

Oman ranked among top 10 MENA nations for startups

Our Correspondent
Muscat

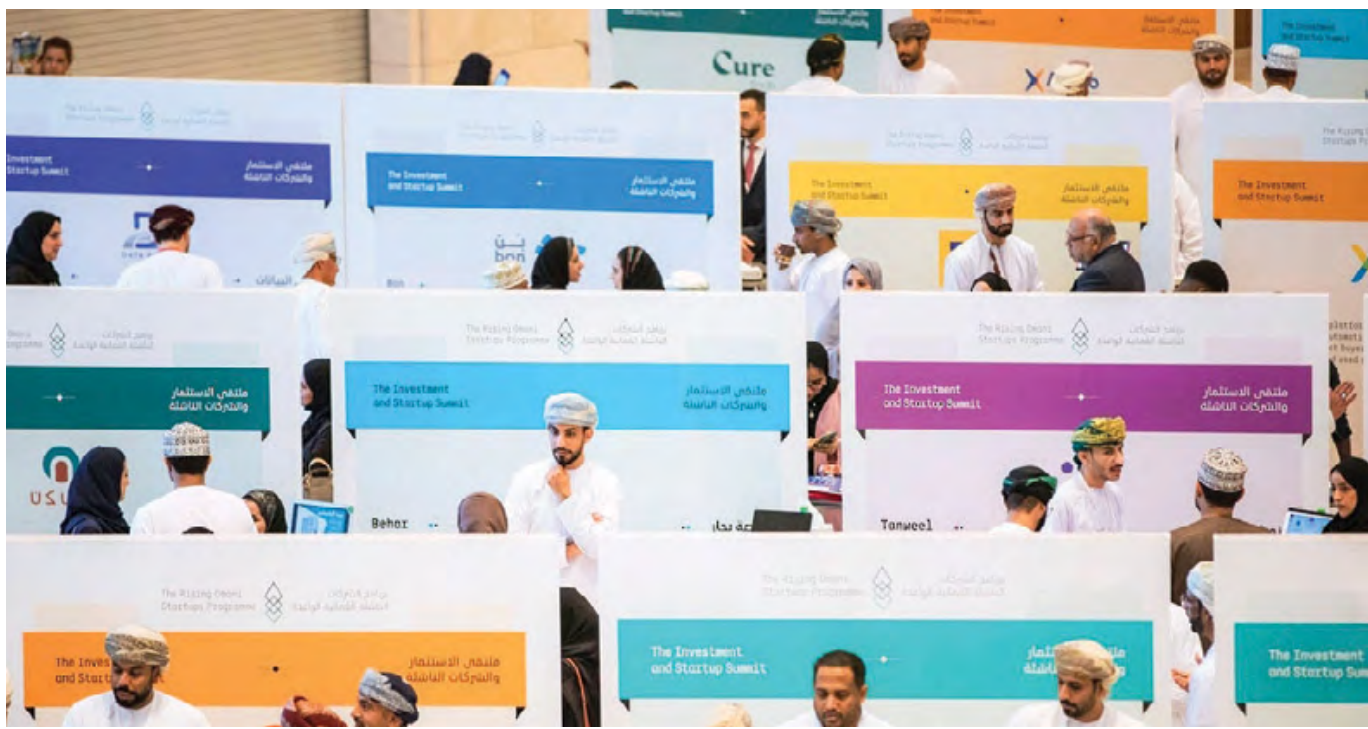
The sultanate has secured a spot among the top ten countries in the Middle East and North Africa region for attracting talented entrepreneurs to establish startups at affordable costs, supported by abundant investment capital.

This recognition comes from the *Global Startup Ecosystem Report 2023*, published by Startup Genome Foundation, a US-based research and advisory firm focused on innovation policy.

According to the report, Oman also ranks among the top 15 countries in MENA for the development and efficiency of startup ecosystems. The collective market value of Omani startups exceeds US\$300mn, indicating the growth potential in the country's entrepreneurial landscape.

The report highlights three key sectors that offer promising opportunities for startups: e-commerce, clean energy technologies and financial technologies. These sectors are expected to experience significant growth by 2025, the report stated.

The report recognises the efforts and initiatives undertaken by both public and private institutions in Oman to promote startup ecosystems.



Oman also ranks among the top 15 countries in MENA for the development and efficiency of start-up ecosystems. The collective market value of Omani startups exceeds US\$300mn

'Oman is also actively building an innovation community as it sets out a vision for a more diverse, knowledge-based economy, as outlined in the Oman

2040 initiative,' the report stated.

To facilitate economic recovery from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, Oman initiated a three-year programme

aimed at nurturing and developing the financial sector. 'Muscat was designated Arab Digital Capital in 2022, consolidating its status as a hub for digital innovation and enterprise,' it further said.

The report emphasises the importance of including home-grown startups in the global startup ecosystem report. This inclusion provides an opportunity to enhance the competitiveness and global recognition of Omani startups by aligning with interna-

tional trends and strategies that foster and motivate entrepreneurial ventures.

These positive indicators reflect the collaborative efforts, partnerships and integrated approach among government institutions in advancing Oman's startup sector, ONA stated.

Notable achievements include the launch of the Promising Omani Startups Programme under H H Sayyid Bilarab bin Haitham al Said.

Oman continues to facilitate peace in region

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman is continuing to play a 'constructive' and 'proactive' role in creating a sustainable environment for peace and security in the region, according to H E Sayyid Badr al Busaidi, Foreign Minister.

In an interview with Al-Monitor, an independent Middle East news and analysis website based in Washington DC, USA, H E Sayyid Badr spoke on Oman's relations with Israel, its peace efforts in Yemen and its longtime role as a regional mediator.

"Our neutrality is not passive. It's constructive, it's positive, it's proactive," H E Sayyid Badr told Al-Monitor.

"We really stick to the principle of creating a sustainable environment for peace, security and stability so that our people and our generations can prosper," he said.

On the question of US-Syria hostage talks, the foreign minister said, "We know at least there are messages going back and forth. I can't tell you that they are closer to finding a way out yet, but the process has started, and I hope it continues."

In the recent past, US and Syrian officials have discussed Austin Tice, a freelance journalist



H E Sayyid Badr al Busaidi

covering Syria's civil war who disappeared more than a decade ago.

H E Sayyid Badr told the website there has been an exchange of messages between Washington and Damascus "partly" with Oman's help.

On the potential of a United States-Iran prisoner deal, he said Washington and Tehran are "close" to finalising a deal on the release of Americans held in the Iranian capital.

"I can say they are close," he said of a likely prisoner agreement. "This is probably a question of technicalities."

He said Oman has "offered in good faith our offices to help both sides, be it here or anywhere else".

Discussing the sultanate's relations with Israel, H E Sayyid Badr said Oman is open to a relationship with Israel, but not at the expense of ignoring and closing the door on the Palestinians.

Continued on Page 03

Dhul Hijjah moon sighted, Eid on June 28

Muscat - The moon sighting committee of the Ministry of Endowments and Religious Affairs (MERA) announced the sighting of the moon of Dhul Hijjah 1444 AH on Sunday. Hence, Monday, June 19, will be Dhul Hijjah 1, and Wednesday, June 28, will be the first day of Eid al Adha.

On the occasion, MERA congratulated and greeted His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq, praying to the Almighty Allah for his good health, happiness and a long life, and progress and prosperity for the Omani people and all Muslim countries.



72-hour truce takes effect in Sudan



Special supplement on air conditioning and electronics

MHUP offers 300 acres of land for agricultural investment

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning (MHUP) is working to boost economic mobility and increase national income by providing 300 acres of land in Buraimi governorate for agricultural investment.

The initiative aims to support population and economic growth while facilitating private sector participation in attracting investments across governorates to foster the development of sustainable urban communities.

An official in MHUP informed that 300 acres of land in the Mrigeel area, located in the wilayat of Mahdah, will be made available through public auction for usufruct contracts.

The initiative's objectives include enhancing potato and green leafy crop production, increasing the agricultural sector's contribution to local production, adopting modern agricultural technologies and irrigation methods, and promoting the development of agricultural investment activities.



Furthermore, the initiative aims to strengthen collaboration between the private and government sectors, create employment opportunities, and enhance food security in the sultanate.

Diversifying investment efforts

In an effort to diversify investment opportunities, the ministry is offering 84 sites for usufruct contracts through the Tatwir platform in eight governorates to stimulate the real estate sector and drive investments. These sites range in size from 150sqm to 20,000sqm and will be avail-

able for usufruct contracts through online auctions.

Among the 84 available sites, 20 are in Dakhliyah, 15 in Muscat, 11 in Musandam, eight each in Buraimi and Al Wusta, seven each in Dhofar and Dhahirah, five in North Sharqiyah, two in North Sharqiyah, and one in South Batinah.

To participate in the bidding process, individuals must be Omani citizens and at least 23 years old. Companies submitting bids must have a minimum stake of 30% held by an Omani or GCC national, the ministry official informed.

H M receives message from Ugandan President; invited to NAM summit



Muscat - His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq has received a written message from President Yoweri Museveni of the Republic of Uganda.

The message relates to bilateral relations between Oman and Uganda and includes an invitation for His Majesty to attend the Summit of the Non-Aligned Movement scheduled in January 2024 in

Kampala.

The message was handed over to Sayyid Badr Hamad al Busaidi, Foreign Minister, when he received in his office Adonia Ayebare, Envoy of the Ugandan President and Permanent Representative of Uganda to the United Nations, on Sunday.

During the meeting, the two sides discussed the march of

bilateral relations between the two countries and ways of enhancing these in various areas to serve joint interests. They also exchanged views on regional and international issues.

The meeting was attended by Sheikh Khalifa Ali al Harthy, Undersecretary for Political Affairs in the Foreign Ministry, and several ministry officials.

ONA

Muscat school student wins bronze in Uzbek Chemistry Olympiad

Muscat - Al Rabee bin Habib bin Hamoud al Dhafri, a student of Al Hassan bin Hashim School in Muscat, has brought honour to Oman by winning a bronze medal at the Abu Rayhan Beruni International Chemistry Olympiad held in Khiva, Uzbekistan from June 11 to 17.

Oman participated with a team of four school students in the Olympiad held biennially in Uzbekistan. The competition

comprises two tests - one theoretical and one practical.

Delighted with the medal win, Al Rabee said, "The feeling of success after putting in so much effort and winning a medal, which has raised the name of Oman, is indescribable. It is a big honour and pride for me to win an international medal for Oman."

Participating in the Olympiad was an enjoyable ex-



Al Rabee al Dhafri

perience, Al Rabee added. "We gained valuable scientific knowledge that will greatly benefit us in our future endeavours. Moreover, forming friendships with like-minded individuals who share similar scientific interests has significantly boosted our self-confidence. I hope to have the opportunity to relive this experience in the future."

According to the Ministry of

Preschool and School Education of Uzbekistan, the Olympiad saw participation of 130 schoolchildren from 16 countries, including Turkey, Azerbaijan, India, Vietnam, Algeria, Brazil, Germany, Russia and Kazakhstan, besides Oman.

The competition is named after the renowned scientist Abu Rayhan Beruni (362-440 AH), who was born in the Khwarazm region of Uzbek-

istan. He is considered one of the greatest scientists of the Middle Ages, excelling in the fields of astronomy, geography, mathematics and pharmacy.

The Olympiad aims to elevate the scientific capabilities of students in chemistry, discover talented individuals, nurture and refine their abilities, and assist them in identifying their scientific interests and setting future goals.



EA starts programme to combat desertification

Our Correspondent
Muscat

To celebrate World Environment Day observed on June 17, Environment Authority (EA) has introduced a new initiative called 'Desert Shadows' to combat desertification and mitigate drought.

Talib bin Ali al Abri, Assistant Director General of Environment Department in Dhofar, informed that the initiative is part of the nationwide project to plant 10mn

indigenous trees.

"The initiative focuses on developing an action plan for planting sites in the Najd region and the Dhofar desert. Currently, the initiative is underway in the wilayats of Thumrait and Muqshin. It aims to provide shaded areas for residents, shepherds and wildlife, particularly during the summer months. This initiative will have a positive impact on all aspects of the environment," Abri added.

According to the authority, the

national initiative to plant 10mn wild trees builds upon the achievements of previous initiatives such as date palm and mangrove plantation programmes. It symbolises the partnership between the EA and various sectors with the aim of preserving the environment and achieving sustainable development.

In January 2020, EA, in collaboration with Petroleum Development Oman, launched the ambitious initiative to plant 10mn wild trees in a ten-year period.

Barka Coast Guard Police saves two children from drowning

Muscat - Two children were rescued from drowning in Barka on Sunday, Royal Oman Police (ROP) announced.

In a statement, ROP said, "Barka Coast Guard Police saved two children from drowning while they were swimming in the wilayat of Barka. They were administered first aid and taken to the hospital."

According to the latest statis-

tics released by Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority (CDAA), water rescue teams handled 521 calls related to drowning accidents in 2021. In light of these incidents, CDAA urged all to be cautious and warned against swimming in undesignated areas.

Experts stress the importance of adhering to safety measures while swimming.

CDAA reminded all to ensure physical fitness and good health before engaging in such activities to mitigate risks. The call for caution and preparedness serves as a crucial reminder to prioritise safety.

ROP urged citizens and residents to exercise caution when visiting the sea, lakes and valleys, and to closely supervise children while swimming.

EID PLANS

Eid al Adha is knocking on the door and there's a sense of anticipation and happiness all around. With festivities in the air, many people are eagerly planning much-awaited vacations, seeking adventure and relaxation both within and beyond the borders of the country. While many have plans to make the most of the holidays in the country, others plan trips abroad. Bachelors and families alike are looking for unique experiences and destinations that will provide a much-needed break from daily routines. What are your plans for the upcoming Eid al Adha holidays? What facilities and entertainment options are needed for development of local tourism? Here's what *Muscat Daily* readers have to say -



Sameer Verma
Cashier

The development of local tourism not only benefits those seeking vacation options but also contributes to the growth of Oman's economy and the preservation of its cultural heritage. By providing the necessary facilities and entertainment options, Oman can create a thriving tourism industry. I feel that there must be more budget hotels. Most of the hotels are overpriced and families cannot afford these.

Salim al Balushi
Driver

My plans for the holidays include visiting Salalah for a week with my brothers and some friends. We will explore places and enjoy some homemade food. This will be my first visit to Dhofar after the pandemic. I

will also get to meet my old relatives. Salalah is a lovely place and the authorities must do enough to promote it. One important thing is to have washrooms in every tourist site and there must be more hotels or guests houses available at reasonable prices.

Yogini Patil
Housewife

Something that can be done during these holidays is to hold a cultural festival and in that there should be a market for dates and fun activities for both children and adults.

Manish Kumar
Engineer

I am visiting India for a quick break. I feel that Oman can have more entertainment activities, especially in malls and theatre halls during summers, targeting

children and music lovers. For adults, there can be stand up comedy shows. Short film festivals can also take place. Additionally, the beaches in Oman can be developed further by providing shades, washrooms and water tankers. There must also be call centre services to guide people on the various issues faced during travelling.

Abida Shamsher
Housewife

I will head to Salalah and plan to camp instead of booking a hotel room to enjoy the lovely weather there.

Anzila Ashraf
Online tutor

I plan a staycation. It would be great if there were outdoor entertainment parks, Eid themed night festivals, food festivals, and hotel discounts.

? NEXT ON
YOUR SAY

Are electric scooters a safe mode of transportation? How can authorities prevent accidents involving e-scooters?

