on model, are Front Collision Warning, Emergency Lane Keep System, Blind Spot Detection and Adaptive Cruise Control.

The new MG3 is powered by an advanced petrol engine, mated to an 8-gear i-CVT transmission, and delivers 109 HP.

With a peak torque of 142 NM, the new model is also highly economical, while offering a fun driving experience with agile handling and flexible steering, re-defining fun on the road.

Available in three trim levels - STD, COM and LUX - the MG3 caters to diverse preferences. In keeping with MG's reputation for offering great value for money, the entry level STD model comes with features such as electric door mirrors, rear parking sensors, hill assist and a multi-function steering wheel, while the COM adds 16-inch alloys, AC vents in the second row, an electric parking brake and a sunroof.

ATP stars make grand slam impact in Dubai

More than 800 children from 20 schools across several Emirates participated in a JP Morgan Kids' Day, marking the start of a busy week of ATP 500 action at the Dubai Duty Free Tennis Championships.

The students' morning of activities included a dedicated tennis clinic led by coaches from the CF Tennis Academy, followed by entertainment, photo opportunities, and a meet-and-greet with reigning Australian Open doubles champions Matthew Ebden and Rohan Bopanna, a press release said.

The enthusiastic children were enthralled by the energetic tournament environment at the Dubai Duty Free Tennis Stadium, as they took advantage of the chance to interact with professional tennis players and receive signed merchandise.

For their part, the Grand Slam winning Ebden and Bopanna were all smiles as they hit an endless number of tennis balls with the children, offering guidance and advice to the youngsters. Following the Kids' Day experience, Bopanna said, "The activities were so fun and vibrant, and it was fantastic to be part of an event that helps empower the next generation of tennis players and fans."

Khaled Hobballah, senior country officer for the MENA region at JP Morgan, added, "We are thrilled to sponsor the JP Morgan Kids Day at the Dubai Duty Free Tennis Championships for the tenth year in a row. Our aim is to inspire children from local schools."

Mercedes-Benz Oman offers air conditioning check for Ramadan

With the Holy Month of Ramadan and warmer weather around the corner, ensure your vehicle's Air Conditioning system (A/C) is working at its peak performance with the Mercedes-Benz A/C Check offer.

From March 1 until 9 April, Mercedes-Benz vehicle owners can get their entire A/C system checked by certified technicians with a 50% discount on parts. Customers can benefit from a complete A/C dust filter change except for the particulate filter, while the offer also includes A/C cleaning, A/C gas top-up, a 10-point health check, and a wash



and vacuum, a press release said.

Graeme Mc Graith, head of Customer Services at Mercedes-Benz Oman, said, "In the spirit of the Holy Month of Ramadan, our clients can always count on a high-quality and impeccable after-sales service. A well-functioning air conditioner is vital for staying cool and comfortable during the warmer months. Regular maintenance is essential to ensure a vehicle runs at its best, and we encourage our clients to visit one of our service centres in Muscat, Salalah or Suhar."

With all services and work on

vehicles performed by highly specialised and certified technicians, Mercedes-Benz customers in Oman can feel confident that their vehicle receives the best possible care. For further peace of mind, and with StarView solution from Mercedes-Benz Oman, the vehicle health check is also recorded. A personalised film, along with an estimate, is shared with customers via email and SMS.

The AC Ramadan Check offer extends across all Mercedes-Benz models that have been registered before January 1, 2021, except Mercedes-Maybach.

Vinfast signs agreement with first dealer in M E

VinFast Auto (Nasdaq: VFS) officially signed a Dealer Sales agreement with Bahwan Automobiles Trading (BAT) for the distribution of electric vehicles in the Oman market. This event signifies not only VinFast's initial operation in the Middle East region but also a significant step in the VinFast's global expansion.

Under the terms of the agreement, BAT will become the official dealer of VinFast in Oman. From 2024 to 2027, BAT plans to establish and operate 13 VinFast stores and service centers, a press release said.

The inaugural store is anticipated to open in mid-2024, with vehicle sales commencing shortly thereafter. Additionally, VinFast will collaborate with BAT to sell four e-SUV models - VF 6, VF 7, VF 8, and VF 9 upon their market launch.

Previously, within the framework of the United Nations Climate Change Conference 2023 (COP 28) held in the United Arab Emirates, VinFast and BAT signed a Memorandum of Understanding for Cooperation.



Through this collaboration with its first dealer in Oman, VinFast actively contributes to the realisation of green mobility solutions within the Middle Eastern region, while affirming the commitment of the Vietnamese electric vehicle manufacturer to making electric vehicles more accessible to everyone.

Ta Xuan Hien, CEO of VinFast Middle East, said, "Oman presents a promising market for electric vehicles, as consumers in the nation demonstrate a growing interest in sustainable and environmentally friendly transportation solutions. We are confident that this Dealer Sales agreement with BAT, a leading and highly reputable dealer in Oman, will empower VinFast to swiftly establish a presence in the market and provide customers in the country with the most diverse and high-quality selection of electric vehicles available."

Abdullah Ahmed Suhail Bahwan, executive director of Bahwan Automobiles Trading, said, "We are delighted to be the first Middle Eastern dealer of VinFast, a pioneering electric vehicle manufacturer in Vietnam renowned for its strategic vision and innovative products. We firmly believe that this Dealer Sales agreement will introduce captivating electric vehicle models to the Oman market, contributing to the development of the electric vehicle sector in Oman and enhancing the electric mobility experience for our customers."

The electric vehicle market in Oman is projected to see significant growth in coming years.

Hublot launches new timepiece to mark 10th year in Oman

Hublot, the renowned Swiss luxury watchmaker, proudly announces the launch of the new Hublot Classic Fusion Titanium Gradient Blue Oman, a special edition timepiece created exclusively in celebration of the anniversary of Hublot and Mistal's partnership in Oman.

This anniversary timepiece is a celebration of craftsmanship, innovation, and the rich heritage of the Sultanate of Oman, a press release said.

"We are excited to be launching yet another successful special edition timepiece for Oman with our partner Mistal. The Classic Fusion Titanium Gradient Blue Oman showcases our dedication to honouring Oman's rich heritage whilst showcasing our commitment to innovation and our Savoir-Faire. This limited edition timepiece signifies a decade of fruitful partnership with Mistal and reflects our shared passion for craftsmanship and exclusivity," said Ricardo Guadalupe, CEO, Hublot.

celebration of craftsmanship, innovation, and the rich heritage of the Sultanate of Oman. Inspired by the hues of the seas and of the Omani landscape and culture, the watch features a captivating blue gradient dial adorned with Omani Khanjar calligraphy, which proudly reads 'The Sultanate of Oman'. The calligraphy adorning the watch's interior further reinforces its connection to Oman's cultural heritage, rich history, and traditions along with Hublot's connection to the world of art and calligraphy."

The Classic Fusion Titanium Gradient Blue Oman showcases our dedication to honouring Oman's rich heritage

RICARDO GUADALUPE

The Hublot Classic Fusion Titanium Gradient Blue Oman sits in a 42-mm satin polished blackened aged Titanium case with a brushed blackened aged Titanium bezel, featuring the unique Omani Khanjar calligraphy and special seconds hand trio-coloured tip. The all-blue alligator strap encapsulates the essence of luxury and exclusivity, with a folding clasp made of micro-blasted black steel, adding a touch of sophistication.

With only 50 pieces available, the Hublot Classic Fusion Titanium Gradient Blue Oman 42mm is a testament to Hublot's commitment to innovation and the brand's savoir-faire in watchmaking.

National Forum of Globe Programme concludes

The National Forum for the GLOBE programme concluded on Tuesday at Maani Hotel, with the participation of more than 100 students, in addition to 60 teachers and supervisors of the programme from various directorates affiliated with the Ministry of Education in the governorates of the Sultanate of Oman.

The two-day forum was patronised by Dr Jokha bint Abdullah al Shukailiya, CEO of the Omani Authority for Academic Accreditation and Educational Quality Assurance, a press release said.

The national forum aimed to



enhance the capabilities of supervisors, teachers, and students in applying the programme's protocols - atmosphere protocol, water protocol, soil protocol, and land cover protocol, in addition

to training them on how to data entry after applying the protocols on the programme's global website. The forum also includes evaluating student research participating in the annual student

research competition of the Globe programme related to the environmental field. This is in preparation for the students' participation in the competitions at the international level.

At the end of the ceremony of the forum, the winning scientific researches of the competition of the global environmental programme GLOBE were honoured. The Hajj School for Basic Education won first place for its study of the effect of marine organisms' scales on water filtration in the Hajj area in the Wilayat of Mahut in Al Wusta Governorate. The second place went to Al Hawari bin Muhammad Al Azdi School for Basic Education for a study on the effect of garlic in treating bacteria in gray water in North Sharqiyah.



Burjeel Hospital launches first Pediatric Hematology Clinic

Burjeel Hospital Al-Khuwayr has announced the expansion of its Centre of Excellence - Pediatric Department, with the launch of an exclusive Pediatric Hematology Clinic.

This clinic is the first of its kind in the private healthcare sector in Oman and aims to provide specialised care for children with blood-related disorders, a press release said.

Pediatric hematology disorders have a significant prevalence in Oman. Recognising this need, Burjeel Hospital Al Khuwayr has established the Pediatric Hematology Clinic to address these conditions comprehensively. The clinic will offer early detection, accurate diagnosis, and advanced treatment modalities for a range of blood-related disorders, including anemia (iron deficiency anemia, sickle cell anemia, and thalassemia), bleeding disorders (hemophilia, von Willebrand dis-

ease, platelet disorders), and blood cancers (leukemia, lymphoma, myeloma).

Dr Zainul Aabideen, a renowned Pediatric Hematology Oncologist, from Burjeel Medical City Abu Dhabi, has joined Burjeel Hospital Al Khuwayr as a visiting consultant. With his extensive expertise and experience, Dr Aabideen will play a pivotal role in leading the Pediatric Hematology Clinic and ensuring that young patients receive the highest quality of care.

Burjeel Hospital Al Khuwayr and Burjeel Medical City Abu Dhabi are now aligned to provide affordable pricing and services for advanced treatments, ensuring patients in Muscat have access to follow-up care. This collaboration aims to deliver comprehensive and accessible healthcare options to patients, emphasising Burjeel's commitment to delivering high-quality and affordable medical services.

In a recent Continuing Medical Education (CME) event held on February 25, Dr Aabideen conducted a session titled 'Updates in Pediatric Hematology'. Eminent doctors attended the event, where they discussed advanced diagnosis and treatment modalities for blood-related disorders.