The views stated here are those of the respondents and not endorsed by *Muscat Daily*. If you feel strongly about the issues discussed here, you can email your comments to muscatdaily@apexmedia.co.om You can also log on to our Facebook page or tweet us your comments on the issue.

SEND YOUR COMMENTS

Share your comments in not more than 50 words along with your full name and profession before next Sunday, 10am, via WhatsApp, Facebook or Instagram

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Companies specialized in the field and registered with Tender Board, may obtain tender documents for the website through the following link: (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>) against non-refundable fees as mentioned below starting from the date of this announcement and until the end of deadline stipulated below.

Tender Number	Description of Tender	Tender Fee	Last date to collect the tender	Tender return date	Grade
PRE/22/070 2022/MM/QS-38 Re-Call	RFP for Muscat Contact Center Solution	25 Rials	08/07/2023	30/07/2023	Specialist
PRE/23/073 2023/MM/HQ-25	Construction of Storm Water Drainage System in Al Khuwair at Boshier	50 Rials	08/07/2023	30/07/2023	Excellent
PRE/23/098 2023/MM/QS-43	Shifting Abandoned Vehicles	25 Rials	08/07/2023	30/07/2023	Specialist
PRE/23/112 2023/MM/QS-44	Painting of Muscat Municipality vehicles	25 Rials	08/07/2023	30/07/2023	Specialist
PRE/23/126 2023/MM/QS-45	Construction of Proposed Solutions to Resolve Water Stagnation at Qurum	25 Rials	08/07/2023	30/07/2023	Forth
PRE/23/127 2023/MM/QS-46	Maintenance of Muscat Municipality Lifts	25 Rials	08/07/2023	30/07/2023	Specialist
PRE/23/133 2023/MM/QS-47	Supply of ACs, Water Coolers & Refrigerators	25 Rials	08/07/2023	30/07/2023	Specialist
PRE/23/134 2023/MM/QS-48	Supply of MyQ	25 Rials	08/07/2023	30/07/2023	Specialist

1- Bidders shall submit their offers electronically.
2- Clarification and Support:

- For any inquiries regarding tenders, please visit e-tendering website: (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>) .
- For technical support of e-tendering system please send an email to (etenderhd@mtcit.gov.om) or call (+96824402200).

SULTANATE OF OMAN
MINISTRY OF HEALTH

ANNOUNCEMENT

The Ministry of Health invites specialized companies to participate in the following Tenders: -

Tender Ref.	Description	Last date for Collection of tender Document	Bid Submission Closing Date on/ Before 10:00 am Thursday	Eligibility	Tender Fee (Non-Refundable)
2300/2023/ MOH/NIZH-5	Supply And Installation Of Spare Parts For Generators At Nizwa Hospital	11/Jul/2023	27/Jul/2023	Specialized Companies registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board	R.O 25,000 Per set

- Tenders should be submitted on line on <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>.
- Ministry is not bound to accept the lowest tender and reserves the right to accepts or reject any tender.
- For any Clarification, you may contact via Telephone: 24402200 , Email id etenderhd@ita.gov.om

MCSY launches 2023 Arts Award

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth (MCSY) has launched the Arts Award for 2023 in three categories - advertising films, animation and soundtrack - for Omanis and residents aged 18 years and older.

The Arts Award aims to discover artistic talents, support the talents of university and college students, encourage young talents in the field of music, and enhance cooperation between musicians, producers and directors in the music industry to facilitate innovative new works of art.

Announcing the award, Ibrahim Saif Bani Oraba, Assistant Director General of MCSY's Arts Directorate, said, "It is dedicated to creative talents in various artistic fields, including folk, performing, theatrical, cinematic, visual and digital art and photography."

The award also aims to achieve the objectives of developing cultural creativity, use of advanced production technologies, and mentoring talented and creative people in cultural fields.

According to Oraba, participants of the Animation Production Award will be given the opportunity to work on projects using computer generated two-



It is dedicated to creative talents in various artistic fields, including folk, performing, theatrical and cinematic art

IBRAHIM SAIF BANI ORABA

or three-dimensional animation techniques, clay animation, paper cutouts or traditional animation and stop motion.

"The Advertising Films Award aims to produce a propaganda film about nature in the sultanate. The film should be of three- to five-minute duration," Oraba informed.

"It should highlight a tourist place in any governorate chosen by the contestant using assistive technologies."

For the Soundtrack Award, the ministry will send a link of a film to participants registered for the award. Participants will be required to create a soundtrack for the given film material within September 5 to 7, 2023.

MoCIIP updates list of activities exclusive for Omani investors

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion has issued a decision (No. 364/2023), updating the list of activities meant for Omani investors only.

The ministry - working in tandem with relevant government entities, as well as the governors and the municipal councils - updated the list of activities - issued in 2020 - which are out of bounds to foreign investors.

The decision is in line with the directives of the Oman Vision 2040, which envisages making the country self-reliant.

The newly updated list includes the following activities:

- ▶ Operating poultry hatcheries - except for projects with large production capacity
- ▶ Beekeeping, honey and beeswax production
- ▶ Marine fishing
- ▶ Slaughtering and preparing poultry, rabbits etc., except for projects with large production capacity
- ▶ Printing using photocopiers and computers and other office machines such as photocopiers or thermal copiers
- ▶ Transporting and selling non-potable water
- ▶ Renting cranes
- ▶ Renting other construction machinery and equipment operated by a worker
- ▶ Renting construction or demolition equipment operated by a worker
- ▶ Wholesale of livestock, except for projects with large production capacity
- ▶ Wholesale of fish and marine animals
- ▶ Wholesale activity of fish products
- ▶ Retail stores specialised in meat and meat products
- ▶ Retail stores specialised in fish and other seafood
- ▶ Retail stores specialised in natural herbs
- ▶ Retail stores specialised in medicinal herbs
- ▶ Retail stores specialised in birds, pets, ornamental fish and their accessories
- ▶ Towing of vehicles
- ▶ Activity of buying and selling land and real estate
- ▶ Managing and renting real estate
- ▶ Building management (owned or leased)
- ▶ Building management (based on a fee or contract)
- ▶ Property valuation
- ▶ Pet care services



Covered transport for livestock

Muscat - The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources (MAFWR) has issued a statement urging all livestock breeders and transporters to use covered means of transport due

to high temperatures during the afternoon.

The ministry emphasised that animal welfare is not only a religious duty 'but also a moral, human, and legal obligation'.

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Oman continues to play proactive role in creating peace, security in region

Continued from Page 01

"Any fully fledged relationship with Israel needs to be matched in parallel with a fully fledged relationship and recognition of the State of Palestine," H E Sayyid Badr said.

He added that Oman is ready to assist with the Palestinian-Israeli peace process "when the mood and the willingness are there in the Israeli camp, which unfortunately, at the moment we don't see".

The foreign minister described the direct talks between Saudi and Houthis officials in the Yemeni capital earlier this year as the 'first step' in ending the country's long-running conflict.

An Omani delegation joined Saudi Arabia's Ambassador to Yemen Mohammed al Jaber for the talks in Sanaa in April. "I think it's the first step because up until recently, there wasn't really any credible dialogue between any major players in Yemen," H E Sayyid Badr said.

"Our assessment is that they are now working on the modalities of how we can move forward that process which will help them [gain] better trust and confidence."

Tender Announcement



The Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madaayn) announces the following Tender:

Tender Number	Tender Name	Last date of buying	Date of submission	Type of work	Register Degree	Fee (R.O)
8/2023/PEIE /HQ- 8	Consultancy Services For Master Planning of Phase No.5 of Nizwa Industrial City	03-07-2023	27-07-2023	Consultancy	First	50
9/2023/PEIE /HQ- 9	The Security System Project at Knowledge Oasis Muscat (Fencing & Gate)	03-07-2023	27-07-2023	Contractor	Second and above	75

Interested Companies registered with Tender Board may obtain the Tender documents from the E-Tendering website: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om> against non-refundable payment as mentioned above for each set of document. Tenders should be submitted on line on given website.

1. Tender Inquiry: All correspondence pertaining to the TENDER Inquiry must be online at eTendering System.

2. eTendering System Inquiry: All correspondence pertaining to the eTendering System technical support must be directed to the following helpdesk email address and phone number:

etenderhd@mtcit.gov.om and +968 24402200 Note: Bid Submission will be online only.

No Document can be accepted as Manual except Original Tender Bond. Scan Copy of Tender Bond needs to be attached in system and original needs to be deposited before Bid Opening.

Madaayn is not bound to accept the lowest or any other Offer and has the right to cancel these tenders and the tenderers have no right to claim for any compensations.

@madaynoman

madayn.om



Send your comments to muscatdaily@apexmedia.co.om



Tender

Oman chamber of commerce and industry in Al Batinah North Governorate would like to announce the following public tender:

Tender No.	Tender Name	Tender Fees (irrevocable)	Specialized companies	Deadline for Obtaining Documents	Deadline for Tender submission
1/ 2023	Organizing and Managing Sohar Investment Forum	25 OMR	Companies specialized in managing and organizing international conferences and exhibitions	06 July 2023	16 July 2023

Companies specialized in managing and organizing conferences may obtain the tender documents from the Administration Department at the first Floor of the chamber's branch Al Batinah North Governorate, during the official working hours against the payment of tender fees.

Tender Terms:

- Provide valued CR,OCCI membership , Tender Board membership and taxation certificate .
- Interested companies should enclose their bids a 1% Bank guarantee/ certified cheque of proposal value issued by one of the banks operating in Oman valid for 90 days from the deadline of submitting the bids addressed in the name of Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry. The bids without this temporary guarantee will not be considered.
- The bids should be submitted in red waxed envelopes addressed to -Procurement Committee , OCCI, written outside the Number and title of the Tender. No indication about the bidder is allowed on the envelope.
- Offers should be deposited in the tender box kept at the Administration Department in the first floor of OCCI Al Batinah North Governorate branch.

OCCI is not bound to accept the lowest or any other bids.
It has the right to accept or reject any bids without showing reasons.

Interested companies should submit the Tenders before 12 pm on 16/07/2023.

For further details, you may call

92620613 - 91964531
dawood.reesi@omanchamber.om

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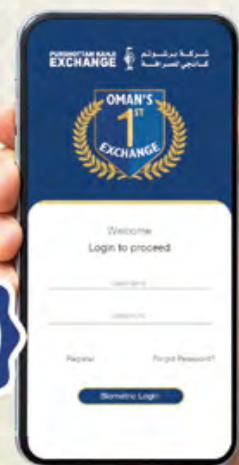
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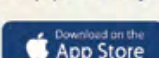
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INTERVIEW

AL MOUJ MUSCAT
WINNER: INTEGRATED TOURISM COMPLEX CATEGORY

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Al Mouj Muscat, one of the Middle East's most established and successful mixed-use developments, has won Oman's Most Trusted Brand Award 2022 in the Integrated Tourism Complex (ITC) category. In an exclusive interview with *Muscat Daily*, Nasser al Shiehani, CEO of Al Mouj Muscat, provided insights into the key factors that contributed to Al Mouj's success as a thriving community and premier destination for tourism and investment. He also talked about the new projects and the role Al Mouj plays in contributing to Omani economy and society.

Al Mouj Muscat has been voted as Oman's most trusted Integrated Tourism Complex (ITC) brand by the general public. In your view, which key factors contributed for Al Mouj to win people's trust?
The core of Al Mouj's success is intrinsically linked to our brand promise of delivering "great moments for everyone, every day,". This is more than just a statement; it's our North Star that guides every decision we make and every action we take. Our unwavering commitment to this promise, combined with our ongoing delivery of extraordinary experiences, has won over the public's trust, earning us the prestigious title of being their most favoured ITC brand.

What do you think are the key elements of a successful brand in the tourism industry, particularly for an ITC?
A successful brand in the tourism sector must be able to consistently drive consumer interest and repeat behaviour. We refer to this as a 'perception and practice' brand strategy. The brand must be able to create and manage positive visitor expectations and (most importantly) drive loyalty through repeated attendance.
Having a vision that combines these two elements is essential, along with the expertise to deliver it. Al Mouj Muscat's brand is encapsulated by 'Life Inspired' and every aspect of our lifestyle destination has been carefully designed to engage and delight, first time and every time.
As a joint venture between Omran, Tanmia and Majid Al Futtaim we are able to combine the long-term strategy of the public sector with private sector skills to deliver a truly integrated experience for visitors. As a master planned community, everything we do is informed by sustainability and the quality of the customer experience. It has enabled us to attract 4.9mn visitors each year and ensure that, every day, we create optimal customer experiences.

What do you think are the most important factors in ensuring a positive customer/visitor experience, and how do you ensure that Al Mouj always meets those expectations?
We have a proactive and structured approach to CX (Customer Experience). We gather ongoing feedback from customers at every touchpoint, which informs each aspect of our

organisation, from frontline staff to the senior management. This 'living intelligence' ensures that we adapt and evolve and allows us not only to meet customer expectations but to strive to exceed them.
Most importantly, we use this data in two ways. We use it to improve day-to-day service delivery. These are referred to as 'Hygiene Increments'. We also use it as inspiration for new services and features. These are referred to as 'Strategic Increments'.

Al Mouj has expanded significantly in recent years and continuing to do so. How do you ensure that Al Mouj as an ITC is environmentally sustainable and minimises its impact on the local ecosystem?
This is an essential question, and we are committed to not only protecting the environment today but enhancing prospects for future generations. All the homes and amenities we develop follow best practices as closely as possible, and we continually introduce eco-friendly initiatives.
For example, our multi-award-winning Golf Beach Residences are luxury family homes in a gated community close to our pristine beach and World 100 golf course, but they are also designed and built to BREEAM standards. BREEAM is the world's most established international sustainability certification, it measures management, innovation, energy, water, waste and pollution and so on to rate a building's environmental performance. This highly demanding and prestigious certification once more evidences Al Mouj Muscat as a community that continues to define design excellence.