Dr Ibrahim al Ghaithi, consultant, Pediatric Hematology Oncology, from The Royal Hospital, Oman, graced the event as the guest of honour. The event provided a platform for sharing knowledge and insights into the latest developments in the field.

Dr (Major) Pankaj Chawla, regional director of Burjeel Hospital Oman, emphasised the hospital's commitment to advancing pediatric care. He highlighted the significance of the Pediatric Hematology Clinic and its contribution to improving healthcare services for children in Oman.



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website www.mcdcoman.com

Notice and Invitation to attend the Annual General Meeting

The Board of Directors of Muscat City Desalination Company S.A.O.G (the Company) has the pleasure to invite all the Shareholders to attend the Annual General Meeting (AGM) of the Company scheduled to be held at 5 p.m. on Monday, 25 March 2024 via the electronic platform for holding General Meetings, in which you can login through the website of Muscat Clearing and Depository Company (MCD) (www.mcd.gov.om); and in the event that quorum was not achieved for the AGM, the second AGM shall be held at 5 p.m. on Monday, 1 April 2024 at the same electronic platform above to discuss the following agenda items:

- To consider and approve the report of the Board of Directors on the business of the Company and its financial position for the financial year ended 31 December 2023.
- To consider and approve the Company's Corporate Governance Report for the financial year ended 31 December 2023.
- To consider and approve the Evaluation Report of the Board of Directors' performance for the financial year ended 31 December 2023.
- To consider and approve the Auditors Report on the Company's audited financial statements for the financial year ended 31 December 2023.
- To approve the sitting fees payable to the members of the Board of Directors and members of the Board's sub-committees for the previous financial year and to fix the sitting fees for the next financial year.
- To notify the general meeting regarding the related parties' transactions during the financial year ended 31 December 2023.
- To consider and approve transactions to be conducted with related parties during the financial year ending 31 December 2024 and authorise the Board and executive management to undertake the necessary steps to implement the transactions.
- To notify the general meeting of the amounts spent for the Company's social responsibility activities for the financial year ended 31 December 2023.
- To consider and approve the proposal of allocating RO 8,000 for corporate social responsibility activities for the financial year ending 31 December 2024.
- To authorise the Board to determine and distribute cash dividends in May and November 2024, out of retained earnings of the Company as reflected in the Company's audited financial statements for the financial year ended 31 December 2023, provided that the aggregate amount of the dividend shall not exceed Baiza 4,822 per share, to the shareholders of the Company who are registered in the Company shareholders' register at the Muscat Clearing & Depository Company SAOC ("MCD") as at a date to be determined by the Board.
- To approve the appointment of the statutory auditors for the financial year ending 31 December 2024 and the proposed remuneration.

As per the Company's Articles of Association, the regulations of the convening of the AGMs through electronic platforms, issued by the Capital Market Authority (CMA), we would like to attract your kind attention to the following:

- Only juristic persons may deputize a natural person to attend the AGM and vote on their behalf through the electronic systems, provided that the deputized natural person has an investor number at Muscat Clearing and Depository Company.
- Voting on the subject items offered for voting in the agenda starts before a period of not more than 3 days and until the end of the voting process on the Meeting's day. If the investor's balance of shares increased or decreased during, his/her voting will be cancelled and they should vote again on the AGM's date.

For any queries please contact Malaak Al Balushi on +968 9389 2854 or e-mail at: malaak.albalushi@dentons.com

Chairman	Legal Advisor	Auditor
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Hungary approves bill on Sweden's NATO bid

The bill approved by lawmakers still needs to be signed by the newly elected president to become law

Budapest, Hungary - Hungary's lawmakers on Monday approved a bill on Sweden's bid to join the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

Out of the 199 members of parliament, 194 participated in the voting, with 188 votes in favour and six against.

The Hungarian parliament voted on the bill on the first day of the spring session of the parliament. "The Swedish-Hungarian military cooperation and Sweden's NATO accession strengthen Hungary's security," Hungary's Prime Minister Viktor Orban said before the agenda of the parliament.

Elod Novak of the opposition party Our Homeland was one of the six MPs who voted against it. "Let's veto Sweden's NATO accession," he said before the vote, urging the MPs to 'veto the path that leads to World War III'.

With Monday's ratification, Hungary became the last of the 31 NATO member countries that approved Sweden's bid to join the military alliance, following the green light from the Turkish parliament on January 23.

Sweden will officially become the 32nd member of the alliance at its next summit in Washington DC in July.

The bill still needs to be signed



Members of the Hungarian parliament vote on a bill on Sweden's bid to join the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in Budapest, Hungary, on Monday (Xinhua)

With Monday's ratification, Hungary became the last of the 31 NATO member countries that approved Sweden's bid to join the military alliance

by the newly elected President of Hungary Tamas Sulyok to become law.

The Hungarian parliament's ratification was welcomed by Swedish Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson. Calling it 'a historic day',

Kristersson wrote on social media platform X that Sweden stands ready to shoulder its responsibility for Euro-Atlantic security. Sweden and Finland applied to join NATO after the Ukrainian crisis escalated in

February 2022. Their accession required the unanimous approval of all members of NATO.

Hungary's parliament approved Finland's NATO bid in March last year but delayed Sweden's accession due to debates within the parliamentary group of the ruling Fidesz party regarding Sweden's criticisms about the rule of law in Hungary.

However, this dispute was settled at a meeting between Orban and Kristersson in Budapest last Friday. The two sides announced an agreement for Hungary to purchase four new Gripen fighter jets from Sweden.

Tamas Sulyok is new president

Meanwhile, the Hungarian lawmakers on Monday elected Tamas Sulyok, head of the Constitutional Court, as the country's new president.

Out of the 199 lawmakers, 146 participated in the voting, with 134 votes in favour, five against and seven invalid.

Most opposition lawmakers did not participate in the vote. The opposition parties failed to reach an agreement on a common candidate to challenge.

"As a jurist, and in my role as the president of the Republic, my foremost commitment is to serve the public good and to embody the nation's unity, all the while upholding the fundamental values of the law," Sulyok said last Thursday upon his nomination.

Sulyok's predecessor Katalin Novak stepped down on Febru-

ary 10 following a child abuse pardon scandal.

Sulyok has been elected for a mandate of five years and can be re-elected for one more term according to the fundamental law. His inaugural ceremony will take place on March 5.

Following his election, Sulyok said that he wanted to be a 'president of trust'.

"For me, all power can only be interpreted within the framework of the law. The law carries values, its central function is the fair complementation of competing values," he added.

Born on March 24, 1956 in Kiskunfelegyhaza in southern Hungary, Sulyok boasts a distinguished career in both law and academia. After graduating from Jozsef Attila University in Szeged in 1980, he furthered his legal expertise with a European law qualification in 2004 and a PhD in 2013.

Sulyok's professional journey encompassed roles as a judicial clerk, legal adviser, lawyer, and honorary consul of Austria in Szeged. He has served as a guest lecturer in constitutional law at the University of Szeged since 2005.

He has assumed the role of deputy president of the Constitutional Court since 2015 while he was elected president of the Constitutional Court in 2016.

On Friday, Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban justified Sulyok's nomination as presidential candidate, highlighting his extensive qualifications such as 'experience, proficiency in constitutional and legal matters, knowledge of international law, manoeuvring in the international arena, understanding of the nature of political institutions, and a career that also confers professional authority'.

Xinhua



Denmark ends Nord Stream blasts probe

Prague, Czech Republic - Denmark on Monday closed its investigation into the 2022 Nord Stream blasts, saying there was a 'deliberate sabotage' but no 'sufficient grounds' to pursue a criminal case.

The joint investigation was conducted by Copenhagen Police and the Danish Security and Intelligence Services (PET).

"The investigation has led the authorities to conclude that there was deliberate sabotage of the gas pipelines. However, the assessment is that there are not sufficient grounds to pursue a criminal case in Denmark," the police said in a statement.

"Therefore, the Copenhagen Police has decided to conclude the criminal investigation of the explosions."

The press release described the investigation as 'complex and comprehensive', saying the Danish authorities 'cooperated with relevant foreign partners' throughout.

Russia said Denmark's decision to conclude the investigation is 'close to absurd'.

"Of course, the situation is close to absurd. On the one hand, they recognise this is a deliberate sabotage took place, while on the other they are not moving forward," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters in a press briefing in Moscow.

In September 2022, underwater explosions targeted the Nord Stream 1 and the newly built Nord Stream 2 pipelines, which delivered Russian natural gas to Germany and the European region through the Baltic Sea. Moscow accused the West, particularly the US, of being directly involved in the blasts. It called for a UN-led international investigation into the likely sabotage, but the request was rejected.

Earlier this month, Sweden also closed its probe, saying the case did not fall under its jurisdiction.

Anadolu Agency

NATO kicks off annual maritime exercise

Washington, US - NATO's annual advanced anti-surface and anti-submarine warfare exercise began on Monday.

Dynamic Manta 2024 will continue through March 8 off Italy's Sicilian coast in the central Mediterranean Sea, where NATO allies Turkey, Canada, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Spain, the UK and the US are participating, the alliance's Maritime Command said in a statement. "It is the largest and most complex submarine exercise in the Mediterranean, which trains, demonstrates and refines allied capabilities in this particular type of warfare," the command said.

It said the aim of Dynamic Manta is to provide all participants with complex and challenging warfare training to enhance interoperability and proficiency in anti-submarine and anti-surface warfare skills.

Each participating unit will have the opportunity to conduct a variety of submarine warfare operations. The submarines will take turns hunting and being hunted, closely coordinating



A Spanish Navy helicopter practices airborne aid delivery to a Spanish Navy submarine as part of the NATO's Dynamic Manta 2024 exercise in the Mediterranean Sea off the coast of Sicily in Italy on Monday (Anadolu Agency)

their efforts with the air and surface participants, according to the statement.

"Anti-Submarine Warfare is a team sport, with each platform bringing its unique capability and valuable contribution, and these exercises enable our allies and teams to sharpen their skills as well as work on new tactics while enhancing interoperability and teamwork," said NATO Submarine Commander Rear Admiral Thomas Wall.

"Developing our collective skills in anti-surface warfare

contributes directly to the NATO Deter and Defence concept by improving our ability to ensure a comprehensive maritime situation awareness from sea-bed to space," Wall added.

Planned by NATO's Allied Maritime Command (MARCOM), the exercise will take place off the eastern and southern coasts of Sicily. Six submarines will in turn hunt and be hunted, in close coordination with air and surface assets. The submarines belong to the navies of Greece, France, Italy, Spain

and Turkey, with the NATO Submarine Command (COMSUB-NAO) exercising operational control on several, as required by the exercise scenario.

Maritime Patrol Aircraft (MPA) from Canada, Germany, Greece, Turkey, the UK and the US and Maritime Patrol Helicopters (MPH) from Italy will also take part, supported by the surface ships of Standing NATO Maritime Group Two (SNMG2), commanded by Italian Navy Rear Admiral Pasquale Esposito.

Anadolu Agency

UN convenes environment assembly in Kenya

Nairobi, Kenya - The world's most powerful UN environmental decision-making body started its sixth session on Monday in Nairobi, Kenya.

The United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA-6) comes at a time when the world faces a 'triple planetary crisis' of climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution and waste.

Leila Benali, the president of UNEA-6, acknowledged the challenging circumstances, said: "We are living in a time of turmoil." She said the current turbulent times marked by escalating conflicts and geopolitical tensions call for the urgent need to restore trust in multilateralism and humanity.

Anadolu Agency

Russophile movement counters efforts to isolate Russia: Putin

Moscow, Russia - Russian President Vladimir Putin on Tuesday said the International Russophile Movement contributes significantly to counter Western efforts to isolate Moscow.

"The Russophile movement makes a significant contribution to counteracting the attempts of the collective West to achieve international isolation of Russia, helps to disseminate objective and reliable information about our country abroad, and expose anti-Russian fabrications and



Russian President Vladimir Putin

propaganda myths," Putin said in an address published by the Kremlin, which was also read by Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov at the initiative's second congress in Moscow.

Sharing that the event brought together hundreds of delegates from more than 130 countries, Putin said the variety of participants shows the movement's development and growth.

"Your noble activities contribute to the preservation and strengthening of the good tradi-

tions of friendship and mutual respect that bind Russians with other nations, the unity of the Russian world, the popularisation of the achievements of our national culture and the expansion of our humanitarian presence on the world stage," he added.

For his part, Lavrov said attempts by Western countries to ban cooperation with Russia do not stop anyone, and the policy of isolating Moscow has suffered a 'complete collapse'.

Anadolu Agency

French president does not rule out Western soldiers in Ukraine

Geneva, Switzerland - French President Emmanuel Macron has not ruled out sending Western soldiers to Ukraine 'to ensure that Russia does not win this war'.

"There is no consensus today that ground troops should be deployed in an official, accepted and endorsed way. But nothing should be ruled out in the dynamic," Macron said at a press conference on Monday evening in Paris. He added: "We will do everything necessary to ensure that Russia cannot win this war."

Macron's comments came after a special summit in Paris in

support of Ukraine.

A total of 21 European heads of state and government as well as representatives from the US, Canada and the UK had gathered at the Elysee Palace on Macron's initiative.

In his statement, Macron pointed out that many people who are saying 'never, never' today are the same people who said two years ago: "Never, never tanks, never, never planes, never, never longer-range missiles."

"On the Ukrainian front, positions are getting tougher and we



French President Emmanuel Macron

also know that Russia is preparing new attacks, particularly to confuse the Ukrainian public," the French president continued.

The president also announced the creation of a coalition for strikes and supply of medium and long-range missiles and bombs.

France's Prime Minister Gabriel Attal also did not rule out the deployment of ground troops to Ukraine.

"Nothing can be ruled out in a war in the heart of Europe," Attal told French radio station RTL on Tuesday morning.

On Monday, before his departure for Paris, Slovakian Prime Minister Robert Fico warned of an escalation in the Ukraine conflict. Speaking to media representatives in Bratislava, Fico said that some members of NATO and the European Union were considering sending their own soldiers to Ukraine.

The agenda of the conference in Paris 'sends a shiver of fear down the spine', Fico continued. The word 'peace' was not even mentioned in the announcements of the Paris conference; instead, all the plans hinted at

were associated with 'huge security risks', the Slovakian leader added.

Several countries, including Germany, France, Italy, and Canada, have recently concluded bilateral security agreements with Ukraine.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, who took part in the conference in Paris via video link, complained on Monday that Ukraine has so far received less than a third of the one million artillery shells promised by the EU.

Anadolu Agency

Israel would halt war in Gaza Strip during Ramadan if hostage deal reached: Biden

Biden also stressed that he hopes a cease-fire will be reached in the Gaza Strip by March 4

Washington, US - US President Joe Biden on Monday said that Israel would halt its war in Gaza during the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan if a hostage-release deal is reached.

"Ramadan's coming up and there has been an agreement by the Israelis that they would not engage in activities during Ramadan as well, in order to give us time to get all the hostages out," Biden said in an appearance on NBC's talk show.

Biden also stressed that he hopes a cease-fire will be reached in the Gaza Strip by March 4.

"I hope by the end of the weekend...My national security adviser tells me that we're close. We're close. We're not done yet. My hope is by next Monday we'll have a cease-fire," Biden told reporters at an ice cream parlour during a campaign visit in New



US President Joe Biden

York City.

Japan announces \$32mn aid

Japan on Tuesday announced an additional emergency aid of

US\$32mn to the suffering Palestinians, stressing that the humanitarian situation in the besieged enclave of Gaza was 'dire' and 'cannot be overlooked'.

"Japan will implement hu-

manitarian assistance in areas such as food and health," said the Japanese Foreign Ministry.

Tokyo will continue to make 'persistent and proactive diplomatic efforts to urge all parties to

improve the humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip and calm down the situation as soon as possible', it said.

The aid will be provided through the UN World Food Pro-

gramme, World Health Organization, UN Children's Fund, and other international organisations, the ministry noted.

Since the October 7 Israeli attacks on Gaza, Japan has provided emergency aid of US\$65mn and US\$10mn for the beleaguered Palestinians.

I hope by the end of the weekend...My national security adviser tells me that we're close. We're close. We're not done yet. My hope is by next Monday we'll have a cease-fire

JOE BIDEN

Death toll in Gaza jumps to 29,878

The Palestinian death toll from Israel's deadly offensive against the Gaza Strip has jumped to 29,878 since October 7, 2023, the Health Ministry in Gaza said on Tuesday.

The Gaza-based Health Ministry made the statement as the Israeli deadly onslaught against Gaza enters its 144th day.

It also said 70,215 other people have been injured in the ongoing onslaught.

The statement noted that in the past 24 hours, the Israeli army committed 11 massacres across the Gaza Strip which left 96 people killed and 172 others

injured.

"Many people are still trapped under rubble and on the roads and rescuers can't reach them," it added.

Israel has pounded the Gaza Strip since a cross-border attack by Palestinian group Hamas in October, in which nearly 1,200

Israelis are believed to have been killed.

About 85 per cent of Gazans have been displaced by the Israeli onslaught, while all of them are food insecure, according to the UN. Hundreds of thousands of people are living without shelter, and less than half of aid trucks are entering the territory than before the start of the conflict. Israel stands accused of genocide at the International Court of Justice, which in an interim ruling in January ordered Tel Aviv to stop genocidal acts and take measures to guarantee that humanitarian assistance is provided to civilians in Gaza.

Anadolu Agency



People gather in front of the Israeli Embassy in Washington, D.C. on Monday (Anadolu Agency)

Hundreds mourn US airman who self-immolated to protest Gaza war

Washington, US - Hundreds of people came to the Israeli Embassy in Washington, D.C. on Monday evening to collectively mourn the US airman who died after setting himself ablaze in protest of Israel's ongoing war in Gaza.

Many hoped that the death of Aaron Bushnell, 25, an active-duty member of the US Air Force, would spark change in US President Joe Biden's hitherto unwavering support for the war.

Leah, a Palestinian American who declined to provide her last name, told Anadolu that she believed it was important for her to attend the vigil 'to show solidarity

and support with those who are taking extreme acts of resistance that shows their solidarity and support with Palestine and our people'. Asked if she believed Bushnell's death would change the course of the war, she said: "That's the hope."

Bushnell set himself ablaze in front of Israel's Embassy on Sunday afternoon in protest of its ongoing war in the besieged Gaza Strip and US support for the offensive. He was taken to a hospital but died from the injuries he sustained. "I will no longer be complicit in genocide. I'm about to engage in an extreme act of protest, but compared to what

people have been experiencing in Palestine at the hands of their colonizers, it's not extreme at all. This is what our ruling class has decided will be normal," Bushnell said in a video recording that went viral on social media.

Bushnell can repeatedly be heard shouting 'Free Palestine!' as flames engulf him before he collapses to the ground.

A Secret Service officer estimated that 'at its peak', the vigil mourning his death attracted over 300 people. The gathering lasted for over three hours with an average of over 100 people there at any given point.

Anadolu Agency

Hunger haunts Gaza: Children cry out as food scarcity grips besieged enclave

Gaza City, Palestine - With the break of dawn, Palestinian Abu Qusay Abu Nasser, 44, woke to the screams of his children, who were suffering from intense hunger due to food shortages in their home in northern Gaza.

Full of profound sorrow as he sees his children suffer from starvation, Abu Nasser was unable to find a quick solution to feed them amid the ongoing Israeli blockade and war that exacerbate the suffering of the people.

This situation compelled Abu Nasser to head towards a meagre market of in the Jabalia refugee camp in northern Gaza in search of food for his family.

He passes by vendors displaying their vegetables - some of which appear to be mouldy - scanning left and right, hoping to find anything that could help him feed his hungry children.

The father, bearing signs of fatigue on his face, seeks to find dried corn and barley, which are considered animal fodder in Gaza.

Abu Nasser, with a hopeful expression, looks forward to preparing bread from these ingredients after wheat supplies have run out in the northern part



A child is seen crying amid others with empty containers, as they all wait to receive hot food in Gaza City on Monday (Anadolu Agency)

Since yesterday, I've only eaten one date, and children are crying out from hunger. I don't know what to do

ABU NASSER

of the territory.

One of the vendors laid out a bag of potatoes showing signs of decay. Abu Nasser and the passers-by hurry toward him, hoping to purchase something they could use to meet their essential needs.

"Since early morning, I've been out searching for food,

corn, and barley to feed my hungry children," Abu Nasser told Anadolu.

"Since yesterday, I've only eaten one date, and the children are crying out from hunger. I don't know what to do," he added.

He went on: "I went to the Jabalia market, but I could not find the dried corn meant for animal fodder to make bread."

Abu Nasser pointed out that 'since the week-long pause in Gaza, nothing has reached the northern part of the territory, and what arrives barely meets the needs of Gaza City, let alone the north'.

On December 1, 2023, a one-week temporary humanitarian

pause between Hamas and Israel, mediated by Qatar, Egypt, and the US, ended.

The pause saw prisoner exchange and limited humanitarian aid in the Gaza Strip, home to more than 2.3mn Palestinians.