Al Mouj recently launched several new projects including Al Mouj Business Park, Sarai, and Jinan Island. Can you elaborate on the significance of these new projects and how remarkable are their launches for Al Mouj?
Each project reflects a key aspect of how Al Mouj Muscat has redefined urban living and, as a community, how we are an engine for growth.
Al Mouj Sarai is the jewel in the crown of Al Mouj Muscat. These extraordinary sea-facing palaces have intentionally redefined the meaning of 'highly customised' ultra-luxury living. Without question, Al Mouj Sarai has no equal in the sultanate, arguably the region, as these individual, personal spaces present buyers with

AL MOUJ MUSCAT

A thriving community and premier destination for tourism and investment



As a master planned community, everything we do is informed by sustainability and quality of customer experience
NASSER AL SHIEBANI
CEO, AL MOUJ MUSCAT

the ultimate canvas for self-expression. Here, owners will be immersed in the beauty of the natural world, whilst enjoying the many world-class amenities and leisure experiences available within our oceanside destination.
Jinan Island has proved a huge success. Buyers responded to the prospect of a serene lifestyle at this private collection of luxury villas, with the island surrounded by a lake and centred around beautiful parkland. Families have the opportunity to 'Escape the Ordinary' and with over 50% selling at our launch event, it demonstrates how well Al Mouj Muscat understands modern buyer aspirations.
As an organisation, we also understand the importance of creating an environment that can inspire across all aspects of our customers' lives. And this should be able to incorporate their working life, better integrating it into their general lifestyle. This was the inspiration for Al Mouj Business Park and what sets it apart. Its eight, human scale office buildings are deliberately located in a landscaped business district within Al Mouj Golf, next to the St Regis Resort and overlooking the ocean. A naturally beautiful setting, companies benefit from the proximity of world-class lifestyle and leisure and business support services.
Major road networks and Oman's International Airport also enable businesses and people to connect easily to Muscat, the region and the globe. Al Mouj Business Park is a truly inspirational working environment and the ideal business ecosystem, here to contribute to the next generation of Oman's business success.
How has been investors' response so far in these new projects?
These projects have already generated significant successes, over half of the Jinan Island collection sold within days of its launch for example, Business Park phase 1 fully sold and construction started. We had a hugely positive reaction to Al Mouj Business Park.
Buyers and investors recognise that Al Mouj Muscat is unique. Our thriving community offers an exemplary environment to live, work, play and stay.
How does Al Mouj ensure that it remains an attractive destination for investors, residents, and visitors over the long term?
The touchstone for everything we do at Al Mouj

Muscat is Placemaking, creating a sense of connection, well-being and authenticity, as we deliver lasting value to our community, our stakeholders and Oman.
By following, and even leading the way, on issues such as sustainable practices, we not only conserve our precious resources but have reduced operating costs, increased efficiencies and have a track-record of achieving sustained growth. Al Mouj Muscat's positive impact across development, tourism, job creation, SMEs growth and foreign direct investment, continues to attract investors as we realise our long-term vision as an ITC. We will continue to innovate, providing new definitions of leisure and lifestyle all the time, creating new facilities, new opportunities for our residents and for visitors to spend their time.
Can you briefly describe what role Al Mouj is playing in terms of contributing to the overall economy, FDI, SMEs, and society?
By creating Oman's premier lifestyle and leisure destination, we have carefully created a community that promotes success through its positive impact on tourism, SMEs growth, employment, development and on the nation's economic diversification.
As an ITC, we have generated foreign direct investment (FDI) through the sale of our residences, with approximately 50% of our properties sold to non-national buyers. And since we were established in 2006, we have worked to create the right conditions for investors, securing over \$1bn in foreign direct investment.
Not only is Al Mouj Muscat the ideal destination for visitors, but it is also a superb location for SMEs. We actively support these diverse businesses, via our trading platforms and by providing access to training in customer service along with marketing and communications support. For example, we now have 15 marine tourism operators based at our Gold Anchor marina, testimony to how our long-term strategy has nurtured and continues to grow Oman's marine tourism sector.
What message would you like to send to people who are considering Al Mouj Muscat as a destination for investment, living, or tourism?
I would like to mention that the Oman's Most Trusted Brand Award once more, as it represents the trust we have built as a brand and as a lifestyle destination, is the proof that what we offer delights our customers.
Over 8,000 people, from 85 nations, now call Al Mouj Muscat home, as this is a community where each of us can enjoy a true sense of belonging, of community and connection. With exceptional 4 and 5-star hotels, pristine beaches, a marina with its waterside cafes and restaurants and a multi-award-winning golf course, Al Mouj Muscat is a location where residents and visitors enjoy truly memorable experiences every day. It is a destination that is actively contributing to a better world for future generations, a location where investors will see their confidence rewarded, and a community that remains committed to realising Oman Vision 2040.

MSX announces listing of Oman Investment Bank



Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) on Sunday announced the listing of newly licensed Oman Investment Bank on the local bourse.
The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion has issued the license to establish Oman Investment Bank SAOC at a share capital of RO500,000 divided into 500,000 shares, according to a statement issued by the

MSX on its website.
'Pursuant to the license issued by the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion to establish Oman Investment Bank and according to the recommendation of the senior director of market operations department, it has been decided that the capital of RO500,000 shall be listed on the third market and this decision shall be effective as from June 15, 2023,' the MSX said.

GCC economies perform strongly but lower oil quotas weigh on growth

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The GCC countries are expected to expand moderately this year, according to the latest Economic Insight report, commissioned by ICAEW and compiled by Oxford Economics. However, the anticipated pace of 2023 GDP growth in the region dropped to 1.9% in the second quarter, down from 2.8% in the previous quarter, due to the slowdown in energy output.
Although growth expectations for the GCC have been revised downwards for this year, the region's latest survey indicators reflect ongoing strength. The second quarter report reveals a slight easing in the pace of expansion since the start of the year. However, strong domestic demand continues to drive growth in employment and new orders.



Hanadi Khalife

ICAEW's revised oil price estimates now anticipate Brent averaging \$81.5 per barrel this year, down from the previous forecast of \$85 three months ago, while heightened concerns about global demand have prompted deeper production cuts from OPEC+ countries. In the June meeting, Saudi Arabia voluntarily agreed to a 1mn barrels per day production cut for the month of July, which may result in a tighter



Scott Livermore

market in the latter half of the year.
As per the Oxford Economics report, the updated OPEC+ agreement implies a greater drag on GCC energy output growth this year, weakening it by 2.1%. While the UAE is expected to experience a rise in production next year, due to a higher supply ceiling aligning with current capacity, most countries in the region are likely to witness stagnation in the

oil sector in 2024.
The report said that non-oil sectors will continue to lead the GCC recovery, projected to grow 3.9% this year, likely reflecting a resilient domestic market. The travel and tourism sector is also recovering strongly, with Dubai Airport expecting passenger numbers to exceed 2019 levels this year. The stimulus from tourism, along with a surge in population and support from the government, are reflected in the UAE's overall economic growth and resilience to global economic headwinds. In a press statement, Hanadi Khalife, head of Middle East at ICAEW, said, "While the region's growth might be slowing down, investments in non-oil sectors are proving critical to Gulf countries' ability to withstand global economic pressures. Continuing to diversify and increase investment in these sectors, in line with the visions of most countries, will enable the GCC to maintain its consistent growth trajectory."
Scott Livermore, chief economist and managing director at Oxford Economics Middle East, said, "Although oil prices remain above most countries' fiscal breakeven levels, their softening and OPEC+ cutting production quotas has increased the urgency to diversify revenues away from the oil sector. For now, the only two countries we have first quarter budget data for are Saudi Arabia and Oman - both of which have been successfully minimising the hit to public finances from oil sector dynamics by generating higher non-oil revenues."
Inflation data in the region indicates easing price pressures with inflation being the lowest in Bahrain and Oman (0.7% and 1.2%, respectively) and Qatar dropping from its highest rate last year to 3.7%.

Biden says rich need to pay 'fair share' of taxes

Philadelphia, US – President Joe Biden on Saturday appealed to blue-collar workers to support his re-election quest and help him compel the richest Americans to pay more taxes.

"It's about time the super wealthy start paying their fair share," Biden told hundreds of union workers in the industrial state of Pennsylvania.

The campaign rally was sponsored by the AFL-CIO, a union federation that represents 12.5mn American workers and that formally endorsed Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris a day earlier.

Biden launched his 2024 re-election bid on April 25 but had held no major campaign events before Saturday's rally.

The president made his pitch as a crowded field of Republicans jostle for the party's nomination, with Donald Trump the runaway frontrunner despite facing federal criminal charges that he mishandled US government secrets, being impeached twice over allegations of misconduct during his White House tenure, and a swirl of other legal troubles.

Biden made a distinctly populist appeal in Philadelphia, touching on a number of issues aimed at halting a migration of working-class voters away from the Democratic Party.

Biden said pro-union sentiments are not widely shared by fellow elected officials in Washington.

"There are a lot of politicians



US President Joe Biden delivers remarks during a political rally hosted by union members in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, on Saturday (AFP)

in this country who can't say the word 'union' and you know I'm not one of them. I'm proud to say the word, I'm proud to be the most pro-union president in American history," he said.

He described blue-collar workers as the backbone of the economy.

"Wall Street didn't build America. You did," Biden said to cheers.

"If the investment bankers in this country went on a strike tomorrow, no one would much notice," he said. But if union members walked off the job, "the whole country would come to a grinding halt."

Biden vowed to protect Social

Security and other benefit programs to help average Americans.

"When the middle class does well, everybody does well," he said, adding that reforms are needed to ensure middle class prosperity, including reforming a tax code that is "simply not fair."

"How could it be fair, when 55 of the largest corporations in America pay zero in federal income tax on \$40bn in profit?" he asked.

Biden noted that the number of US billionaires has climbed to about 1,000. He said they pay an average of eight percent federal taxes on their earnings.

"They paid at a lower tax rate than schoolteachers, than firefighters, probably anyone in this room. It's time they paid a minimum tax. I don't mind them being billionaires. Just pay your fair share, man."

Earlier in the day, Biden took an aerial tour of a bridge on an interstate highway in Philadelphia that collapsed last weekend after a tanker truck caught fire.

He vowed the full support of the federal government in rebuilding the bridge.

AFP



Intel to invest \$25 bn in new Israel plant

Jerusalem – US chip giant Intel will spend \$25bn on a new plant in Israel, officials said Sunday, with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu calling it the country's single largest foreign investment.

The "agreement in principle" would see the semiconductor firm build the facility in southern city Kiryat Gat that would open by 2027 and operate at least until 2035, Israel's finance ministry said.

As part of the deal, Intel's taxes to Israel would rise from five to 7.5%, the finance ministry said in a statement.

Intel in return would receive a grant of 12.8% of its outlay, the ministry said, in line with Israel's capital investment encouragement law.

Netanyahu said the new plant would constitute "the largest investment in Israel".

"This is a great show of confidence in Israel's economy, and shows the strength of the free economy we built here and the technological economy developing here," the Israeli leader said.

The two sides would begin finalising the deal in a process expected to take a number of weeks, according to the ministry.

A spokesman for Intel in Israel had no immediate comment.

Intel has been operating in Israel since the 1970s with development centres and a production site that employ some 12,000 people out of the company's global work force of 130,000, the finance ministry said.

In 2017, Intel acquired Israel-based Mobileye, which makes technology for automated driving systems in vehicles, for just over 15bn dollars.

AFP

EU says China's Huawei, ZTE pose risk to bloc security

Brussels, Belgium – Chinese telecoms giants Huawei and ZTE pose a risk to the EU's security, the European Commission warned recently, as it announced it will no longer use services that rely on the companies.

"The commission considers that Huawei and ZTE represent in fact materially higher risks than other 5G suppliers," the EU's executive arm said in a statement.

It added the commission "will take relevant security measures so as not to procure new connectivity services that rely on equipment from those suppliers".

The EU's internal market commissioner, Thierry Breton, called on the 27 member states and telecoms operators to exclude Huawei and ZTE equipment from their mobile networks.

"We cannot afford to maintain critical dependencies that could become a 'weapon' against our interests. That would be too critical a vulnerability and too serious a risk to our common security," Breton said during a press conference in Brussels.

Some 24 EU member states



have adopted the rules or are laying down the groundwork to give national authorities powers to issue restrictions, the commission said.

But Breton pointed out that only 10 members, without naming which countries, had used the rules to restrict or exclude high-risk vendors.

"This is too slow, and it poses a major security risk and exposes the union's collective security, since it creates a major dependency for the EU and serious vulnerabilities," he said.

The move comes three years after the commission introduced strict 5G rules but they did not include an outright ban on any supplier and did not name Huawei.

Thursday's announcement therefore marks a departure for the bloc and represents the EU's increasingly tougher line on China, while maintaining ties with Beijing.

The United States has put pressure on Europe to exclude the companies over national security concerns and last year issued a ban on the import or sale of communications equipment from Chinese companies including Huawei and ZTE.

Washington has previously expressed fears that Huawei equipment could be compromised by Chinese intelligence.

Britain has also blocked Huawei's involvement in the roll-out of its 5G telecoms network.

AFP

Boeing expects number of commercial planes in air to double by 2042

Paris, France – Boeing expects the number of commercial planes in service around the world to double in the next 20 years, according to estimates published on Sunday, anticipating a slightly larger increase than competitor Airbus.

The American aircraft manufacturer estimates 48,575 planes will be in service in 2042, compared with 24,500 last year. This will require producing, across all manufacturers combined, 42,595 planes – half to replace existing aircraft, and the other half to account for growth.

North America will take 23% of these new planes, the Asia-Pacific region 22%, Eurasia 21% and China alone 20%.

The projections, published on the eve of the opening of the Bourget air show near Paris, are in line with ones Boeing made last year, when it forecast a world fleet of 47,080 aircraft in 2041.

On Wednesday, rival manufacturer Airbus said it anticipated a need for 40,850 new passenger and cargo planes by 2042, bringing the world fleet to



Boeing estimates 48,575 planes will be in service in 2042, compared with 24,500 last year

a total of 46,560 aircraft.

After the shock to air travel demand brought on by the Covid-19 pandemic, the industry is now "shifting from a recovery mindset back to the fundamentals that drive air travel", said Darren Hulst, head of commercial marketing at Boeing.

Hulst pointed to the link between the propensity to travel and world GDP, which he expected to grow substantially over the next two decades, bringing another 500mn people into the middle class and making them potential air passengers.

Boeing also expects low-cost carriers to more than double in size over the next 20 years –

substantial growth, but slower than the past 20 years, when their combined fleet grew six-fold.

Demand for cargo planes should also remain strong, with Boeing predicting air cargo traffic growth to outstrip overall growth in global trade.

AFP

US business titans flock to China despite fraying ties

Beijing, China – From Elon Musk to Bill Gates and Apple's Tim Cook, some of the United States' biggest business titans have headed to Beijing, seemingly defying the barrage of doomsayer narratives around the US-China trade war.

The stream of visits by some of the world's richest men began after China abruptly ended nearly three years of Covid isolation late last year.

In Beijing, the American magnates have talked up their optimism about China's vast market and trade ties between the world's two largest economies.

Landing in China in late May, Tesla owner Musk reportedly said that Beijing and Washington's interests were "intertwined, like conjoined twins, who are inseparable from each other".

Apple CEO Cook also spoke of his firm's "symbiotic" relationship with China – home to the world's largest iPhone factory.

The biggest honour of all – a meeting on Friday with Xi Jinping – was reserved for Gates, whom the Chinese leader hailed as "our old friend", according to the state-run People's Daily.

The visits come as US-China trade tensions deepen, and after trade between the two countries reached a record \$690.6bn last year, according to the US Department of Commerce.

But businesses are worried about a slow in US exports to China, America's third-largest trading partner, with the drop strongly felt in the tech industry.

Citing national security con-

cerns, the United States in 2022 blocked exports to China of the most advanced semiconductors and the equipment needed to make them.

China has hit back by vowing



A news broadcast shows footage of Bill Gates during his meeting with Chinese President Xi Jinping (not seen), on a giant screen outside a shopping mall in Beijing on Friday (AFP)

to accelerate its efforts to become self-reliant on semiconductors.

"China-US trade was... once mutually dependent and beneficial," analysts at the Peterson Institute for International Economics wrote in a recent paper.

"US exports to China are one more channel through which the bilateral relationship continues to deteriorate."

'Minority voice'

The US government is engaged in high-stakes disputes with China over policy issues ranging from Taiwan to human rights, with no sign of tensions abating despite an upcoming visit to Beijing by US Secretary of State Antony Blinken.

US businesses in China have long been at the forefront of advocating for engagement, arguing that a strong economic relationship could spur reform.

The visits by the magnates show just how embedded some of the world's biggest firms are in China, despite the political tensions. With China growing more repressive under Xi, however, long-influential business lobbies are "increasingly a minority voice", according to Joe Mazur, an analyst at Trivium.