Abu Nasser explained that he resorted to consuming Khub-bayza (malva) a type of wild green herb, but the influx of people to agricultural lands made it unavailable. "Does the Israeli occupation punish us by not providing food and drink? Is it because we have not all fled to the southern Gaza Strip?" he wondered, urging Arab and Muslim nations to look at the people of Gaza with compassion.

Rawiya Rizq, a Palestinian woman who sought refuge in one of the schools in the Jabalia camp in northern Gaza, said: "There is no food, and we are living in famine."

"We are consuming animal fodder, which is running out, and diseases are spreading rapidly. Children are suffering from measles and hepatitis, while adults are struggling with diabetes and high blood pressure," she added.

Anadolu Agency

INDIA

Will have own space station by 2035: PM

The prime minister also presented before the nation four astronauts who will be part of Gaganyaan

Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala - Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday said that the country will have its own space station by 2035 which will help in the study of unknown expanses there.

Addressing a gathering at the Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre (VSSC) in Thiruvananthapuram, the PM said that Indian astronaut will land on the surface of the moon 'on our own rocket'.

"By 2035, India will have its own space station in space that will help us study the unknown expanses of space. In this period of Amrit Kaal, Indian astronaut will land on the surface of the moon on our own rocket..." the PM said.

He further said that the India in the 21st century is emerging as a dynamic global player, showcasing significant developmental strides across sectors.

"India of the 21st century, is today surprising the world with its potential. In the last 10 years, we have launched about 400 satellites, whereas 10 years before that, only 33 satellites were launched..." the PM added.

Modi further expressed his happiness over the equipment being used in the Gaganyaan mission 'mostly made in India'.

"I was very happy to know that most of the equipment used in Gaganyaan is made in



Prime Minister Narendra Modi bestows astronaut wings to astronaut designates at Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre (VSSC), in Thiruvananthapuram on Tuesday (ANI)

India. What a great coincidence it is that when India is taking off to become the top three economy of the world, at the same time India's Gaganyaan is also going to take our space sector to a new height..." the PM said.

Four chosen for Gaganyaan

Modi also announced the names of the four astronauts who will be part of India's first

human space flight programme, Gaganyaan, slated to be launched in 2024-25.

The four chosen Indian Air Force pilots are Group Captain Prashanth Nair, Group Captain Ajit Krishnan, Group Captain Angad Pratap, and Wing Commander Shubhanshu Shukla. The four astronauts were trained at Yuri Gagarin Cosmonaut Training Center in Russia. "I am happy that today I got

The astronauts chosen for India's first human space flight programme were trained at Yuri Gagarin Cosmonaut Training Center in Russia

the opportunity to meet these astronauts and present them in front of the country. I want to congratulate them on behalf of the entire country...You are the pride of today's India... These are not just 4 names and 4 humans, but 4 forces taking 140 crore aspirations to space. After a long period of 40 years, an Indian is set to go into space. But this time, the time is ours, countdown ours, and rocket is

also ours," the PM said.

"India's success in the space sector is sowing the seeds of scientific temperament in the country's young generation," Modi said in his address at the Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre.

As per ISRO, Gaganyaan project envisages demonstration of human spaceflight capability by launching crew of three members to an orbit of 400km for a three days mission and

bringing them back safely to earth, by landing in Indian sea waters.

The pre-requisites for Gaganyaan mission include development of many critical technologies including human rated launch vehicle for carrying crew safely to space, Life Support System to provide an earth like environment to crew in space, crew emergency escape provision and evolving crew management aspects for training, recovery and rehabilitation of crew.

Various precursor missions are planned for demonstrating the Technology Preparedness Levels before carrying out the actual Human Space Flight mission. These demonstrator missions include Integrated Air Drop Test (IADT), Pad Abort Test (PAT) and Test Vehicle (TV) flights. Safety and reliability of all systems will be proven in unmanned missions preceding manned mission.

LVM3 rocket - The well proven and reliable heavy lift launcher of ISRO, is identified as the launch vehicle for Gaganyaan mission.

Human safety is of paramount importance in Gaganyaan mission. In order to ensure the same, various new technologies comprising of Engineering systems and Human centric systems are being developed and realised.

ANI

India-Thailand joint commission: Multiple agreements signed

New Delhi - India and Thailand signed multiple agreements in the presence of External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar and Thailand's Foreign Minister Parnpree Bahiddha-Nukara in the national capital on Tuesday.

Prior to this, Jaishankar and his Thailand counterpart also held the 10th India-Thailand Joint Commission meeting in the national capital.

Earlier in the day, Jaishankar welcomed Nukara and said that the Joint Commission meeting would take forward the partnership between the two nations.

Nukara, is on his first official visit to India. He arrived in New Delhi in the early hours of Monday.

The 9th India-Thailand Joint Commission Meeting was held in Bangkok on August 17, 2022.

Earlier in the day, Thailand Vice Minister for Foreign Affairs Sihasak Phuangketkeow expressed confidence that bilateral ties with India will grow in strength and move towards a



External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar welcomes Thai Foreign Minister Parnpree Bahiddha-Nukara, in New Delhi on Tuesday (ANI)

strategic partnership that will boost the partnership between the two countries on a regional and global level.

Delivering the lecture on 'How Can Thailand and India be Strategic Partners?' organised by the Indian Council of World Affairs, the visiting dignitary noted that there has been a lot of redirection of foreign policy since the Cold War period, when distance between two na-

tions had grown.

Phuangketkeow said: "The fact of the matter was that there was some distance in our relationship because of the Cold War. So the view from Bangkok was not the same as the view from New Delhi. But of course, with the end of the Cold War, a lot has changed. And I think we've seen a lot of realignment of relations."

ANI

UNSC 'ineffective' in resolving Russia-Ukraine conflict: India

New York, US - India's Permanent Representative to the United Nations Ruchira Kamboj has questioned the United Nations Security Council for not being able to resolve the conflict between Russia and Ukraine that has continued for over two years.

Calling for reforming 'outdated and archaic structures', Kamboj in the United Nations General Assembly meeting on the situation in Ukraine said that India is concerned over the situation in Ukraine and reiterated Prime Minister Narendra Modi's statement 'this is not an era of war'.

During his meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin on the sidelines of Shanghai Cooperation Summit (SCO) in Samarkand in 2022, Modi had said 'this is not an era of war'.

"At the present juncture, as the conflict has continued for two years unabated, we, the



India's Permanent Representative to the UN, Ruchira Kamboj (ANI)

Committee of UN Member States, must pause and ask ourselves two pressing questions. One, are we anywhere near a possible acceptable solution? And if not, why is it that the UN system particularly its principal organ, the United Nations Security Council, mandated to primarily maintain international peace and security. Why is it rendered completely ineffective to the resolution of the ongoing conflict?," Kamboj said.

"For multilateralism to be effective, outdated and archaic structures need reform and reinvention, else their credibility will always be on the wane. And unless we fix that systemic flaw, we will continue to be found wanting," she said.

India's Permanent envoy to the United Nations said that the member states must remain focussed on shared objectives to achieve development goals. She stressed that member states should aim for more co-

operation as they continue to make efforts to achieving the sustainable development goals (SDGs) back on track.

"As we the member states, strive to bring the process of achieving the SDGs back on track, and as we endeavour to forge a significant pact for the future, we should aim for more cooperation and not less. It is crucial, therefore, to keep the faith, to keep the conviction in the power of dialogue and diplomacy, which have reliably and always served humanity's progress," Kamboj said.

Highlighting India's stance amid the ongoing conflict in Ukraine, Kamboj said that India has consistently stated that escalation of hostilities and violence is in the interest of no one. She stated that India has called for making efforts for early cessation of hostilities and returning to path of dialogue and diplomacy.

ANI

Knots and AI: Weaving the future of Persian-inspired Kashmiri carpets

Srinagar, Jammu and Kashmir - In Kashmir, the process of making Persian-inspired handmade carpets has remained largely unchanged for the past 500 years, with the only technological intervention being the use of computers in the designing process. Is this industry, which still relies on work by hand for most of its processes, ready for the next major disruptive technology - artificial intelligence?

Both experts and artisans believe so, going as far as to wager that AI will revolutionise it and help it flourish.

Shahnawaz Sofi, a second-

generation carpet maker from Rathpora locality in Srinagar, the capital of Indian-administered Kashmir, has been using computers to create bold, unconventional designs. He believes that AI can revolutionise the designs.

Three key people are involved in the production of a carpet. A naqash draws the design on paper. A 'taleem' writer encodes the design into a unique script called taleem (literally, education). A 'qaleenbaf' (the carpet maker) weaves the design onto the warp and weft, one knot at a time, according to the pattern dictated by the taleem. An intri-



cately designed 3x5 feet rug has nearly two million knots.

Earlier, the designing and writing of taleem was done by hand, which could take weeks or months. Written on long rectangular strips of brown paper, each representing a small portion of the design, the carpet's code would be hung through the strings of the yarn for the weaver to read.

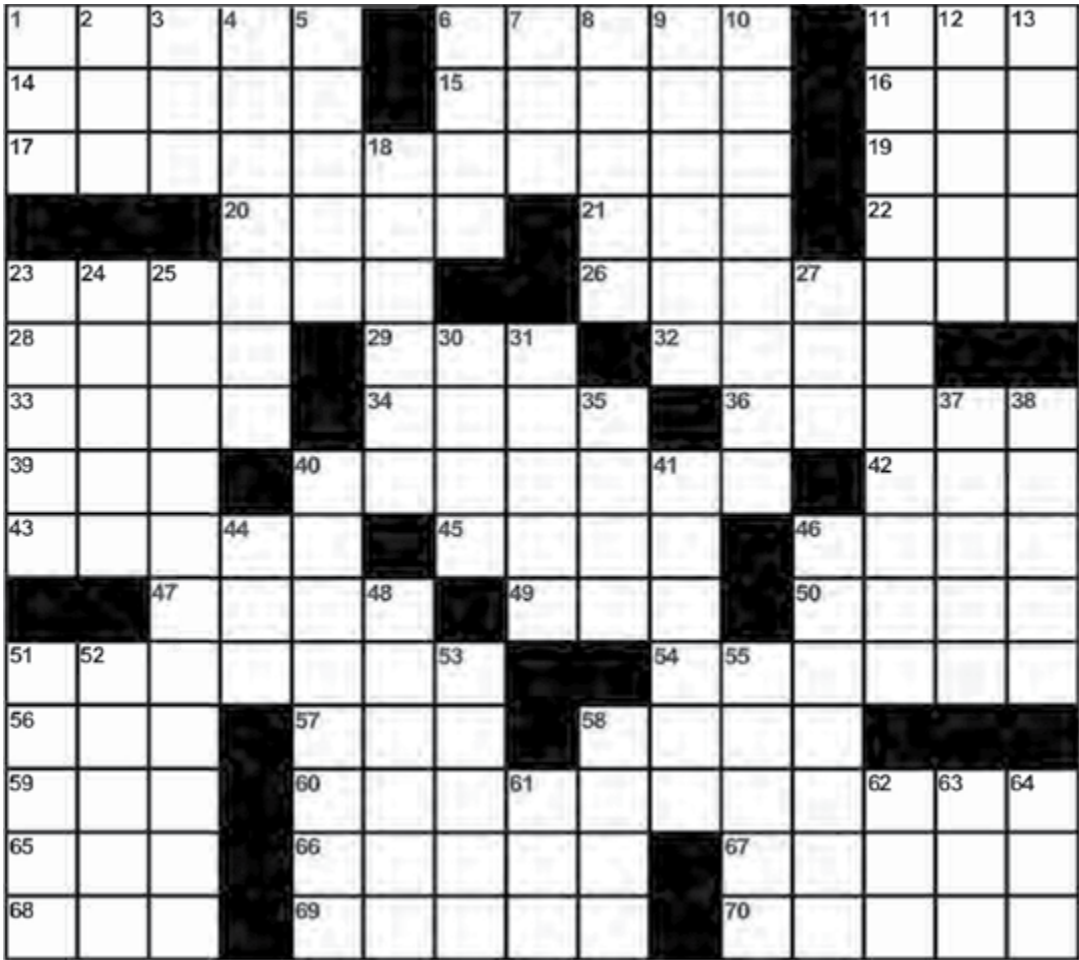
Computers helped Shahnawaz unleash his creativity. He now draws a design in a tailor-made programme aptly named naqash. Each tiny square of the file represents a knot on the final