"The business community is one of the last remaining pieces of ballast that is stabilising the US-China relationship."

The business community in China will be closely watching Blinken's visit this weekend, which analysts say is unlikely to

ease the confrontation.

"American business has substantial investments, thousands of employees, and still considers China a promising market," James Zimmerman, a Beijing-based former chairman of the American Chamber of Commerce in China, told AFP.

But the US and Chinese governments, he said, "have hollowed out any level of collaboration and there is little room for developing even a pretence of goodwill".

The US-China Business Council, long a key interlocutor between Beijing and Washington, feels left in the lurch, with its efforts against stricter trade curbs having failed to sway an increasingly hawkish Congress.

AFP

MHD Automobiles hosts special off-road test drive for Ineos Grenadier in Muscat

Ineos Grenadier, the trailblazing automotive company committed to engineering durable and versatile all-terrain vehicles, brought together numerous automotive enthusiasts and industry experts to an exclusive test drive event, which took place from May 29 to June 1.

This event served as a platform to unveil the Ineos Grenadier, a remarkable off-road vehicle engineered to conquer any challenge.

The well-attended event took place at The Drive Coffee (Oman Automobile Association) and gave attendees the unique opportunity to experience firsthand the power, capability, and craftsmanship of the Ineos Grenadier.

The vehicle's exceptional performance and its ability to thrive in rugged environments were showcased, solidifying its status as a true off-road icon,' said a press statement.

The test drive event also featured a series of engaging activities designed to immerse participants in the remarkable capabilities of this robust all-terrain vehicle.

Attendees put the Grenadier through its paces in a variety of challenging off-road scenarios, including steep inclines, treacherous descents, and rough terrains, that allowed them to witness the vehicle's durability and unrivaled off-road capabilities.

"We are thrilled that enthusiasts



and professionals alike experienced the Ineos Grenadier firsthand," said Mohsin Hani al Bahrani, CEO, Mohsin Haider Darwish Automobiles LLC.

"This vehicle represents a new era in off-road adventure,

combining rugged design with cutting-edge engineering. The test drive event offered attendees the chance to witness the Grenadier's remarkable performance, resilience, and versatility."

The Ineos Grenadier has been meticulously designed and engineered to meet the demands of adventurers, explorers, and professionals who require a vehicle capable of tackling the toughest challenges.

With a robust ladder frame, superior ground clearance, and an advanced four-wheel drive system, the Grenadier delivers exceptional off-road capability without compromising on comfort or functionality.

This exclusive event also provided attendees with the opportunity to interact with Ineos Grenadier representatives, who were on hand to answer questions and share insights about the vehicle's design, technology,

and future developments.

Participants gained valuable knowledge about the brand's commitment to sustainable manufacturing practices and its dedication to producing vehicles that are built to last.

International Day of the African Child commemorated: AHF Africa

AIDS Healthcare Foundation (AHF) Africa joined the world on Friday in commemorating the International Day of the African Child with their #Protect-TheChild campaign.

Focused on 'Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) Access through Digital Empowerment', this initiative aims to enable children across the continent to receive vital education to help keep them healthy. AHF Africa calls on the African community to support age-appropriate CSE, empowering young individuals to make informed choices and contribute to national development.

Recognising the risks children face in the digital environment, AHF Africa emphasises the importance of equipping them with



knowledge and skills to navigate online actions safely, understand their rights, and make informed decisions about their sexual and reproductive health.

"Contrary to common misconceptions, CSE does not promote sexual activity, and there is strong evidence for its positive impact on young people's physi-

cal and emotional development," said Dr Penninah lutung, AHF's Africa Bureau Chief.

"Comprehensive Sexuality Education covers various critical areas, including abstinence, gender equality, human rights, gender-based violence, and sexual and reproductive health, ensuring young people have the

knowledge to protect themselves and their well-being. We remain committed to advocating for the rights of African children and strive to promote access to CSE. Together, let us protect children, equip them with essential knowledge, and empower them to thrive in the digital age."

Extensive global research, including in Sub-Saharan Africa, highlights the benefits of Comprehensive Sexuality Education. It reduces early sexual engagement, fosters positive attitudes towards sexual and reproductive health, decreases risky behaviours, strengthens self-awareness, and equips young individuals with knowledge to combat HIV, STIs, and unplanned pregnancies, challenging harmful gender norms.

HEALTH MINISTER RECEIVES KUWAITI AMBASSADOR



H E Dr Hilal Ali al Sabti, Minister of Health, on Sunday received at his office H E Dr Mohammed Nasser al Hajri, Ambassador of the State of Kuwait to the Sultanate of Oman. They had a cordial conversation and discussed topics of mutual interest. The meeting further addressed means of promoting bilateral cooperation in the fields of health

Ooredoo offers Shahry customers extra data on certain plans

Ooredoo is giving new and existing Shahry customers the opportunity to benefit from an extra data boost, at no extra cost, on certain Endless and Omanuna plans.

The selected Endless and Omanuna plans are available contract-free and starting from just RO15 per month, giving customers even greater value and flexibility!

Customers on a Shahry Endless 15 plan will receive 3GB extra data on top 24GB data, while those opting for a Shahry Endless 20 plan can enjoy 5GB data in addition to 40GB.

Customers on a Shahry Omanuna 25 plan will benefit from an 8 GB data boost on top of 60 GB

and Omanuna 30 customers will receive 10GB data on top of 70GB. Omanuna 50 customers will benefit from 25GB data in addition to 200GB, while Omanuna 100 customers will receive not less than a whopping 250GB extra data on top of what is already 1 TB!

Customers on any of the Shahry Endless or Omanuna plans, can use the included data locally and in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) region. Apart from access to the Internet, the Shahry plans also include voice, which are minutes to make calls to local numbers, as well as international calls to GCC countries, India, Bangladesh and Pakistan.

ahlibank introduces comprehensive auto insurance with enhanced benefits

ahlibank, in its efforts to deliver more convenience and ease to its customers, has introduced comprehensive auto insurance coverage in collaboration with Dhofar Insurance Company, with enhanced benefits for its esteemed customers.

With this new insurance policy, car owners can be stress-free knowing that their vehicles are protected against a variety of unexpected events. The comprehensive insurance policy includes a range of benefits for its customers, such as accidental collision or degradation, fire,

natural disasters, theft, and deliberate acts of others, and comprehensive cover for vehicles up to ten years old.

In addition to this, there are services which include the UAE extension cover with Orange Card, the GCC extension cover, and dealer's/agency repair cover. With the policy, car owners are also aided with roadside assistance in case of a breakdown or any other emergency, ensuring that they are never stranded on the side of the road.

With easy and fast claim processing, and a seamless policy issuance process, auto

insurance with ahlibank will provide customers with the services they need.

These offerings give them peace of mind and ensure that they are fully protected in any situation.

"We are committed to providing the best possible solutions to our customers and we understand that car owners need more than just insurance coverage, they need a partner who can support them in times of need," said Muneer al Balushi, AGM-Head of Retail Distribution, ahlibank.

"Our comprehensive auto insurance policy is designed to

provide our customers with the support and protection they need to drive with confidence. The insurance policy curated by the bank caters to the diverse needs of vehicle owners, ensuring that they are adequately protected in case of any unforeseen events."

Aside from the comprehensive coverage options, ahlibank Auto Insurance Conventional, in collaboration with Dhofar Insurance Company, also offers third-party cover that protects against death, bodily injury, material damage, medical expenses and personal accidents.

This feature ensures that car owners are protected against any liabilities that may arise from accidents involving third parties. And that's not all; by providing attractive rates, a hassle-free documentation process and quick turnaround time, the motor insurance is available conveniently across all of ahlibank's branches.

With its comprehensive coverage and range of benefits, ahlibank's new auto insurance policy is the ideal solution for car owners who want to protect their vehicles and enjoy carefree while on the road.

MoH undersecretary receives Gulf CDC chief Pasi Penttinen



H E Dr Saeed bin Harib al Lamki, Undersecretary for Health Affairs in Ministry in the Ministry of Health, received Dr Pasi Penttinen, Chief Executive Officer of the Gulf Center for Disease Prevention and Control (Gulf CDC) and his accompanying delegation at the ministry headquarters on Sunday.

At the beginning of the meeting, H E Lamki stressed the importance of joint cooperation between the various authorities of the ministry and the Gulf CDC to ensure success in its mission and yield positive outcomes.

Dr Penttinen stated that this two-day visit to the Sultanate of Oman is aiming at discussing and identifying Gulf CDC strategy and work plan for 2024, recognising the center's upcoming programs and strategies to achieve its vision and review the work progress and challenges faced.

In order to address aspects of joint cooperation, the Gulf CDC delegation will visit further the GCC Statistical Center (GCC STAT), the World Health Organization, and Sultan Qaboos University. A number of senior officials from the ministry also attended the meeting.



Bank Muscat launches waiver on Credit Card annual fees for 1st year

To further enhance its pioneering role in providing the best banking services to all segments of society and to continue to implement plans and strategies to boost financial inclusion, Bank Muscat, the leading financial service provider in the Sultanate of Oman, has launched a new offer on its credit cards.

Bank Muscat's credit cards are an ideal choice for customers as they open a world of opportunities and unrivalled benefits, making them one of the most popular banking options in Oman.

Credit cardholders can enjoy a number of benefits as well as safe and secure payment options for travel plans with family and friends in and outside the sultanate.

Recently, the bank launched a special offer for customers, whereby those who apply for all eligible Bank Muscat Credit Cards will get a waiver of annual fees for the first year. The offer will continue until August 31 and is valid across both eligible Primary and Secondary Credit Cards.

This offer comes as part of Bank Muscat's strategy to provide special offers to customers and users of Bank Muscat cards in general and credit cards in particular. Bank Muscat cards contribute to enhancing the concept of electronic payment and completing various transactions, especially at times that require reducing the use of cash, such as travel, as credit cards offer more convenience and security with their multiple features.

On this occasion, Abdulnasir N al Raisi, General Manager - Personal Banking, Bank Muscat, said, "We are pleased with the excellent response and feedback from the large number of customers, who are keen to take advantage of the various benefits of credit cards. As the leading financial services provider in the sultanate, Bank Muscat is keen to provide a banking experience that is in line with customer expectations and global banking trends.

"I would like to take this opportunity to thank all our valued customers for their continuous confidence in the bank's products and services. I also urge all our customers to take full advantage of the exclusive offer to get Bank Muscat credit cards to enjoy travel benefits that come with them, especially with the advent of the summer holidays. I do hope that they have the best possible experience when traveling this season."

In addition to the different benefits Bank Muscat's credit cards offer including the free travel insurance, credit cardholders get to enjoy exclusive discounts across a wide range of services including: lifestyle, health and beauty, entertainment, travel and hotel stays.

Bank Muscat is currently running its international travel cashback campaign where all credit cardholders who spend RO100 or more will have a chance to win 100% cashback. The offer is valid till December 31.

Besides, and in line with its customer-centric vision 'To serve you better, everyday', Bank Muscat has launched a new service within its Internet and Mobile banking channels, which enables customers to submit applications for credit cards digitally.

The new service further expands the list of options available to customers through the bank's various digital channels and enhances banking convenience leading to reduce waiting times when visiting branches.

Shell Oman joins Outward Bound Oman as partner

Committed to fostering a stable and inclusive energy transition roadmap, Shell Oman Marketing Company recently signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Outward Bound Oman (OBO), becoming its official 'Journey Partner' and affirming its support to the educational, non-profit foundation for the next three years.

The MoU, while primarily being directed at delivering an exceptional experience and boosting convenience to clients of both parties, also focuses on powering OBO's journeys with quality fuels, expanding Shell Oman's EV network, and encouraging the use of cleaner energy through the execution of sustainability-linked initiatives.

A keen supporter of OBO's outdoor educational workshops and skill development programmes dedicated to the youth, Shell Oman is sponsoring Shell Fuel Cards for OBO's fleet of vehicles which not only include an extensive range of Shell lubricants but also its premium fuel,



Shell V-Power.

As per the terms of the memorandum and in an endeavor to fortify its EV infrastructure, Shell Oman will support OBO through the installation of EV charging points at their centres in Muscat, Jebel Akhdar and Sharqiya Sands.

Additionally, Shell Oman will collaborate with OBO in providing solar energy solutions reaffirming its role as a partner in the nation's decarbonisation and net-zero emissions agenda.

Apart from access to fuel, lubricants, and EV charging points, the MoU is an integral part of Shell Oman's CSR strategy that focuses on youth empowerment and community upskilling and will aid in the socioeconomic progress of the nation.

Commenting on the signing of the agreement, Dr Mohammed al Balushi, CEO of Shell Oman, said, "We are indeed delighted to join hands with OBO once again. This initiative, while reiterating Shell Oman's commitment to the Shell Powering Progress strategy, is also a reflection of the inherent zeal of both parties to engage in meaningful collaborations to further the objectives of Oman Vision 2040 while simultaneously contributing to the UN Sustainable Development Goals."

He added saying, "While the nation's transition to a sustainable, circular economy is a key priority area, it is also important to remember that inculcating a sense of responsibility and ethicality amongst the youth is critical to achieving these long-term objectives."

"By powering OBO's innovative programmes, Shell Oman seeks to go beyond nurturing a more competitive, creative, and progressive workforce - it seeks to raise the next generation of change makers who not only reserve a deeper understanding of climate change but are innately motivated to spearhead efforts toward sustainable development."

Mark Evans, executive director of Outward Bound Oman said that the Shell Oman's 'Powering Progress' strategy is a perfect fit for what they strive to achieve at Outward Bound Oman in terms of equipping young Omanis with the soft skills required to address the challenges that face us all.

Alizz Islamic Bank introduces Alizz Jr to secure children's future

As part of its efforts to constantly provide exceptional product & services, Alizz Islamic Bank recently introduced the 'Alizz Jr' value proposition for parents with children under the age of 15 at Avenues Mall.

This comprehensive program offers a wide range of attractive benefits and services designed to meet the unique needs of today's parents, while also promoting a culture of saving.

With a focus on securing a brighter future for the children. Parents/guardians can conveniently visit any branch of Alizz Islamic Bank in order to avail the program's benefits.

'Alizz Jr' offers parents the opportunity to earn attractive profits on the amount they deposit in a savings plan that can be used for education/higher studies or for future savings of the child.

This will provide parents with flexible options for deposits and standing instructions, allowing them to choose between weekly, monthly, quarterly, semi-annual, or annual contributions.

This aims to support the children's higher education studies, enabling them to continue their journey at an affordable finance rate with easy and flexible procedures in future.

Additionally, 'Alizz Jr' has no minimum balance requirement for savings accounts, allowing individuals to open an account without the need for a specific minimum amount. It also includes unlimited local funds transfers via the Mobile Payment Service (MPS/Wallet to Wallet fund transfer) through the Alizz Islamic Bank mobile banking application.

It is worth noting that Alizz Islamic Bank has adopted a comprehensive strategy to offer services and products that cater to the diverse segments of society, ensuring that the offerings are tailored to meet their needs.



proud history, as one of the first financial institutions established in the sultanate and the Arab world respectively, the group provides a complete range of financial products and services for personal banking and corporate banking clients.

As a part of a larger group, Alizz Islamic Bank draws upon the successful track record of Arab Bank's experience in Islamic Banking on an international level. This synergy has helped create an enriching sharia'a compliant banking experience designed for today's modern world.