design. With the click of a mouse, he assigns every knot a colour and taleem code. A printer then spews out the complete code for the carpet.

"I try random combinations. You can say I go wild with the mouse. I think I am teaching the computer the design, and in the process, it is helping me come up with some brilliant ideas," he told Anadolu. "One big advantage is that a weaver can, for the first time, see a picture of a fully-designed carpet. Earlier, he only witnessed a design unfold fully as he went on to weave it."

Anadolu Agency

DAILY CROSSWORD



ACROSS

- 1) Address an audience
6) "All in the Family" character
11) Pranks a yard on Halloween (Abbr.)
14) Drink with marshmallows
15) Lama
16) Three in Roman numerals
17) Like the first overtime points
19) Dispose of leftovers
20) Reunion attendee
21) "Disgusting!"
22) Chromosome component
23) Suburban school sport
26) Computer screen
28) "Black gold" gp.
29) Word with Glory or Testament
32) "Family Guy" creator Macfarlane
33) Move, in Realtor-speak
34) Banana covering
36) Back of a boat
39) Previously used by Shakespeare?
40) Social service part?
42) Mauna _ (Hawaiian peak)

- 43) Cavalry sword
45) Beef order
46) Agitation
47) Clean, as a pipe
49) Wistful wishing
50) _ l'Eveque cheese
51) More apt to complain
54) Bow like a girl
56) Decay
57) "7 Faces of Dr..." (1964 flick)
58) Arboreal monkey
59) It's fit to be tied
60) They cause performance failures
65) Ballerina's prop
66) Hebrew month
67) Viola's big brother
68) Bulky phone-book section
69) Annoy successfully
70) Invite off one's doorstep

DOWN

- 1) Autumn mo.
2) King of France
3) Expert fighter pilot
4) Cigarette filling
5) Former "College Bowl" host Robert
6) Imported cheese
7) S_ (Neb. neighbor)
8) Widest of the three

- bones of the hip
9) Does a ballroom dance
10) Part of HRH
11) Got married
12) Key instrument?
13) Eastern lute
18) Second-smallest continent
23) Ointment targets
24) Musical spectacle
25) People fodder?
27) "Addams Family" cousin
30) Jet-set jet
31) Crumble away
35) Angler's decoy
37) They help control a horse
38) Impeccably dressed
40) Behind
41) Writing instrument
44) Early night, to a bard
46) Elves, pixies and such
48) Cruel one
51) Composed, as a letter
52) Freight train hoppers, stereotypically
53) Cook with dry heat
55) Central New York city
58) Window shade?
61) Sheep's cry
62) Type, derogatorily
63) Manning of the NFL
64) Future heir, perhaps

NOTE PAD



YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE



ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

Keeping your communication short and sweet is a good strategy for you today. Whenever you can, try to put things in a nice little nutshell. Try not to get too wordy. Zippy little emails, snappy messages, and short voicemails will help you get across the ideas you need to convey without getting caught up in all of the messy details. Other people are likely to go off on tangents today, but you just won't have time to humor them like you usually do.



LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

Your strong feelings about an issue aren't necessarily shared by every one of your friends, so be careful not to make assumptions today when the conversation turns to a topic you feel passionately about. Temper your excitement. Let other people get a word in edgewise. That's the best way for everyone to understand what's behind their viewpoints. They can better understand why you feel the way you feel only after they know you are trying to understand them.



SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

Don't be someone who is long on talk and short on action. Watch how much you talk about your ambitious goals and plans, because the longer you go on and on about your ideas, the more people will begin to doubt that you are going to follow through on them. Start embracing humility, then enact your plans. Let your actions speak for you, and show the world that you aren't all talk. You are a person of substance and you need to show it.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

1. Which of these was an important part in the car that travelled in time in the "Back to the Future" series of films?

- A. Warp drive
B. Flux capacitor
C. Difference engine
D. Nuclear fribulator

2. Which of these is a form of alternative medicine, first proposed by German physician Samuel Hahnemann in 1796, which uses reference books known as "repertories"?

- A. Abroadopathy
B. Awayopathy
C. Homeopathy
D. Houseopathy

3. Which US President has figured on the cover of the magazine Sports Illustrated, twice?

- A. George W Bush
B. Ronald Reagan
C. Dwight Eisenhower
D. Donald Trump

Answers: 1.B 2.C 3.B



TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

Whatever happens around you today will feel like a drama that you simply can't control. You are right. You can't control it. But being powerless in a situation doesn't have to make you feel hopeless about that situation. Sometimes it's a liberating feeling to know that you can't do much to change it. Going with the flow is pleasing to you anyway, so just do what feels good. Trying to make the day be exactly what you want it to be will only be a waste of your time.



VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

Today, you should be wary of people trying to take advantage of you. If you give certain people an inch, they will surely take a mile. It's not that you shouldn't be friendly and generous. It's just that you have to keep an eye out for people who are asking for too much. Have your boundaries set early, so when needy people try to get on your good side, you can remind them to step back and give you space.



CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

You know that it can often be efficient to speak directly and honestly, but your communication style today should be more subtle than straight up. Instead of responding immediately when someone says something you don't like, wait and listen to more of what they have to say. Let them explain themselves completely before you go at them, especially if this is a person you are just starting to get to know. You have to be gentle and bend over backward to make them feel safe.



GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

Someone who is usually a source of bright sunshine in your life is feeling a bit depressed right now, but you need to act like you don't notice. Avoid making them feel like they're the object of pity or sadness and just try to keep them communicating with you. Eventually, they will open up about what is bothering them, and you will be able to see a way to help them see the brighter sides of things. Throughout the day, keep in touch with them and remind them that someone cares.



LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

Every once in a while you need a good cry to get out some of the bad feelings. Letting yourself get emotional over the trials in your life is not a sign of weakness. It is a healthy way to process unpleasant feelings. If you need solace, you will find more comfort from your family than from anyone else, so try to spend some time with them later in the day if you can. You share the good things in your life with them, and you should share the bad stuff too.



AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

Today, an intellectual connection might spark some romantic feelings, but the situation could be a complicated one. There's an imbalance of interest or availability, and now is not the time to be embroiled in a big drama that could give you a bad reputation or broken heart. Proceed with caution when you start to feel the chemistry with someone. There is more to this than meets the eye, and you have to protect yourself. Make sure you're doing the right thing.



CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

Today, you're going to be an essential element in a lot of people's plans. It seems you've got what everyone needs, whether it's the best attitude, the best ideas, or the best cooking skills! So in order to avoid overextending yourself, don't commit to anything unless you absolutely have to, and don't let everyone know what you're doing for anyone else. Otherwise, your alliances may be misinterpreted by sensitive folks who are hurt that they're not your number one.



SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

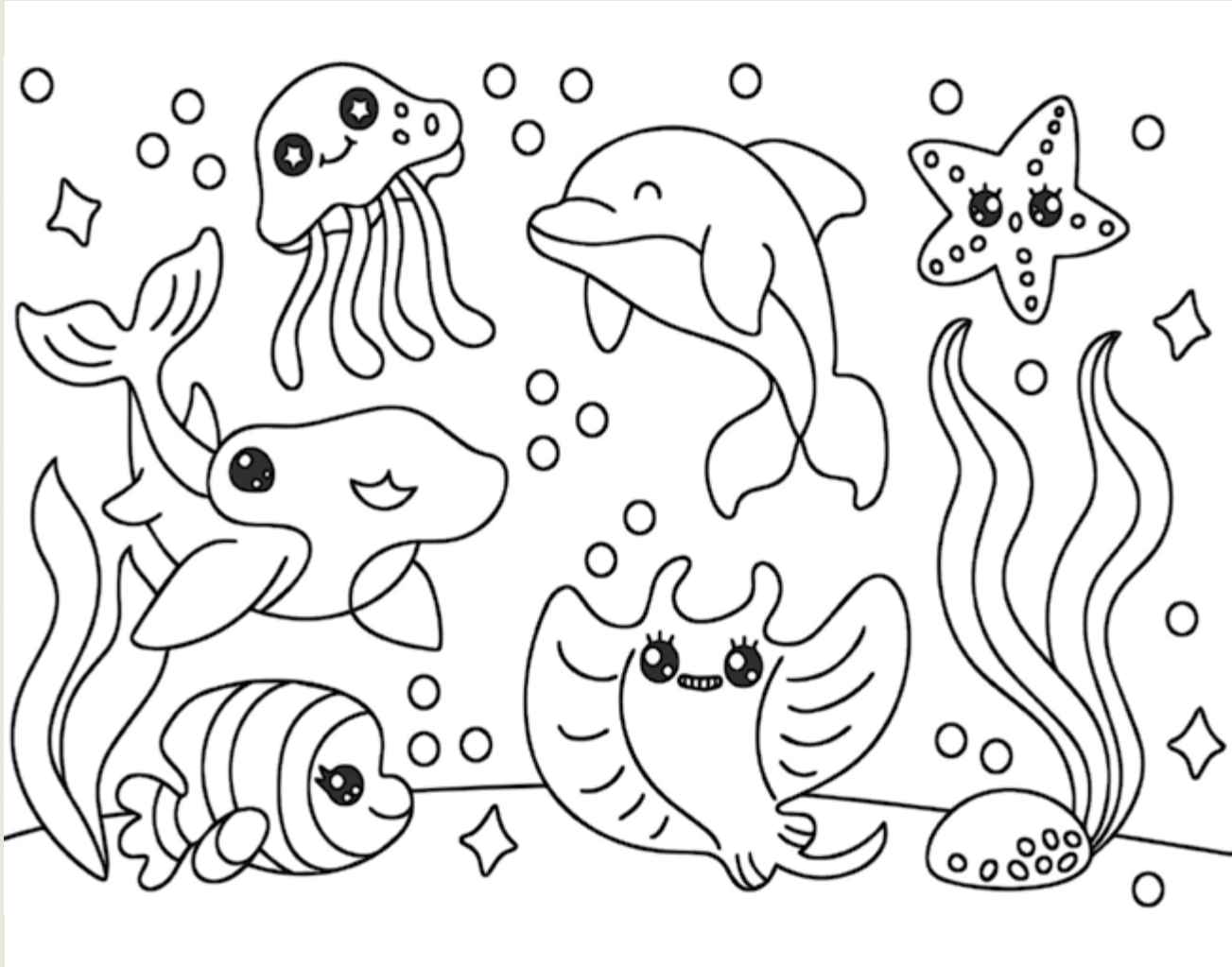
Pay attention to an unusual minor detail that comes up when someone tells you something in confidence. Part of the secret they are sharing is a clue to another, even bigger secret. And if you can get in touch with your inner private detective, you can figure out the rest of the story, the part they don't want to tell you just yet. This inside knowledge will put you in a very powerful position, so use it wisely. Don't spread the word too quickly if you want to remain a confidant.



PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

Anything that you dream up, you can make happen if you persevere and stay positive! Banish those clouds of doubt that you feel edging into your brain. Yes, there is uncertainty ahead, but there always will be. Why not choose to think the best and just keep moving forward? Stick with the people who always see the bright side of life and stay away from those who tell you that you can't have the things you want. That's nonsense and you know it. Now you have to prove it to them.

KIDS COLOURING



BOGGLER

N	C	L	S
P	S	U	S
K	E	P	A
O	G	H	A

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

DO YOU SUDOKU?

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

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

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

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

BACK TO WINNING WAYS

Savinho's added-time double helps Girona recapture second place in LaLiga

Girona, Spain - Girona's Brazilian winger Savinho scored twice in added time to help the hosts beat Rayo Vallecano 3-0 in torrential rain on Monday and lift the season's surprise LaLiga package back to second place in the standings.

After two consecutive losses, Girona got back on track and now have 59 points, six behind Real Madrid and two ahead of third-placed Barcelona.

The season's early pacesetters, Girona were unbeaten in 15 successive league games until a 4-0 thrashing at Real Madrid and a 3-2 loss away to Athletic Bilbao that provided a reality check for the Catalans' lofty title ambitions.

On Monday, they dominated possession against Rayo but struggled to find the net on a surface that deteriorated in the downpour, creating one shot on target in the first half.

Girona's Ukraine forward Artem Dovbyk, the third highest scorer in LaLiga this season with 14 goals, missed three

close-range chances but they broke the deadlock with a first time effort by his compatriot Viktor Tsygankov in the 52nd minute.

The visitors were reduced to 10 men when Pep Chavarria was sent off in the 76th after getting two yellow cards in quick succession and jet-heeled Savinho made the most of two quick counter attacks to work his magic, striking twice in a four minute spell to wrap up the points for the Catalan side.

"The scoring does not reflect what the match was like, because it was evenly matched," Girona manager Michel told DAZN.

"However, I'm glad that we've regained second place. We're once again the top scorers in LaLiga. These are data we like and make us want to remain the same until the end of the season."

Girona have now scored 57 times in 26 matches, one more than Barcelona and three goals ahead of Real Madrid.



Girona's Savinho tosses up his shirt in celebration after scoring against Rayo Vallecano on Monday

Ramsay leaves Man Utd to take charge of Minnesota in MLS

Manchester England - First-team coach Eric Ramsay has left Manchester United to join Minnesota United, both clubs announced on Monday, with the Welshman becoming the youngest head coach in Major League Soccer (MLS).

The 32-year-old, who previously coached Chelsea's Under-23 side and was an assistant coach with the Wales national team, will leave United after their Premier League game against rivals Manchester City on Sunday.

"I'm incredibly excited to be joining a club with such a strong football culture, a fanatic fan-base and a brilliant infrastructure," Ramsay said.

"I've spoken to a lot of the club's staff throughout the process and you can't help but feel everyone's passion for moving the club forward."

Minnesota won their opening league game and sit third in the Western Conference, level on points with leaders Portland Timbers.



Eric Ramsay

Everton's points deduction cut to 6 from 10

London, England - Everton have had their points deduction for breaching Premier League financial rules reduced to six points from 10 after an appeal, the club said on Monday, though they could yet face another punishment for a separate overspend.

Everton were docked points with immediate effect in November after being found to have breached the league's rules relating to spending and losses, partly blamed on the rising cost of financing their new ground that is under construction.

"An independent Appeal Board has concluded that the sanction for Everton's breach of the Premier League's Profitability and Sustainability Rules (PSRs), for the period ending Season 2021/22, will be an immediate six-point deduction," the Premier League said in a statement.

The original deduction meant Everton dropped from 14th in the standings into the relegation zone with four points. The club filed an appeal against the initial



The cut in deduction means Everton move up to 15th on 25 points, five above the relegation zone

deduction, which they labelled "wholly disproportionate and unjust".

"Everton can confirm an Appeal Board has concluded that the points deduction be reduced from 10 points to six points, with immediate effect," a club statement said.

The record sanction was appealed on nine grounds, each of which related to the sanction, rather than the breaches and two of those nine grounds were upheld by the Appeal Board.

Everton admitted to a breach of PSR for the period ending with the 2021-22 season, with their

total losses for that period amounting to 124.5 million pounds according to an independent commission.

According to the Premier League's regulations, clubs are permitted to lose a maximum of 105 million pounds (\$133.33 million) over a three-year period.

The three-person appeal board concluded that the independent commission which imposed the 10-point ban made legal errors on two of them.

It was ruled wrong to punish the club for being "less than frank" over what it told the Premier League about its new stadium debt and also wrong "not to take into account available benchmarks" saying that a six-point sanction was broadly in line with English Football League guidelines.

In dismissing the other grounds for appeal, the panel said that the club's reduction in transfer spending towards the end of the four-year period under investigation showed only "limited evidence of a more sensible approach."

Everton recorded four straight wins after their deduction to climb up to 16th, but have been dragged back into the relegation battle following a run of nine league games without a victory. The reduction means they move up to 15th on 25 points, five above the relegation zone.



West Ham's Jarrod Bowen celebrates after scoring against Brentford

Bowen hat-trick and Emerson hammer blow floors Brentford

London, England - A hat-trick from Jarrod Bowen helped West Ham United to snap a six-match winless run in the Premier League as they secured their first victory of 2024 with a 4-2 home win over Brentford on Monday.

David Moyes' side moved up to eighth with 39 points, level with seventh-placed Brighton and five adrift of sixth-placed Manchester United. Brentford remain 16th with 25 points, five clear of the relegation zone.

"I'd hoped it was coming. It was needed. Our form in six weeks has been poor. It's good to score four goals and get a win at home," Moyes told the BBC.

"(Eighth place) is not bad at this time of the season. We're always getting a level of criticism but we're up there challenging."

"There's a lot of teams with a lot of money and experience. It was only three years ago we were battling to avoid relegation most seasons."

The hosts grabbed the lead five minutes into the game as

Bowen collected Emerson's pass from the left to slam home a fierce low shot before doubling the lead with a half-volley from close range two minutes later.

Neal Maupay pulled one back for the visitors in the 13th minute following a pass from Keane Lewis-Potter, sliding through the centre of the box to lob the ball over French compatriot keeper Alphonse Areola.

Bowen capitalised on Brentford's sloppy defending to complete his first ever senior hat-trick with a header on the edge of the six-yard box in the 63rd minute, and Emerson made it 4-1 with a superb long-range shot into the top right corner in the 69th minute. Yoane Wissa scored eight minutes from time for Brentford, who came close to a stoppage time goal but fell short as they suffered their fifth defeat in their last six games.

"There's been a lot of games, at Hull City too, where I scored two but couldn't get the third one," Bowen said.

Guardiola hopes Grealish 'can do a good last three months'

Manchester, England - Manchester City midfielder Jack Grealish must quickly find his rhythm upon his return from injury to force his way back into the Premier League club's starting lineup, manager Pep Guardiola said.

Grealish was a key player in City's treble-winning campaign last season, but his performances have been underwhelming with three goals in 26 games in all competitions this season.

The England international has not featured for City since picking up a groin injury in a 3-1 Champions League victory at FC Copenhagen earlier this month, and was left on the bench in a 1-



Pep Guardiola with Jack Grealish

He is the same player, he has the same manager, and the way we play has not changed

PEP GUARDIOLA

0 win over Bournemouth on Saturday.

"He is the same player, he has the same manager, and the way we play has not changed," Guardiola told reporters on Monday ahead of City's FA Cup

fifth round clash against Luton Town. "It's just the way he has performed. That's the difference. I said from day one, we need him. He has a special quality for our team. But it depends on him. Hopefully he can do a good last three months."

Guardiola added that he could not afford to give injured players time to ease themselves back into the team, saying: "They have to find the rhythm to play for 20 minutes or 90. At a high level, the team don't wait to be fit. You cannot give someone three or four games to be fit. What about the 10 who don't play? They deserve not to play?"

GROWING GOLF IN OMAN

The International Series reaffirms commitment to development of game in the sultanate

Muscat – The International Series underscored its commitment to the development of golf at the grassroots level in Oman, with a contribution of \$US 25,000 to the Oman Golf Federation in support of its ongoing efforts to encourage more participation in the region.

The presentation was made by Rahul Singh, Head of The International Series and Cho Minn Thant, Commissioner and CEO of the Asian Tour, to Mundhir Al Barwani, Chairman of the Oman Golf Association, on the sidelines of the International Series Oman, the first of 10 upper-tier Asian Tour-sanctioned events that provide a pathway to the LIV Golf League.

Singh said: “We recognise the important role that The International Series has to play in the wider golf ecosystem, and part of that is giving something back to the host communities that support our tournaments.