The bank has strategically invested in developing its workforce and harnessing cutting-edge technologies to ensure exceptional and swift customer service.

The bank ensures the delivery of exceptional, responsive customer service, transparent processes and innovative products and solutions that are inspired by sharia'a that cater to the diverse needs of both commercial and corporate customers.

Alizz Islamic Bank, a licensed financial institution operating as a closed public shareholding company, is owned by Oman Arab Bank. With Oman Arab Bank and Arab Banks' rich and

Blinken opens rare Beijing visit in bid to lower temperature

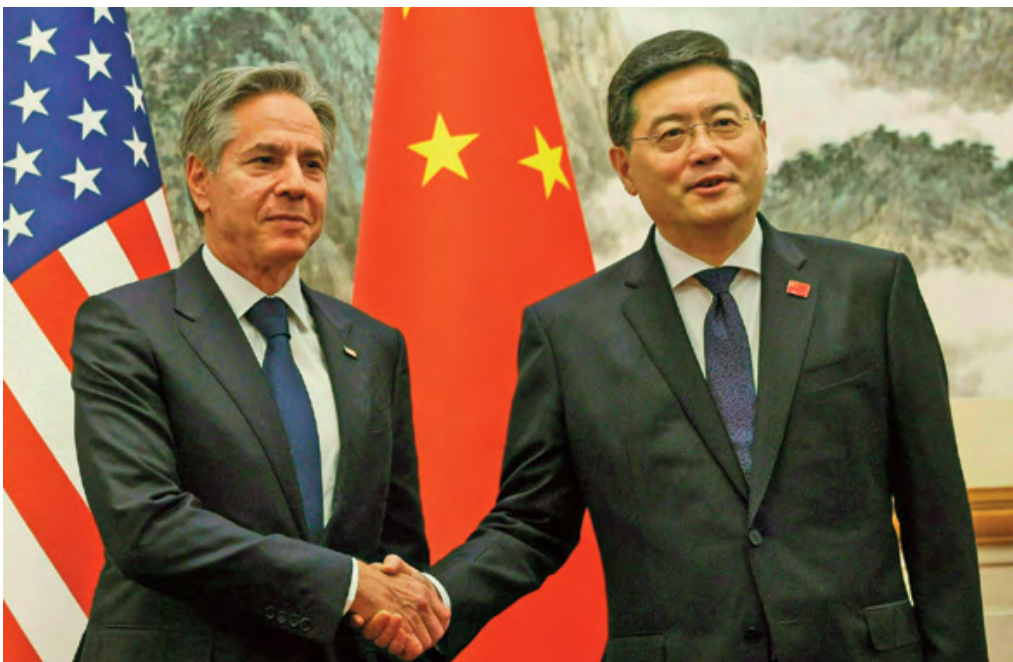
Beijing, China - Secretary of State Antony Blinken began talks in China on Sunday on the highest-level trip by a US official in nearly five years as the two powers looked to notch down the temperature in an escalating rivalry.

Both sides have voiced guarded hope of improving communication and preventing conflict, with the world's two largest economies at odds on an array of issues from trade to technology and regional security.

Blinken and his aides opened the two-day visit by meeting Foreign Minister Qin Gang at an ornately decorated state villa in Beijing's ancient Diaoyutai gardens, where the Chinese hosts will later throw a banquet dinner.

Qin and Blinken walked along a red carpet and shook hands next to a pair of national flags standing in front of a painting of craggy mountains and wispy clouds. Blinken earlier said he would seek to avoid 'miscalculations' and to 'responsibly manage' relations with the country identified by US policymakers across party lines as the greatest challenge to Washington's global primacy.

He was originally scheduled to visit in February but abruptly scrapped his plans as the United States protested - and later shot down - what it said was a Chinese spy balloon flying over its soil. US President Joe Biden played down the balloon episode as Blinken was heading to China, saying: "I don't think the leadership knew where it was and knew what was in it and knew



US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and China's Foreign Minister Qin Gang shake hands ahead of a meeting at the Diaoyutai State Guesthouse in Beijing on Sunday (AFP)

Blinken and his aides opened the two-day visit by meeting FM Qin Gang at an ornately decorated state villa in Beijing's ancient Diaoyutai gardens

what was going on."

"I think it was more embarrassing than it was intentional," Biden told reporters on Saturday.

Biden said he hoped to again meet President Xi Jinping after their lengthy and strikingly cor-

dial meeting in November on the sidelines of a Group of 20 summit in Bali, where they agreed on Blinken's visit.

"I'm hoping that, over the next several months, I'll be meeting with Xi again and talking about legitimate differences we have but also how there's areas we can get along," Biden said.

The two leaders are likely to attend the next G20 summit, in September in New Delhi, and Xi is invited to travel to San Francisco in November when the United States hosts the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum.

Array of disputes

The United States and China are at odds over a slew of issues in-

cluding trade, technology and Taiwan.

Beijing has not ruled out seizing Taiwan by force and has conducted military drills twice since August near the self-governing democracy, in response to the actions of top US lawmakers.

Ahead of Blinken's visit, Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin said the United States needed to 'respect China's core concerns' and 'give up the illusion of dealing with China 'from a position of strength'.

Beijing has been especially irritated by Biden's restrictions on the export of high-end semiconductors to China, with the United States both fearing their military application and eager to prevent the communist state

from dominating next-generation technologies.

In a rising domestic priority for the United States, an aide said Blinken is expected to press China to curb precursor chemicals sent to Latin America to produce fentanyl, the powerful painkiller behind an addiction pandemic that kills tens of thousands of Americans a year.

Washington has also lashed China over human rights, with Blinken's visit the first by a cabinet member since the United States formally accused Beijing of genocide against the mostly Muslim Uyghur minority.

Keeping allies close

As part of the Biden administration's focus on keeping allies close, Blinken spoke by telephone with his counterparts from both Japan and South Korea during his 20-hour trans-Pacific journey.

Biden's national security advisor, Jake Sullivan, travelled to Tokyo for separate three-way meetings involving Japan and both South Korea and the Philippines. In recent months the United States has reached deals on troop deployments in southern Japan and the northern Philippines, both strategically close to Taiwan.

Blinken before departure also met in Washington with his counterpart from ally Singapore, who voiced hope that the United States would stay as a power but also find ways to coexist with a rising China.

AFP



A voter holds up his voting card during Mali's referendum in Bamako on Sunday (AFP)

Mali junta holds vote on new constitution

Bamako, Mali - Malians went to the polls on Sunday to pass judgement on the governing junta's constitution, which has fuelled speculation that the country's strongman ruler will seek election.

The west African nation has been under military rule since an August 2020 coup, which came after a decade of instability marked by militant insurgencies and political and economic crisis.

Some 8.4mn citizens are eligible to vote 'yes' or 'no' on the draft constitution in the first electoral test for leader Colonel Assimi Goita, 40, who has vowed to lead the country back to civilian rule in 2024 elections.

Voting began at 0800 GMT and results are expected within 72 hours. But election turnout is typically low in the country of 21mn, where many have grown weary of chronic instability, while others face the direct danger of militant attacks in central and northern regions.

continued, and Bamako has since broken its alliance with Paris in favour of Russia and its Wagner mercenaries.

Disputed parliamentary elections in March 2020, and mass protests against a government unable to reign in the insurgency, corruption and economic crisis, ended in a coup.

Goita initially appointed an interim president, but kicked him out in a second coup in 2021 and stepped into the top job himself.

Now doubts are swirling over his commitment to step down next year. Mali's ruling junta called on Friday for the immediate departure of the country's UN peacekeeping mission, a central and controversial actor in a security crisis that has claimed the lives of nearly 200 peacekeepers in the last decade.

The new constitution will strengthen the role of the president, who will have the right to hire and fire the PM and cabinet members

The African nation's military rulers had increasingly imposed operational restrictions on the peacekeepers, ultimately accusing the mission on Friday of not only being a 'failure', but even becoming 'part of the problem'.

The new constitution will strengthen the role of the president, who will have the right to hire and fire the prime minister and cabinet members.

The government will answer to the president, and not parliament as the current 1992 document states.

AFP

Indonesia orders 13 long-range military radars from Thales

Paris, France - Indonesia has ordered 13 long-range military radars from Thales to boost airspace surveillance efforts across its immense archipelago, the French manufacturer and state-owned Indonesian defence firm PT Len Industri said on Sunday.

The Ground Master 400 Alpha (GM400a) radars will allow the Indonesian military to 'benefit from a single air picture integrating the detection of all types of threats, from jets and missiles to hovering helicopters and unmanned air vehicles', the companies said in a joint statement.

The amount of the contract, which spans several years, has not been disclosed. Each radar costs several tens of millions of dollars.

The GM400a is a mobile radar with a range of 515km (320 miles) and 'integrates artificial intelligence capabilities to manage the massive amounts of data' it receives, president of Thales International Pascale Sourisse told AFP.

The purchase of the 13 latest-generation radars 'shows this country's concern for monitoring the surrounding airspace, which is directly linked to the situation in the Indo-Pacific', where China is asserting its ambitions, she said.

The contract provides for Thales to build the radars and the computer system for processing the information they receive. PT Len is in charge of building the stations where the equipment will be installed, as

well as certain components of the radars.

Growing geopolitical tensions have led to strong growth in the radar market, and Sourisse said this was why Thales had transformed its industrial organisation and developed production capacities in new countries as well as France.

The amount of the contract, which spans several years, has not been disclosed. Each radar costs several tens of millions of dollars The Ground Master 400 Alpha radars have a range of 515km

"We have to set up in new countries to meet the needs in terms of production volume, but also the requirements of our customers who want to take advantage of these contracts to develop their country's economy, create jobs and benefit from technology transfers to master" new skills, she said.

More than 80 GM400 and GM400a radars have been sold to 19 countries, according to Thales.

AFP

THE GRAND PARADE



People watch French aircraft patrol 'Patrouille de France' planes flying over a French battle ship during the Grand Parade, as the ships sail through the Seine river, in Barneville-sur-Seine, on Sunday (AFP)

Mitsotakis on course to return as Greek premier

Athens, Greece - After an inconclusive election in May, Greece returns to the ballot box on next Sunday with conservative former prime minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis on course to win a second straight four-year term.

Polls show that Mitsotakis' New Democracy party is in line to be the clear winner, with between 40 and 43.9 per cent of the vote.

Mitsotakis, 55, last month cruised to victory with a score of 40.79 per cent, more than 20 points ahead of his nearest rival, former leftist prime minister Alexis Tsipras. But he fell short of a workable parliamentary majority and declined to form a coalition government.

A Pulse poll for private Skai TV last week said nine out of 10 New Democracy voters would vote conservative again on Sunday. Mitsotakis says that under his stewardship, Greeks paid lower taxes and the country became a success story attractive to investors, posting growth



People walk past the pre-election poster of Kyriakos Mitsotakis, leader of the conservative New Democracy party on Saturday (AFP)

above the European average and returning tourism revenue to nearly pre-pandemic levels.

'Growth will continue'

"I promise Greeks that (economic) growth will continue," he told Skai TV last week. "We are more experienced, more prepared and more determined."

Mitsotakis' critics counter

that he showered billions of euros on political allies and friendly media, tried to bury a major wiretapping scandal and attempted to dodge responsibility for Greece's worst train disaster in February.

This time, Harvard graduate and former McKinsey financial consultant Mitsotakis faces a challenge on his right that could determine the size of his parliamentar-

mentary group. A new hard-right party, Niki, narrowly missed out on parliamentary seats in May and is now polling over the required 3 per cent threshold, as is the established nationalist party Greek Solution.

Another new party, Pleafsi Eleftherias, headed by hard leftist former parliament speaker Zoe Konstantopoulou is also likely to clinch parliamentary representation. And former finance minister Yanis Varoufakis also seeks election under the radical left MeRa25 party. If eight parties succeed in entering parliament on Sunday, the winner will need a higher percentage of the vote to maximise their parliamentary group in the 300-seat chamber.

Mitsotakis has been criticised for warning that a third election could be held in August, at the height of the busy tourism season, if a government cannot be formed after Sunday.

A final vote?

Last month, the former PM

blamed deep policy differences with his closest rivals, leftist leader Alexis Tsipras and socialist head Nikos Androulakis, for his refusal to form a coalition government after May's ballot.

And he has declined to cooperate with any hard-right party.

The upcoming election is held under new rules that give the winner a bonus of up to 50 seats, facilitating efforts to form a single-party government.

The vote will be conducted in the shadow of a migrant boat disaster on June 14 that claimed 78 lives, with hundreds more feared missing and unlikely to be found.

But the tragedy, which has been declared Greece's worst maritime accident, is not expected to heavily influence the election result.

The election could also spell the end of Tsipras' 15-year control of the leftist Syriza party, as he has already lost four electoral contests to Mitsotakis.

AFP

Grief after 41 dead in Uganda school attack

41 people, mostly students, were massacred in the worst attack of its kind in Uganda since 2010

Mpondwe, Uganda - Grieving families prepared to bury their dead in western Uganda on Sunday while others desperately searched for loved ones still missing after militants killed dozens of students in a school attack. Officials say at least 41 people, mostly students, were massacred on Friday in the worst attack of its kind in Uganda since 2010.

Victims were hacked, shot and burned in the late-night raid on Lhubiriha Secondary School in Mpondwe, which lies less than two kilometres (1.2 miles) from the border with the Democratic Republic of Congo. Pope Francis offered a prayer on Sunday for 'the young student victims of the brutal attack' that has shocked Uganda and drawn condemnation from around the globe.

Ugandan authorities have blamed the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), a militia based in DR Congo, and are pursuing the attackers who fled back toward the border with six abductees in captivity. Fifteen others from the community, including five girls, were still missing, said Eriphaz Muhindi, chairman of Kasese district, which shares a long and forested border with DR Congo.

Seventeen victims were burned beyond recognition when the attackers set a locked dormitory ablaze, frustrating efforts to identify the dead and account for the missing. 'Great pain'

Muhindi said they had been taken away for DNA testing, a process that could take some time. "This is a great pain to their families," he told AFP.

Families desperate for news waited all night in the cold outside a mortuary in Bwera, a town near where the attack occurred.

Those able to identify loved ones inside the mortuary embraced and wept as they received the bodies and took them away in coffins for burial. Others milled about anxiously, still without any information of their relatives. The government said on



The relative of a victim of the Mpondwe Lhubiriha Secondary School mourns outside the Bwera General Hospital Mortuary, Kasese, on Sunday (AFP)

Victims were hacked, shot and burned in the late-night raid on Lhubiriha Secondary School in Mpondwe, which lies less than two kilometres (1.2 miles) from the border with the Democratic Republic of Congo

Sunday it would assist with funeral arrangements and supporting the injured.

Thirty-seven students died in the attack, said Uganda's first lady and education minister, Janet Museveni.

The badly burned bodies of 17 male students were found in their dormitory which was to-

tally destroyed by fire. Witnesses said they locked the door when they heard gunshots. Twenty female students tried to run to safety but were hacked to death with machetes. Investigators said a security guard at the school gate was shot dead as the attackers forced their way in, while three members of the public were also killed.

'They will pay'

The African Union, France and the United States, a close ally of Uganda, offered their condolences and condemned the bloodshed.

UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres said: "Those responsible for this appalling act must be brought to justice."

Museveni said the army would track down 'these evil people and they will pay for what they have done'.

But questions have been raised about how the attackers managed to evade detection in a border region with a heavy military presence.