“Our contribution to the Oman Golf Association is a sustainable commitment that will help in the development of golf in the region, bringing golf to a wider demographic, enabling the discovery and unlocking the potential of the untapped talent in



Rahul Singh, head of The International Series and Cho Minn Thant, Commissioner and CEO of the Asian Tour, present a \$25,000 cheque to Mundhir al Barwani of Oman Golf Association

We recognise the important role that The International Series has to play in the wider golf ecosystem, and part of that is giving something back to the host communities

RAHUL SINGH

this region.”

Al Barwani added: “This significant contribution will help us in our ongoing quest to bring golf to a bigger demographic, and to provide newcomers with the tools they need to develop and grow their skills, and enjoy this wonderful sport which can form part of a healthy and active

lifestyle for all ages.”

During tournament week, the Oman Golf Association brought

several youngsters to Al Mouj Golf for a special clinic and to experience the build up to the

event, which brings big names from the LIV Golf League and the cream of the Asian Tour to Oman.

The Oman Golf Association is committed to the development of golf in the region through two campaigns. The

OGA have introduced the R&A’s Unleash Your Drive campaign in collaboration with The Golf Foundation, a six-week introduction to the game for primary school children that teaches youngsters golf skills and mental toughness.

A ‘Go Ladies’ campaign is part of OGA efforts to introduce the sport to females as part of the ‘Women in Golf’ charter they signed in 2018. The campaign provides lessons to women in four of five golf clubs across the Sultanate.



Andy Murray

Murray gets 500th career hard-court win

Dubai, UAE - Three-time major champion Andy Murray from Great Britain won his 500th career hard-court match when he beat Canadian Denis Shapovalov 4-6, 7-6 (5), 6-3 in the first round of the Dubai Duty Free Tennis Championships on Monday.

Murray - who joined Roger Federer, Novak Djokovic, Andre Agassi and Rafael Nadal in the 500 club - said in a post-match interview that he “probably (doesn’t) have too long left but I’ll do the best that I can these last few months,” a possible hint that the 36-year-old is considering retirement.

No. 2 seed Andrey Rublev of Russia rallied past China’s Zhizhen Zhang 6-7 (4), 6-2, 6-4, while Polish third seed Hubert Hurkacz outlasted German Jan-Lennard Struff 7-6 (5), 6-7 (4), 7-6 (6).

No. 7 seed Alexander Bublik also needed three sets to top Czech qualifier Tomas Machac 2-6, 6-3, 7-6 (5), and Dutchman Botić van de Zandschulp upset French sixth seed Adrian Mannarino 7-6 (3), 7-5.

New Zealand’s Neil Wagner retires from cricket effective immediately

Wellington, New Zealand - Neil Wagner has announced his retirement from international cricket effective immediately after the New Zealand selectors told him he would not be picked for the upcoming two-Test series against Australia starting on Thursday.

Wagner, 37, made the emotional decision following a tough conversation with coach Gary Stead last week, where it was confirmed he was not in New Zealand’s best XI for the upcoming series against Australia. He announced his retirement at a press conference alongside Stead at Basin Reserve in Wellington on Tuesday, having been invited to be part of the squad for the first Test.

He retires after 64 Tests for his adopted country having moved across from South Africa. He took 260 wickets at 27.57 with a strike rate of just 52.7. Only Sir Richard Hadlee has a better Test strike rate among New Zealand bowlers to have



Neil Wagner

taken more than 100 wickets.

Wagner will continue to play first-class cricket but felt like the time was right to step away from the Test arena.

“I knew the time was coming near,” Wagner said. “They sometimes say when you think about retirement, you’re screwed in a way. I knew the time was going to come and it was going to come close. In the last week, reflecting and looking into the future, looking at the Test matches

that are to come, I thought it was the right time to step down and let the other guys come in and do what we’ve been doing as a group for a number of years and obviously grow that attack.

“It’s never easy. It’s an emotional road. It’s a big roller-coaster. But it’s something that I feel like the time [has] come to pass that baton on and leave that Black Cap in a good place for the rest to take it and hopefully grow their legacy forward.”

Wagner and Stead held a conversation after New Zealand’s Test series win over South Africa in Hamilton - which has turned out to be Wagner’s final Test - about his future within the Test side. Wagner was initially not going to be part of the build-up to the Australia series at all, but the team invited their talismanic fast bowler down to be part of the first Test even though he wouldn’t play.

“I wasn’t going to be down here,” Wagner said. “I think it’s a very nice way for the team... they invited me to come down here and spend this time with them to celebrate it but also help them prepare for the series to get stuck in against Australia and it was a really nice, kind gesture.

“And I thought it’d be a nice way to bow out, doing what I’ve always been doing, to come here, be here with the team, do everything with a smile on my face and service the lads. That’s just who I am. And it’s a pretty nice gesture.”

Red Bull boss’ fate to be decided before Bahrain GP

London, England - Red Bull team boss Christian Horner, who has denied allegations by a female employee about his conduct, could be out of a job or cleared to continue before Saturday’s season-opening Bahrain Formula One Grand Prix.

Well-placed sources told Reuters they expected an announcement from Red Bull’s Salzburg-based Austrian parent company before the race at Sakhir and possibly within the next 48 hours. An investigation into the sport’s longest serving principal, and husband of former Spice Girls singer Geri Halliwell, has been ongoing since January



Christian Horner with Max Verstappen

although details only emerged publicly on Feb. 5.

The British-based team have

no control over the process.

Neither the energy drink company nor the reigning champions

have said what the allegations are, although media reports have spoken of inappropriate and controlling behaviour towards a female colleague.

Formula One, owned by U.S.-based Liberty Media, has said only that it hopes the matter “will be clarified at the earliest opportunity, after a fair and thorough process.” The sport, and governing body, are known to want the matter cleared up as soon as possible to avoid it hanging over the racing. Horner was interviewed by an independent barrister on Feb. 9 and the final report is believed to be based on some 60 hours of interviews.



Mohammed Shami underwent a surgery in his right Achilles tendon in London on Monday

Shami set to miss IPL after undergoing ankle surgery

New Delhi, India - Mohammed Shami is looking to “get back on my feet soon” after undergoing surgery in his right Achilles tendon in London on Monday. This all but rules him out of IPL 2024, which will be played from March 22 to May 26.

Shami hasn’t played any cricket since India’s ODI World Cup campaign, where he played a key part in India’s run to the final, finishing as the leading wicket-taker in the competition with 24 wickets in seven matches at an average of 10.70 and strike rate of 12.20. He played through pain during the tournament, taking injections to treat his ankle, and has been away from cricket since.

The injury will come as a massive blow for the Shubman Gill-led Gujarat Titans, who also traded Hardik Pandya to Mumbai Indians in an all-cash deal - Shami was the side’s highest wicket-taker during their second-place finish in IPL 2023.

In January, Shami had re-

vealed he was experience “some stiffness” in his ankle but was confident at being able to recover in time for the England Tests. However, that possibility was ruled out later in the month after he checked in to the BCCI’s National Cricket Academy (NCA) for a reassessment.

Prior to that, Shami had been included in India’s squad for the South Africa Tests but was withdrawn after the ankle pain that ruled him out of the white-ball leg of the tour didn’t subside. In Shami’s absence, India have handed Test caps to Mukesh Kumar (in the Caribbean) and Akash Deep (in Ranchi against England) during the ongoing WTC cycle where he hasn’t featured in a single game. Shami’s last Test was the WTC final against Australia at The Oval last June.

The injury is also expected to rule him out of the upcoming T20 World Cup, which begins in the Caribbean and USA five days after the conclusion of the IPL.



Dhruv Jurel

India have found a gem in Jurel

New Delhi, India - A player-of-the-match award in only his second test, plaudits from the pundits and even a “man crush” from his England counterpart -- India wicketkeeper Dhruv Jurel could not have dreamt of a better start to his international career.

Jurel made his test debut in the third test in Rajkot, where India steamrolled England by 434 runs, their biggest test victory by runs.

The 23-year-old has honed his six-hitting skills in the Indian Premier League and he smashed three of them in his maiden test knock of 46.

His keeping was impressive too and commentators gushed how Jurel ran in from behind the stumps to collect Mohammed Siraj’s full-blooded throw on the bounce before breaking stumps while collapsing to run out England opener Ben Duckett.

GILL INNINGS HAS ECHOES OF DRAVID AND PUJARA

The match-winning 50 in Ranchi was all the sweeter for the struggles he’s come through in the series

Ranchi, India - There was this hug. The happiest, back-slapping hug you may have seen on a cricket field. There was an Instagram post. There were all the visual echoes. India’s No. 3, tall, slim, batting in a cap, completing an epic come-from-behind Test win with an unbeaten fourth-innings half-century.

This was Ranchi 2024, but it may have got you thinking about Adelaide 2003. Shubman Gill came into this series with all the promise in the world and an average of 30.58 after 20 Tests. He had asked for, and been given, a chance to move from the top of the order down to No. 3: Rahul Dravid’s position, Cheteshwar Pujara’s position. With India losing a number of experienced batters for injury and other reasons, he was soon to become a senior member of one of their least experienced line-ups.

Here’s how Gill’s series has gone: 23, 0, 34, 104, 0, 91, 38, 52*. That’s 342 runs at 48.85, the second-most runs by anyone on either side, and the second-best average of anyone who’s played at least two Tests.

He’s not batted like he’s from another planet, like Yashasvi Jaiswal has. He’s not even batted like the Shubman Gill the world has known and marvelled at



Shubman Gill

whenever he’s scored runs before. He’s looked vulnerable early on, particularly against England’s quicks. He’s gone through periods of struggling to rotate strike against the spinners. He’s gotten out to attacking shots that he seemed not to really commit to.

He’s among the world’s most fluent strokemakers when he gets going, but he’s seldom got into that kind of rhythm. He’s run into problems, worked on them, scored runs, and run into other problems to address. It’s not been the kind of series where one innings has unlocked his free-flowing self.

He scored a second-innings hundred in Visakhapatnam, and followed it up with his most uncertain-looking innings of the series. This was on day one in Rajkot, where he jabbed feverishly at everything with his back foot seemingly stuck on leg stump, and eventually nicked off to Mark Wood for a duck. Then, on the morning of day two, when India were still batting, he went to the nets and faced a long session of throwdowns.

It’s not clear what he worked on, but it may have been something to do with his trigger movement against pace, because he got into line so much more quickly and assuredly in the sec-

ond innings - the conditions were, it has to be said, less helpful to the quicks by this stage - and seemed to put all his jabbiness behind him while scoring 91.

In the first innings in Ranchi, he made 38 before Shoaib Bashir got him lbw while defending off the front foot. Gill got a good stride forward to the ball but was struck on the front pad just about in line with off stump.