Major General Dick Olum told AFP that intelligence sug-

gested the presence of the ADF in the area at least two days before the attack, and an investigation would be needed to establish what went wrong. Uganda and DR Congo launched a joint offensive in 2021 to drive the ADF out of their Congolese strongholds, but the measures have failed to blunt the group's violence. Originally insurgents in Uganda, the ADF gained a foothold in eastern DRC in the 1990s and have since been accused of killing thousands of civilians.

The Islamic State group has claimed the ADF as its Central African affiliate.

Attacks in Uganda are rare but in June 1998, 80 students were burnt to death in their dormitories in an ADF raid on Kichwamba Technical Institute near the DR Congo border.

More than 100 students were abducted.

Friday's attack is the deadliest in Uganda since 2010, when 76 people were killed in twin bombings in the capital Kampala by the Somalia-based group Al-Shabaab. AFP

Iraq unveils ancient stone tablet returned by Italy

Baghdad, Iraq - Iraq unveiled on Sunday a 2,800-year-old stone tablet returned by Italy, as the war-ravaged country works to recover from abroad antiquities looted from its territory. The tablet - whose text is written in cuneiform, the Babylonian alphabet - bears the insignia of Shalmaneser III, the Assyrian king who ruled the region of Nimrod, in present-day northern Iraq, from 858 to 823 BC.

The circumstances surrounding the tablet's arrival in Italy remain unclear, but the Italian authorities handed it over to Iraqi President Abdul Latif Rashid during a visit to Bologna over the past week. "I would like to thank the Italian officials for their efforts and cooperation in bringing back this piece," Rashid said during a ceremony on Sunday at a Baghdad presidential palace to hand the artefact over to the national museum.

The tablet had arrived in the 1980s in Italy, where it was seized by police, said Laith Majid Hussein, director of Baghdad's council of antiquities and heritage. Iraqi Culture Minister Ahmed Fakak al-Badrani said the circumstances behind its discovery were unclear.



Iraqi Culture Minister Ahmed Fakak al-Badrani presents a 2,800-year-old stone tablet during a press conference in Baghdad, on Sunday (AFP)

"Perhaps (it was found) during archaeological excavations or during work on the Mosul dam," Iraq's biggest built in the 1980s, he said. He underlined the importance of the piece, "whose cuneiform text is complete".

Modern Iraq's territory is the cradle of the Sumerian, Akkadian, Babylonian and Assyrian civilisations, to which humanity owes writing and the first cities.

The country's antiquities have been the target of looting that increased in the chaos following the US-led invasion of 2003.

"We will continue to work to recover all the archaeological pieces of Iraqi history from

abroad," said the Iraqi president.

"We want to make the national Iraq Museum one of the best museums in the world, and we will work to do so." In May, New York prosecutor Alvin Bragg announced the return of two ancient sculptures to Iraq: a limestone Mesopotamian elephant and an alabaster Sumerian bull from the old city of Uruk.

The figurines were smuggled into New York in the late 1990s, according to the prosecutor's office. The bull was part of the private collection of Shelby White, a billionaire philanthropist and Met trustee. AFP

72-hour truce between Sudan's warring generals takes effect

Khartoum, Sudan - A 72-hour ceasefire between Sudan's warring generals took effect on Sunday to allow for the delivery of desperately needed aid to the country, on the eve of a humanitarian conference.

The army led by Abdel Fattah al-Burhan has since April 15 been battling paramilitary forces commanded by his former deputy Mohamed Hamdan Daglo, after the two fell out in a bitter power struggle.

Multiple truces have been agreed and broken in the war that has claimed the lives of more than 2,000 people and driven over two million from their homes, including at least 528,000 who fled abroad.

The latest ceasefire came into force at 6am (0400 GMT), with the mediators saying the two sides had agreed to refrain from attacks and allow freedom of movement and the delivery of humanitarian aid.

"The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and United States of America announce the agreement of representatives of the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) on a ceasefire throughout Sudan for a



Sudanese wait for a gas truck to arrive to exchange their empty canisters, in Wad Madani, the capital of Sudan's al-Jazirah state, on June 14 (AFP)

period of 72 hours," the Saudi foreign ministry said.

Witnesses in Khartoum said the situation was 'calm'.

"We want a full ceasefire," Sami Omar, who lives in Khartoum's twin city of Omdurman, told AFP.

"A truce is not sufficient for us to return to our lives. They may stop fighting, but the RSF will not leave the homes (they occupy) and passing through checkpoints is just as difficult."

The United Nations will on Monday host an international donors' conference for Sudan in

the Swiss city of Geneva.

Intensifying air strikes

Clashes had intensified before both sides pledged to respect the truce in separate statements on Saturday evening.

The RSF said it would abide by the cessation of hostilities, while the army said 'despite our commitment to the ceasefire, we will respond decisively to any violations the rebels commit'.

Saudi Arabia had threatened on Saturday to 'postpone' negotiations on its soil between the

two sides 'should the parties fail to respect the 72-hour ceasefire'. The talks, which began weeks ago, have so far failed to produce any concrete agreement.

On Saturday, warplanes struck residential districts of Khartoum, killing '17 civilians, including five children', according to a citizens' support committee. AFP was unable to independently confirm the figures.

The RSF accused the army of targeting residential areas and claimed to have shot down a fighter jet. A video the paramilitary forces posted online showed destroyed homes and blankets covering what appeared to be dead bodies.

Since battles began, the death toll across Sudan has topped 2,000, the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project says.

A record 25mn people - more than half the northeast African country's population - depends on humanitarian aid, the UN says. Intense fighting has rocked the western region of Darfur, with the United States saying as many as 1,100 people have been killed in the West Darfur state capital of El Geneina alone. AFP

Switzerland looks set to back carbon neutral climate law

Geneva, Switzerland - The Swiss, feeling the impact of global warming on their rapidly melting glaciers, on Sunday backed a new climate bill aimed at steering the country towards carbon neutrality by 2050, according to early estimates.

The initial projections from the gfs.bern institute showed that 58 per cent of Swiss voters had said 'yes' in the referendum on the new law, which would require Switzerland to slash its dependence on imported oil and gas, scaling up the development and use of greener and more homegrown alternatives.

Voters also appeared to have overwhelmingly backed adopting a global minimum tax rate of 15 per cent for multinational corporations, with 79 per cent voting in favour, according to the pro-

jections published shortly after polls closed at noon (1000 GMT).

Recent opinion polls had indicated strong but slipping support for the climate bill, amid an anxiety-infused campaign around electricity shortages and economic ruin driven by the populist right-wing Swiss People's Party (SVP).

Supporters had argued that 'Federal Act on Climate Protection Targets, Innovation and Strengthening Energy Security' is needed to ensure energy security.

They say it will also help address the ravages of climate change, highlighted by the dramatic melting of glaciers in the Swiss Alps, which lost a third of their ice volume between 2001 and 2022.



An electoral poster reading in French 'Invest in our future , Yes, Climate Law June 18', is seen in Lausanne on Sunday (AFP)

Climate-friendly alternatives

Switzerland imports around three quarters of its energy, with all the oil and natural gas consumed coming from abroad.

Climate activists had initially

wanted to push for a total ban on all oil and gas consumption in Switzerland by 2050.

But the government balked at the so-called Glacier Initiative, drawing up a counter-proposal that scrapped the idea of a ban

but included other elements.

The text promises financial support of two billion Swiss francs (US\$2.2bn) over a decade to promote the replacement of gas or oil heating systems with climate-friendly alternatives, as well as aid to push businesses towards green innovation.

Nearly all of Switzerland's major parties support the bill, except the SVP - the country's largest party - which triggered the referendum against what it dismisses as the 'electricity-wasting law'.

The SVP says the bill's goal of achieving climate neutrality in just over a quarter-century would effectively mean a fossil fuel ban, which it claims would threaten energy access and send household electricity bills soaring.

In 2021, the SVP successfully

lobbied against a law that would have curbed greenhouse gas emissions, and there had been fears it might push through a similar upset.

But the 'yes' camp was likely strengthened by swelling concerns around Switzerland's reliance on foreign energy sources since Russia's invasion of Ukraine threw into doubt Swiss access to much of the foreign energy it uses.

Corporate tax hike

There had meanwhile been little doubt that voters would back a separate referendum on hiking the tax rate for large businesses, with opinion polls consistently showing strong support.

The vote will allow an amendment to the constitution so Switzerland can join an interna-

tional agreement, led by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), to introduce a global minimum tax rate of 15 per cent for multinational corporations.

The plan is to impose the new rate on all Swiss-based companies with a turnover above €750mn.

Until now, many of Switzerland's 26 cantons have imposed some of the lowest corporate tax rates in the world, in what they often said was needed to attract businesses in the face of high wages and location costs.

The Swiss government estimates that revenues from the supplementary tax would amount to between 1.0 and 2.5bn Swiss francs in the first year alone.

AFP

INDIA

World now listens to India: Rajnath Singh

The defence minister was addressing a gathering of the successful candidates of civil services exam

Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh - Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Sunday said that the stature of India in the international forums has risen in the past nine years and the world now listens to it attentively.

Addressing a gathering of successful candidates of the UPSC Civil Services Exam in an event organised in Lucknow today, he stressed that the idea of a developed India is not merely a dream now, but is becoming a reality under the dynamic leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Singh emphasised that now a Superpower like the United States prepares diligently to welcome and host India's Prime Minister, and foreign media talks about the country's success story.

Highlighting Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of a Developed India by 2047, Singh said that young civil servants have a vital role in building such a nation.

"A huge responsibility is on your shoulders. You are going to serve at a time when the country has entered the Amrit Kaal. When you will be at the end of your term by 2047, the country will be celebrating its 100th year of independence. I would like



Defence Minister Rajnath Singh addresses a gathering of successful candidates of UPSC civil services exam during the 'Together we can rise' programme, in Lucknow on Sunday (ANI)

you to be prepared for the upcoming challenges. Together we can face them and take India on the path of a developed nation," the Defence Minister said.

He exhorted civil servants to earn people's trust in government by living up to their expectations and aspirations, and by proactively engaging with them.

He stressed that people's trust in democracy will increase manifold if bureaucrats connect with the public more readily.

Singh underscored that as society is moving forward on the path of progress and prosperity, the feudal system and mentality are diminishing, and in such a situation, living up to the expectations and aspirations of the public is the measure of the capability of bureaucrats and leaders.

"There was a time when there used to be a culture of authority in the society, now the culture of justification has overtaken the culture of authority as citizens are becoming educated and more aware with the arrival

of new means of communication," he added.

Emphasising the role of people's representatives in day-to-day governance and democracy, he stressed that civil servants should listen carefully and act on the suggestions made by the public representatives, as in a democracy, the

representatives of the people are the representatives of their aspirations.

Defence Minister denounced the culture of undue political interference in the local administration, however, he pitched for guidance from the people's representatives, as they represent the common citizens of the

A huge responsibility is on your shoulders. You are going to serve at a time when the country has entered the Amrit Kaal

RAJNATH SINGH

country.

"As people's representatives, they will definitely raise before you the issues related to their constituency. That's why you have to work closely with the people's representatives in your area," he stressed.

Admiring the phenomenal performance of women in civil services exams in recent years, Singh said, "Girls occupying the top three positions, and 14 girls out of the top 25 presents the picture of a new India. Our daughters have brought laurels whenever they got the opportunity." He also asked young civil servants to think of the last person in society when taking any decision for the welfare of the people.

ANI

A BIG CATCH



Children play with a fish at Kasimedu fishing harbour in Chennai on Sunday, as fishermen return with their catch after the end of 61-day fishing ban on the east Indian coast to protect fish stocks during the breeding season (AFP)

Target set to eradicate tuberculosis by 2025: Modi

New Delhi - India has set a target of eradicating tuberculosis (TB) by 2025 and 'Ni-kshay Mitra' has taken charge of this movement against the disease, said Prime Minister Narendra Modi in his monthly radio programme 'Mann ki Baat' on Sunday.

The Pradhan Mantri TB Mukht Bharat Abhiyaan (Ni-kshay Mitra Initiative) has been implemented by the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare.

"Thousands of people are adopting TB patients in rural areas. This is the true strength of India. The youth is also contributing to achieving the target of eradicating TB by 2025," Modi said during the 102nd episode of 'Mann Ki Baat.'

Remembering Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj, Modi said: "Along with the bravery of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj, there is a lot to learn from his



Prime Minister Narendra Modi (ANI)

governance and his management skills. The works done by Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj, especially regarding water management and the navy, increase the pride of Indian history even today."

"The forts built by him, even after so many centuries, are still standing proudly in the middle of the sea," he added.

Praising the efforts of people

reviving a river in UP, PM Modi said: "In the Hapur district of Uttar Pradesh, people have revived an extinct river. The river's source is also being developed as an Amrit Sarovar."

On this year's International Day of Yoga on June 21, Modi said that he would be leading a yoga session for the first time at UN Headquarters.

ANI

Jailed hangman freed after sentence reductions for kills

Dhaka, Bangladesh - A jailed Bangladeshi hangman who executed more than two dozen fellow prisoners including killers and coup plotters in exchange for sentence reductions was released on Sunday, officials said.

Shahjahan Bhuiyan gained notoriety for putting 26 people to death during his time inside after he highlighted to officials his skills with a noose upon entering prison 32 years ago for murder.

His executions included military officers found guilty of plotting a 1975 coup and of killing the country's founding leader, who is the father of current prime minister Sheikh Hasina.

"His jail sentence was reduced for hangings he carried out," Tania Zaman,

deputy chief of Dhaka Central Jail, told AFP, saying his executions numbered 26 while incarcerated.

Among those he hanged were top Islamist leader Ali Ahsan Mujahid and opposition stalwart Salahuddin Quader Chowdhury after both were charged with war crimes, according to another jail official who spoke on condition of anonymity.

In 2007 he also hanged Siddique Islam, alias Bangla Bhai, an Islamist leader of the outlawed Jamayetul Mujahideen Bangladesh, which led a nationwide bombing campaign two years earlier, the official added.

The 74-year-old defended his acts, saying it helped him cut his sentence.

AFP

Pope Francis leads Vatican prayers after surgery

Vatican City, Holy See - Pope Francis led Angelus prayers at Saint Peter's Square in the Vatican on Sunday before thousands of pilgrims, just days after undergoing a hernia operation.

Francis expressed his gratitude to those who had sent him messages of support during his stay at Rome's Gemelli hospital as he spent 10 days convalescing.

"I want to express my gratitude for the affection, the concern, the friendship' expressed in those messages of support, the Argentine pontiff said, following his third stay in hospital in the past two years.

"This human support has been a great help and comfort to me," said Francis to cheers and applause from the thousands assembled in the square.

The 86-year-old has suffered a series of health issues since his election in 2013, from hip problems, knee pain and weight gain,



Pope Francis addresses the crowd from the window of the apostolic palace in Vatican on Sunday (AFP)

to an inflamed colon and respiratory infection.

He underwent a three-hour operation under general anaes-

thetic on June 7 to remove a painful hernia on the site of a scar from a previous surgery.

Francis reiterated his 'pro-

found sadness and pain' over last week's trawler sinking off Greece, which resulted in the drownings of at least 78 migrants aboard

with hundreds more missing.

"It seems, it seems, the sea was calm. I renew my prayer for those who lost their lives and I urge everything be done, always, to prevent such tragedies," said Francis.

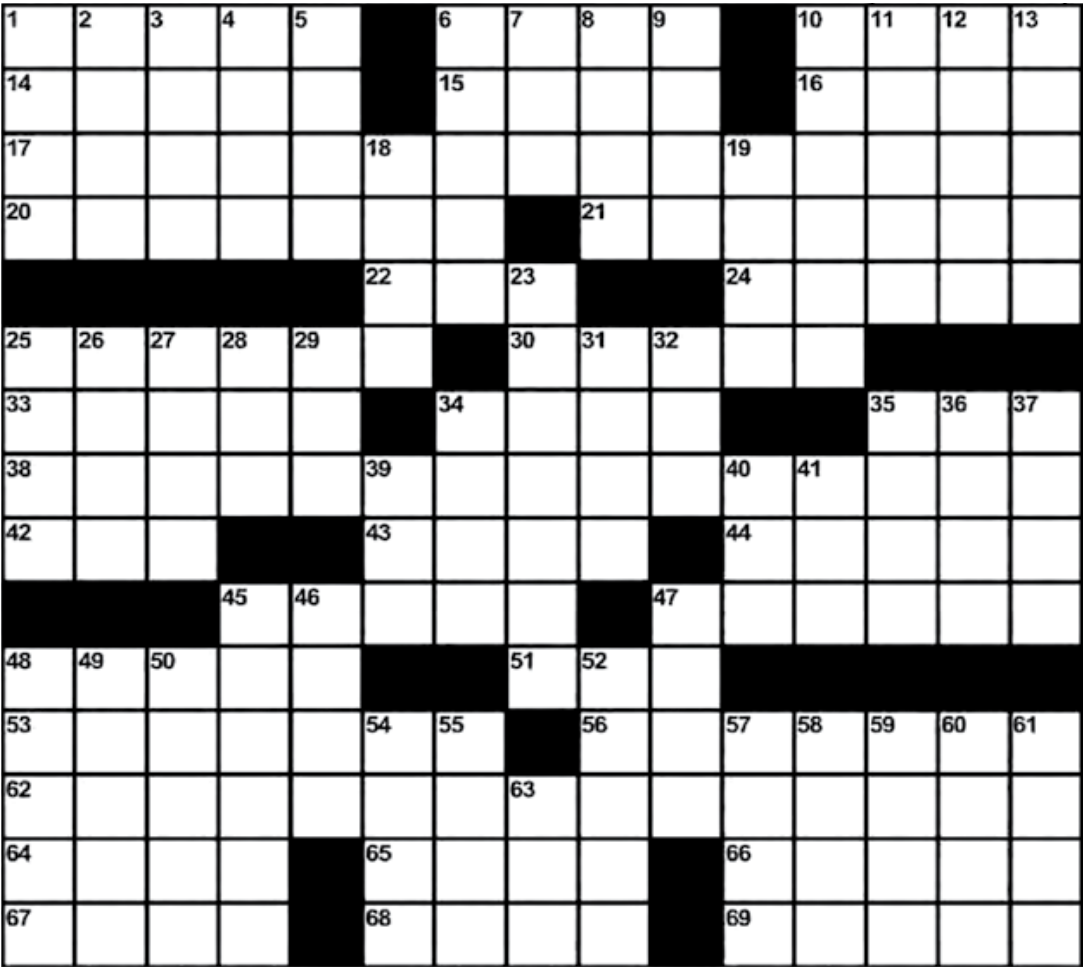
He also condemned Friday night's 'brutal attack' by suspected militants on a school in Uganda where 41 mostly student victims were hacked, shot and burned to death while others remain missing.

"I pray for the young student victims of the brutal attack against a school in western Uganda," the pope said during the weekly Angelus prayer.

While able to take weekly prayers and looking in good form following his latest hospital stay, the pontiff has cut back his commitments for the coming week, notably cancelling a weekly audience on Wednesday.

AFP

DAILY CROSSWORD



ACROSS

1) Made public
6) "Candida" playwright
10) Handheld organizers (Abbr.)
14) "In bad company," to Bierce
15) Like petting zoo animals
16) Letter before kappa
17) HDL, familiarly
20) Time in a recording studio
21) Marathoner's asset
22) _ center (games room)
24) Checked out, as before aheist
25) Chocolate-coated goodie
30) Torch's misdeed
33) Be of service
34) Home to most of Turkey
35) "_ Hate Me" (Spike Lee movie)
38) Gang-infested area, per-haps
42) _ provencale
43) Brief moments, in brief
44) West who married a Kardashian
45) "On the contrary!"
47) Friendly Islands native
48) Searcher for the Golden Fleece

51) First baseman in a com-edy routine
53) Going wild
56) Short operatic piece
62) Drizella and Anastasia, to Cinderella
64) Gin fizz flavorer
65) Leave out
66) Map within a map
67) Festival setup
68) Wallow in dejection
69) Tattoo-removing tool

DOWN

1) Umps man them
2) Skin lotion additive
3) Outback bounders, for short
4) Some gridiron players
5) Prefix with "bel" or "meter"
6) Fourteen pounds, in Eng-land
7) Rogue computer in "2001"
8) Iowa State city
9) Greeley's direction
10) "Simple Simon" vendor
11) Day of "Pillow Talk"
12) Make amends
13) All-you-can-eat fare, maybe
18) Chile's Cape_
19) Tex-Mex munchie
23) Reliable source of profit

25) Rummy cake
26) Race track shape
27) Zilch
28) Place for recyclables
29) Soccer stadium cheer
31) BBQ fare
32)_ Paulo, Brazil
34) Gets grayer
35) iTunes selection
36) Georgetown athlete
37) Barbara who played a genie
39) Follower's suffix
40) Original "King Kong" studio
41)_ Solo of "Star Wars"
45) "Maybe later"
46) Vending machine input
47) Spelling of "Beverly Hills, 90210"
48) Tilt'er's combat
49) What a protractor measures
50) Place for a tan
52) Waste maker, in a proverb
54) Place for a proton
55) San _ (Italian resort)
57) Terrorist group, as Obama calls it
58) Sicilian spewer
59) Miss Trueheart of "Dick Tracy"

60) Pre-Christmas buy (Abbr.)
61) Sagan's specialty
63) Apple seed

NOTE PAD

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

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE

ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

As selfish as it might sound, you need to put yourself first today. You have been putting the needs of other people ahead of your own priorities for far too long, and it's high time to put yourself back at the top of your list. You've accumulated far more karma points than you could ever use, so why keep racking them up? Take a break. Do something nice for yourself just because you are your favorite person. You don't have to earn this attention.

LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

Don't fly off the handle due to any shocking news that might come your way today. You might be only getting part of the story, so it's very unwise to connect the few dots you've been given. Wait for this story to develop more fully over the next few days. You'll probably see that not only are things more complicated than you thought, but they're also none of your business. Making assumptions will only lead to problems. So when you get that email or text, just delete it and move on.

SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER21

Today, it looks like someone you thought would never budge from their stubborn position appears to be thinking about things in a different way. This is very encouraging! Something you said to them recently has been bouncing around in their head, and it's been making a real impression. Even though you're excited that they're coming around to your way of thinking, don't show your excitement to them. They need to think that they're changing their mind without an audience.

TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

The definition of being a good friend isn't always making the other person in the relationship feel good. Sometimes the truth won't make them feel good, and if you keep it from them because you're afraid of hurting their feelings, you aren't being a good friend. If someone you care about needs a reality check, you should be the one to give it to them. You'll know how to deliver the news with the compassion and sensitivity they deserve. And you'll show them you are a good friend.

VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

New people are coming into your life at a fast and furious pace, and you can't slow down this flood! This is the start of a very social phase of your life, so get ready to party. You might have a few scheduling headaches, but figuring out which parties to go to is a nice headache to have! If you're in search of a romantic partner, this is a great time to go out with a lot of different people. And if you're already in a relationship, this is a great time to rekindle those first-date jitters!

CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

Today marks the beginning of a very relaxed and carefree time in your life. Projects have been completed, tasks have been finished, and goals have been reached. Now you should just kick back and schedule some time off. Explore a new hobby or pick up a juicy book you've long wanted to crack open. Your brain is open to new ideas and new ways of doing things, so fill it up! Step out of your comfort zone. It will feel a bit scary, but only in the most exciting way.

GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

This might be one of those days when it feels like everyone is purposefully getting in your way! The good news is that this frustration is easy to avoid. Simply start off your day as quietly as you possibly can. Ease your way into it. Instead of getting in line at a crowded coffee shop, wait a while and opt for coffee later in the day when it's quieter. Better yet, make some to take along with you. You'll not only enjoy a calmer day but you'll also save a few bucks!

LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

In a work relationship, it's time to take a step back and look at potential problems that could develop if you get too close to a certain someone. Personal stories about your weekend need to have boundaries, and it's up to you to set them. You really don't have the flexibility to change up the terms of your relationship whenever you want. Either you are friends as well as coworkers or you're strictly business. They might enjoy the gray areas, but it's not good for you.

AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

Today, there is no point in sharing your thoughts with other people unless you share all of them, honestly, the good and the bad, the objective and the subjective, the helpful and the pointless. Due to your healthy balance between diplomacy and compassion, you always know just what to say and how to say it. So don't worry about hurting other people's feelings. If you come off as harsh, it's more their hypersensitivity than it is your insensitivity.

CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

Try to keep a handle on your curiosity today. Given the unpredictable nature of the people around you right now, it isn't wise to go exploring unknown territory. So this isn't a good day to start on any new projects, especially if they involve meeting new people or entering unfamiliar social situations. Stick with the people and places you know well for now. Visit a place where everyone knows you and nothing out of the ordinary is likely to happen.

SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

Good for you for always being there for your friends! But while you're so busy supporting them, who is supporting you? Today, start switching your focus back to your own problems. The one exception should be an older relative. If they need any attention from you, you should definitely give it to them. They miss the sound of your voice and your unique way of looking at things. Stop saving the world and start showing your loved ones that you value them in your life.

PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

You definitely know how to create good vibes for everyone around you, as you've proven many times over. Today, stop trying to make sure everyone else is having fun and just focus on yourself. Make this day all about expanding your horizons. Try something you've never tried before and see if you like it. Try your hand a new sport, eat some food that's new to you, or change up your playlist. You'll be surprised by what appeals to you (and what doesn't).

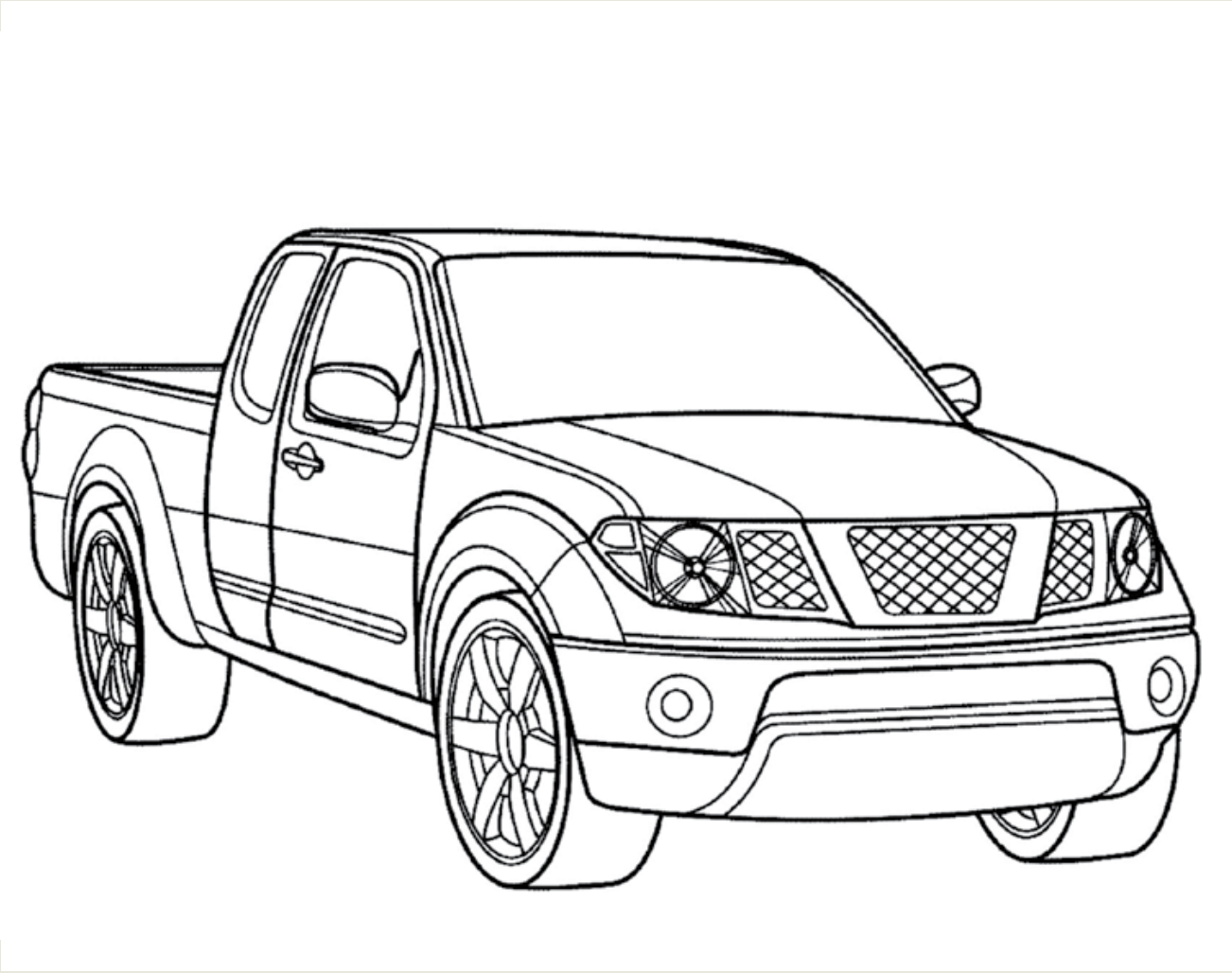


TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

01. Who are the only players in an ice hockey game allowed to be in the referee's crease?
- A. Rink steward
B. A game official
C. Goaltender
D. Captain and alternate captain
02. On which coast of South America would you find the country of Venezuela?
- A. South
B. East
C. West
D. North
03. In 1971, on which island was the largest underground test of nuclear weapons ever conducted by the USA?
- A. Mururoa
B. Bikini
C. Amchitka
D. Christmas

Answers: 1. B 2. B 3. D

KIDS COLOURING



BOGGLER

T	S	T	A
O	I	B	U
Y	A	U	B
B	P	Y	T

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

Solution 20-25 words: Excellent, 15-20 words: Very good, 10-15 words: Good, 5-10 words: Average

DO YOU SUDOKU?

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

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

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

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

FERNANDES TO THE FORE

Portugal win in Euro 2024 qualifying as Scotland stun Haaland’s Norway

Paris, France - Bruno Fernandes scored twice as Portugal won in Euro 2024 qualifying on Saturday after Scotland produced a stunning late comeback to beat Erling Haaland’s Norway in Oslo.

Portugal defeated Bosnia and Herzegovina 3-0 in Lisbon to make it three wins out of three in Group J, with Manchester City star Bernardo Silva opening the scoring a minute before half-time.

Fernandes headed in the second from a Ruben Neves cross in the 77th minute and scored his second, and Portugal’s third, in added time.

Cristiano Ronaldo wore the captain’s armband and played all 90 minutes as the 38-year-old men’s international appearance record-holder won his 199th cap.

However, the forward now playing for Al Nassr in Saudi Arabia did not manage to add to his record 122 international goals - he found the net with a header midway through the first half only to be denied by an offside flag.