In the second, he resolved to take lbw out of the equation. He did this by doing something that comes naturally to him, but did that thing differently.

“In the first innings, the ball was not turning much, so I didn’t step out much, and the ball which I got out [to], it hit the crack and spun sharply,” Gill told the broadcaster at the end of the match. “In the second innings, I just thought I would take lbw out of the game by just stepping out.

“It’s one of those things I’ve practiced a lot, step out and play for the singles or defend, because generally when you’re stepping out you’re always looking for the big shot, but I think if you can step out and you have this game where you can step out and defend or look for the single I think it really helps on wickets like these.”

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SAG AWARDS

Cerulean to couture

THE BEST FASHION MOMENTS FROM THE 30TH SAG AWARDS 2024 – SEQUINS, BEADS, FEATHERS, ET AL

The momentum of awards season persists with the Screen Actors Guild Awards, more commonly known as the SAG Awards.

Over the weekend the event, now in its 30th year, honoured outstanding achievements in both television and film and marked the return of the event since the end of the SAG-AFTRA strike in November.

Nominations at the SAG awards paint a similar picture to the season so far. Barbenheimer – a moniker Barbie and Oppenheimer have earned throughout the year – were tried for most nominations with four each, though it was the latter that dominated ahead of the Academy Awards on March 11.

While the SAG awards traditionally garner slightly less attention than their bigger sisters such as the aforementioned Academy Awards and the Golden Globes, the event is said to be one of the most beloved by its attendees, who donned their finest frocks and several pieces of fashion history to this year's ceremony, that were a far cry from the casual outfits worn to the picket line just month ago. Among the highlights of the latest award show was a nostalgic on-stage reunion of the cast of 'The Devil Wears Prada', including Anne Hathaway wearing cerulean and other daring outfits on the blue-tinted red carpet.

Homages, sequins

The SAG Awards were the last night of award season that saw Margot Robbie nominated as

best actress for her titular role in Barbie, and the Australian actress paid homage to her character one more time. Robbie donned a sleek black minidress adorned with a sculptural pink add-on that Barbie would

surely approve of.

The adornment originated from her shoulder, wrapped around her waist, and cascaded into a sweeping train, courtesy of Daniel Roseberry from Schiaparelli. An ode to her on-screen character in 'Poor Things' seems to have been on Emily Stone's mind. Stone, a house ambassador for Louis Vuitton, wore a custom silver beaded gown with subtle purple and blue feather-accent.

Beads and all that glitters did not only strike a chord with Stone but were seen on several other attendees. Elizabeth Debicki who was nominated and took home an award for her portrayal of Princess Diana in the latest season of the TV-drama The Crown, wore a light blue floor-length gown adorned in intricate beading from Armani Prive. The gown featured a sheer mesh neckline and a backless silhouette.

houette similarly to Stones, while actress Jennifer Aniston wore a silver Celine dress, which featured spaghetti straps and a high slit.

Feathers and fringes rather than beads and sparkles were the fashion recipe for both, Kelley Curran and Maddie Ziegler. Curran, a nominee for outstanding performance by an ensemble in a drama for 'The Gilded Age', took to the SAG carpet in a white feather dress while Ziegler donned a historic Alexander McQueen dress from the spring 2003 collection sourced from Shrimpton Couture.

While Ziegler's McQueen dress might have been the most historic fashion moment of the night, stars like actress and comedian Ayo Edebiri and Greta Lee also created some high-fashion looks with choices that went against the typical red carpet grain. Edebiri collected the Outstanding Performance by a Female Actor in a Comedy Series for 'The Bear,' at the 2024 SAG Awards, making it a clean sweep this awards season – and she did so in a dress worthy of the occasion.

The actress wore a checked gown from Luar's Fall 2023 collection, therefore not only representing a relatively young brand, but also one that is not exactly a red carpet staple yet. The Row, more established but also no standard Red Carpet choice, was worn by Greta Lee, who has been wearing experimental dresses by brands such as Loewe and Bottega Veneta throughout this award season. For the SAG awards, the actress turned to a look from The Olsen sisters' resort 2023 collection, completed with leather gloves and a simple hairstyle.

Meanwhile, actress Bel Powley served up whimsical elegance wearing a Chanel Fall 2022 Haute Couture petticoated dress accented with silk tulle and feathers, proving that black and white does not have to be minimalistic, something that was further underlined by Ali Wong. The 'Beef'-Star wore an otherworldly, laser-cut dress by Iris Van Herpen.

Another actress who took a look back at runways past was Anne Hathaway. The actress, who sat front row at the Versace fashion show in Milan just 48 hours prior, wore a cerulean coloured gown from the Italian brand's Spring 2015 couture collection. The dress and its colour were a nod to Hathaway's film 'The Devil wears Prada' from 2006 that would be referenced during the awards ceremony when Hathaway and her co-stars Emily Blunt and Meryl Streep reunited on stage. (Source: fashionunited.uk)



Penelope Cruz



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WATCHMAKING EXCELLENCE

Leader in luxury

With the ever-changing needs of customers in the digital age, there has been an increasing desire for new features in luxury watches, too, as it is with watches in other segments - How are you coping with this demand while maintaining the esteemed profile of your watches and timepieces?

At Hublot, we prioritise innovation while preserving the tradition of our brand DNA, the Art of Fusion, while leveraging digital platforms to really speak to the growing audience, especially to the new generation of watch enthusiasts. We always ensure to integrate cutting-edge materials and savoir faire into our timepieces which cater to their requirements.

In parallel, we always find a way to align with our key markets by launching special editions - which is why I am excited to share the launch of the Classic Fusion Titanium Gradient Blue Oman timepiece from Hublot. This approach enables us to maintain our position as a leader in luxury watchmaking while delivering unique and pioneering experiences to our clientele.

To what extent are Hublot watches seen as a status symbol - does it have any decisive edge over your competitors?

Hublot watches are widely regarded as a symbol of innovation, with wide recognition alongside the various partnerships of Hublot. Of course, we hold a distinctive advantage in the industry for always being the first in developing our own materials and movements, such as the ceramic and sapphire, and movements like the MP-10 (seen in the latest MP-10 Tourbillon Weight Energy System Titanium). Our brand's fusion of innovative design, high-quality craftsmanship, and prestigious collaborations distinguishes us from competitors, providing a unique allure that resonates with those seeking distinction in their timepieces.

The ideology of Hublot currently revolves around the 'Art of Fusion', could you please elaborate how different (or similar) are Hublot watches these days from their inception in 1980?

The ideology and Hublot DNA has actually remained quite the same: to bring

To mark the 10th anniversary of Hublot and Mistal's partnership in Oman, the renowned Swiss luxury watchmaker, has announced the launch of the new Hublot Classic Fusion Titanium Gradient Blue Oman - a special edition timepiece created exclusively to mark this milestone.

"Hublot watches are widely regarded as a symbol of innovation," David Tedeschi, regional director, Hublot, tells **Hubert Vaz** in an exclusive interview. Excerpts:



Photo: V K Shafeer

together the tradition and innovation of watchmaking. Hublot was the first watch brand to ever integrate gold and natural rubber into one timepiece. By pioneering such combinations in material, this sparked the creative concept of the 'Art of Fusion'.

More than 40 years later, we are still the leaders in various combinations of materials and even our partnerships reflect this part of our DNA. The real difference is now with the new technology at the Hublot Manufacture, our R&D team is always leaders in the development of new materials to use in our watches.

You visited Oman in May 2018 (when a special collection of 25 pieces were created for buyers in Oman) and again in October 2020 to mark Oman's 50th National Day (with the release of the Classic Fusion Special Edition Oman Golden Jubilee) - Have these milestones built a bigger market for Hublot in Oman?

Definitely! We can really see the demand in the Omani market for Hublot watches increasing over the years and we are very pleased to continue building the Hublotistas community with our partner Mistal. This is why we also have chosen to celebrate the decade-long partnership with Mistal by launching the special edition Classic Fusion Titanium Gradient Blue Oman. It pays homage to the Omani heritage and features the Khanjar calligraphy which reads 'Sultanate of Oman'. To give it an even more Omani touch, the seconds hand has a special tip with the colours of white, red, and green, resembling the flag of Oman. From the launch of this special edition, we noticed that the demand is definitely there and we are doing our best to meet it.

How much of emphasis does Hublot give for Research and Development to cater to the changing needs of

modern day buyers?

Research and Development at Hublot is strongly emphasised and a vital part to the pioneering production - it is a foundational aspect that we pride ourselves on, considering some of our core values are innovative materials and in-house movements. With such a strong focus on our manufacture, it has led to the creations of advanced watchmaking seen in all our newest novelties.

We think outside of the box on how to enhance materials such as sapphire and ceramics or creating Hublot in-house movements, with some developments taking up to 5 years of R&D - like the new MP-10 Tourbillon Weight Energy System. It is such an avant-garde timepiece, designed with a dial-less piece, fusing the calibre and dial into one. Only a strong manufacture R&D team would create such excellence and trend-setting in watchmaking.

In December, in an interview in Bahrain, you mentioned that the Middle East market is saturated with luxury brands - Does this make the competition stiffer for Hublot? And do you think that buyers of luxury brands in the Middle East have greater purchasing power than those in other markets?

Naturally, the region of the Middle East is quite saturated with luxury brands as I've mentioned before. That being said, Hublot remains steadfast as the fore-runner in the world of watchmaking, with our commitment to innovation and excellence which distinguishes us and ensures our competitive edge.

Our focus lies in delivering unparalleled quality and experiences to our clients, which is unrelated to the market saturation. The market here definitely has a stronger and larger base for luxury buyers that have the purchasing power for luxury and appreciation for fine craftsmanship and branded heritage.



Does the new showroom in Muscat have any firsts with regard to new products or offers for Hublotista members?

Yes! I am very happy to unveil the newest timepiece made exclusively for the Omani market, in partnership with Mistal. It is definitely not the first time we produce a special edition for Oman. However, this is a very special launch as it is an anniversary timepiece to celebrate our 10-year partnership with Mistal.

The Classic Fusion Titanium Gradient Blue Oman - The Classic Fusion collection is a well-liked collection here in Muscat, and we felt that developing further on the likes of the region, inspired by the region's blue seas, is the most important collaboration to fuse together the world of Hublot in this very special market. The timepiece features many different elements that highlight the Omani heritage and rich culture, such as Khanjar calligraphy which reads 'Sultanate of Oman' and customising the seconds hand to feature the three colours of the Omani flag on the tip. We are proud to celebrate the Omani pride whilst reflecting the brand's deep appreciation for Oman.

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