Portugal, who visit Iceland on Tuesday, are top of Group J with nine points out of a possible nine having scored 13 goals and conceded none.

They are two points clear of



Portugal’s Bruno Fernandes celebrates after scoring against Bosnia and Herzegovina in their Euro 2024 qualifier on Saturday (AFP)

Slovakia, who beat Iceland 2-1 in Reykjavik with Tomas Suslov unwittingly scoring the winner 20 minutes from time after an Alfred Finnbogason penalty for the hosts cancelled out Juraj Kucka’s opener. Luxembourg beat Liechtenstein 2-0 in the same six-team group, from which the top two sides qualify for the finals in Germany.

Scotland have three wins out of three in Group A after follow-

ing a famous victory over Spain in March by coming from behind late on to beat Norway 2-1 on Saturday.

It looked as if Norway would get their first win of the campaign after Erling Haaland was fouled in the box on the hour mark by Ryan Porteous and converted the resulting penalty.

It was Haaland’s 22 goal in 24 games for Norway, and he was taken off six minutes from time

by coach Stale Solbakken with the job seemingly done.

But then Scotland equalised in the 87th minute when Leo Ostigard failed to deal with a John McGinn pass, allowing Lyndon Dykes to stab home.

And Scotland were not finished as they snatched the winner with a minute left, McGinn and Dykes combining to set up Norwich City’s Kenny McLean to slot in, leaving Norway with just

one point from three outings.

Lukaku rescues Belgium

Scotland, who went 23 years without appearing at any major tournament before going to Euro 2020, are now in a fantastic position on top of Group A, five points clear of Georgia and six ahead of Nations League finalists Spain.

They have played a game

Cristiano Ronaldo wore the captain’s armband and played all 90 minutes as the 38-year-old men’s international appearance record-holder won his 199th cap

more than both of those sides, however, and welcome Georgia to Glasgow on Tuesday.

“Sometimes when it’s your moment you just have to ride the wave. The boys believe in themselves and kept going,” said Scotland boss Steve Clarke.

Georgia, coached by ex-

France international Willy Sagnol, won 2-1 in Cyprus with Zuriko Davitashvili scoring the decisive goal late on.

That was after Georges Mikautadze’s opener was cancelled out by a penalty from Ioannis Pittas for Cyprus.

AFP



South Africa’s Percy Tau (L) celebrates with team-mates after scoring against Morocco in their Africa Cup of Nations qualifier in Johannesburg on Saturday (AFP)

Goalkeeper howler sinks Morocco, Zambia run riot to qualify

Johannesburg, South Africa - A blunder by Morocco goalkeeper Munir el Kajoui led to a 2-1 Africa Cup of Nations qualifying defeat in South Africa on Saturday - their first loss since reaching the 2022 World Cup semi-finals.

Zambia completed a joyful day for southern Africa by hammering the Ivory Coast 3-0 in Ndola to secure a place in the finals for the first time since 2015.

South Africa and World Cup history-makers Morocco had qualified ahead of a lively Group K clash in Johannesburg that drew a 50,000 crowd despite near-freezing conditions.

El Kajoui, standing in for rested Yassine Bounou, allowed a Percy Tau cross slip from his grasp into the net after only five minutes and Zakhele Lepasa added a second on 48 minutes.

Hakim Ziyech halved the deficit on the hour, but an equaliser eluded Morocco, who last December became the first African and Arab team to reach

the World Cup semi-finals.

After finishing fourth in Qatar, the Atlas Lions beat Brazil and drew with Peru and Cape Verde in friendly matches. The visit to Johannesburg marked a return to competitive action.

Call me crazy if you wish for saying that, but you sometimes learn more from a loss than a win.

WALID REGRAGUI

Morocco coach Walid Regragui, mastermind behind successes over Belgium, Spain and Portugal before a semi-final loss to France in Qatar, said he was “not unhappy with the result”.

“Call me crazy if you wish for saying that, but you sometimes learn more from a loss than a win.

My players were tired after a gruelling season of domestic and World Cup matches.”

Zambia, needing one point to end a run of three failed qualifying campaigns, took all three as they outplayed the Ivory Coast, who will host the January 13-February 11 finals.

After stunning the Ivorians by winning the 2012 final, Zambia declined dramatically, failing to get past the group stage in the following two tournaments.

Worse followed for the Chipolopolo (Copper Bullets) as they did not even qualify for the next three editions.

But those sad memories were forgotten before a capacity 50,000 crowd as Zambia claimed a fourth straight Group H victory. Serge Aurier conceded an own goal on 32 minutes, Patson Daka doubled the lead three minutes into the second half and Kings Kangwa completed the rout after 55 minutes.

AFP

Vinicius and Brazil spot on with black strip anti-racism protest

Barcelona, Spain - On a night in which Brazil wore an all-black strip to protest racism in football, Vinicius Junior was on the score sheet and in the spotlight in a 4-1 international friendly win over Guinea.

The 22-year-old Real Madrid forward has been subjected to frequent racist abuse this season and Brazil decided the freindly was a good opportunity to strike back as the match was staged in Espanyol’s stadium near Barcelona. In a powerful move Brazil abandoned their iconic yellow and green shirts and were instead kitted out in an all-black strip in a stand against racism for the first half of the game.

The Brazilian Football Confederation was behind the gesture accompanied by the slogan of “Com racismo nao tem jogo”



Brazil’s Joelinton (R) celebrates with team-mates after scoring against Guinea in their friendly match on Saturday (AFP)

(With racism, there is no game).

Vinicius himself, wearing the number 10 shirt, got on the score sheet with an 88th minute spot-kick, by this time kitted out in Brazil’s usual colours.

Newcastle forward Joelinton was well placed to tap-in the opener on the goal-line on 27 minutes while Rodrygo curled home the second two minutes later. Stuttgart striker Serhou Guirassy pulled a goal back with a close range header on 35 minutes but Eder Militao restored the two-goal lead shortly after the restart rising high to meet a cross at the far post.

Manchester United midfielder Casemiro escaped with a yellow card for a late tackle on Francois Kamano that was at odds with the party atmosphere in the stadium.

Fowler, Clark lead McIlroy after US Open third round

Los Angeles, United States - Rickie Fowler and Wyndham Clark shared a one-shot lead over four-time major winner Rory McIlroy on Saturday after a two-shot swing at 18 left them tied atop the leaderboard at the US Open.

Overnight leader Fowler led playing partner Clark by two as they stood on the 18th tee at Los Angeles Country Club.

Clark had just dropped a shot at the 17th, but fired his approach at the flag at 18 and made a six-foot birdie putt.

Fowler, who had gone 12 holes without a bogey as a string of rivals faltered on the treacherous back nine, saw his 42-foot birdie putt skim the edge - but his par putt from inside four feet coming back lipped out.

“You could see from the first



Rickie Fowler of the United States plays his shot from the seventh tee during the third round of the US Open on Saturday (AFP)

putt, there’s a lot of slope there,” Fowler said. “I’m not sure why it didn’t move. It should have. I hit a good putt, so really can’t go back on it.

Fowler signed for an even par

70 while Clark posted a one-under 69 that left them one in front of Northern Ireland star McIlroy, who carded a 69 for 201 to remain in position to claim a fifth career major and his first

since 2014. World number one Scottie Scheffler was alone in fourth on 203.

After two days of record scoring, the sun-baked LA Country Club North Course - hosting the championship for the first time - proved plenty capable of providing a classic US Open test of patience and nerve.

Fowler, who had a stunning 18 birdies over the first two rounds, couldn’t match those fireworks, his three birdies including a 36-foot putt at the seventh and a 70-footer from off the green at 13.

Clark, a long-hitter who broke through for his first US PGA Tour title at Quail Hollow last month, had grabbed a one-shot edge through nine holes before back-to-back bogeys at the 11th and 12th.

AFP

MARTIN WINS GERMAN MOTOGP

Spanish rider holds off Bagnaia to claim his second Grand Prix victory

Sachsenring, Germany - Jorge Martin edged world champion Francesco Bagnaia after a cut-and-thrust battle over the last 10 laps to win Sunday's German MotoGP, and trim the Italian's lead in the standings.

It was Martin's second Grand Prix victory. His last was in the Styria Grand Prix in Austria in 2021. "Emotional moment after almost two years fighting for it, finally it arrived," said. Martin in the winner's enclosure. "It was a tough, tough race. Peco (Bagnaia) was pushing so hard."

After beating Bagnaia in Saturday's sprint race, Martin, a Spaniard who rides for the Pramac Ducati team, this time resisted late counter-attacks to win. Frenchman Johann Zarco, on another Pramac, completed the podium.

On Saturday, Martin, starting from the second row of the grid, overtook pole-sitter Bagnaia, on a factory Ducati, on the fourth lap. On Sunday, he made his move even earlier and took first on the third lap.

Bagnaia gave chase and overtook with 10 laps to go but Martin hit back and regained the lead.

Bagnaia pressed hard and the



Ducati Pramac Racing's Jorge Martin celebrates with the trophy after winning the German MotoGP (AFP)

bikes touched on the second-last lap, but both riders remained upright. Martin stayed ahead to close out the win.

The Spaniard had built a large lead by the middle of the race before Bagnaia started clawing back his advantage.

"I had some issues at the middle of the race with the rear tyre so I didn't strain too much."

He responded aggressively when Bagnaia grabbed back the lead. "To be in front was my target so when he passed me I tried to keep the front," said Martin.

"The last two laps I was just trying to push the maximum."

Bagnaia said he had been out-fought in the final laps.

"I was gaining and gaining but wasn't enough. I tried in second-last lap but I touch him and then to recover was a bit on the limit

and he was too fast.

Martin picked up a maximum 37 points by winning both the weekend's races and with 144 overall, Martin, has cut Bagnaia's championship lead to 16.

"Happy with the second position," Bagnaia said. "I gave my maximum."

Marco Bezecchi was fourth and Luca Marini fifth, both on Mooney Ducati, giving the Italian manufacturer the top five places and eight of the top nine, with only Australian Jack Miller on a KTM in sixth breaking their domination.

It was a tough, tough race. Peco (Bagnaia) was pushing so hard

JORGE MARTIN

Last year's winner and former world champion, Frenchman Fabio Quartararo trailed in 13th on his Yamaha.

Six-time world champion Marc Marquez withdrew an hour before the start after breaking a thumb in a crash in the morning warm-up session.

The Spaniard, who went over the handlebars of his Honda at full speed shortly before 10:00 am (0800 GMT), appeared to be completely stunned. He took several minutes to recover before limping away and heading back to the pits.

Marquez missed three races earlier this season after undergoing hand surgery following a spill in the season-opener in Portugal.

AFP



Victor Axelsen of Denmark celebrates his victory (AFP)

Axelsen wins third Indonesia Open title in a row

Jakarta, Indonesia - Badminton world number one Viktor Axelsen clinched his third-consecutive Indonesia Open title on Sunday after triumphing over underdog Anthony Sinisuka Ginting in straight games.

The Danish ace continued his dominance on the courts of capital Jakarta's Istora Senayan arena, outplaying the hometown favourite and world number two 21-14, 21-13 in a 47-minute final.

Axelsen controlled the match from start to finish, never allowing Ginting to gain a foothold.

The 29-year-old said the final win had left him "speechless" after the Indonesian shuttler failed to halt his hot streak.

"I never thought that I could win Indonesia Open for the straight third time," the Tokyo Olympic gold medallist told reporters.

"I played with a good balance in my game. A good balance between defence and attacking, and all in all, I'm re-

ally, really satisfied about my game today."

It was his first individual tournament title win after a hamstring injury forced him to miss the Singapore Open and withdraw from the Sudirman Cup, an international badminton tournament.

Axelsen said he would prioritise his health after making his comeback and would not be drawn on where he would compete next.

"I just want to make sure that my body is healthy and strong, and then there are so many tournaments coming up where I hopefully can perform again," the reigning world champion said.

In the women's singles final, China's Chen Yu Fei triumphed against Spanish star Carolina Marin in a tightly contested 64-minute match to bring home the title.

World number four Chen took the first game 21-18 before Marin nearly tied the match, carving out a slim 19-18 second game lead.

AFP

Zimbabwe, West Indies win opening World Cup qualifiers

Harare, Zimbabwe - West Indies and Zimbabwe notched up victories in their respective opening Cricket World Cup Group A qualifiers over the United States and Nepal on Sunday.

Two-time world champions West Indies recovered from the early loss of openers Brandon King and Kyle Mayers as four players hit half-centuries as they made 297 all out off 49.3 overs.

Johnson Charles top scored with 66, while Jason Holder (56), Roston Chase (55) and skipper Shai Hope (54) all went past 50, Nicholas Pooran also chipping in with 43 runs.

Gajanan Singh hit an unbeaten 101 off 109 balls, with

eight fours and two sixes, for the US, but the chase proved too much and the West Indies ran out winners by 39 runs.

"We have to be disciplined and we have to stay calm," Holder said, praising Singh for his effort. "He played a really good knock to get his team close enough to our total."

Earlier in the day, unbeaten centuries by skipper Craig Ervine and Sean Williams in a 164-run partnership guided Zimbabwe to an eight-wicket win over Nepal.

Chasing an imposing total of 290, Ervine hit a 128-ball 121 featuring 15 fours and a six, while Williams struck 102 off 70 balls as Zimbabwe reached 291 for the loss of two wicket.

Verstappen on pole at Canadian Grand Prix, Hulkenberg second in rainswept qualifying

Montreal, Canada - Max Verstappen drove with extreme poise and skill on Saturday as he claimed pole position for Red Bull ahead of Haas driver Nico Hulkenberg in a rainswept qualifying session at the Canadian Grand Prix.

The defending double world champion and series leader out-paced the German driver by 1.244 seconds in a very wet top-ten shootout to secure his 25th career pole. It also completed a hat-trick for the Dutchman after poles in Monaco and Spain.

It will be the third front row starting position for Hulkenberg and the first for the American-owned Haas team.

Two-time champion Fernando Alonso was third-fastest for Aston Martin and will share the second row of the grid with seven-time champion Lewis Hamilton of Mercedes.



(From left) Haas F1 Team's Nico Hulkenberg, Red Bull Racing's Max Verstappen and Aston Martin's Fernando Alonso pose after the qualifying session for the Canadian Grand Prix on Saturday (AFP)

George Russell was fifth in the second Mercedes ahead of Esteban Ocon of Alpine, Lando Norris of McLaren, Carlos Sainz of Ferrari and Oscar Piastri in the sec-

ond McLaren.

Sainz, however, was dropped three places on the grid by race stewards after the session for impeding Alpine's Pierre Gasly in

qualifying, tumbling the Spaniard from eighth to 11th.

Alex Albon was 10th for Williams in the original results while both Red Bull's Sergio

Perez and Ferrari's Charles Leclerc failed to proceed from Q2 for the second consecutive event. "We made changes after a tricky day yesterday, said Verstappen.

"And it was completely wet but the car felt improved to drive. In these conditions, you have to stay on top of everything as it is super-slippery and but we made all the right calls and I am very happy to be on pole here.

"I'm from Holland so I like driving in the wet."

Hulkenberg said: "It was a wild and crazy session in changing conditions with the walls so close in the wet - we were changing tyres and the team did a great job."

Alonso admitted it had been a difficult session in which to choose the right tyres at the right time.

AFP



Australia's Cameron Green (2R) celebrates with team-mates after taking a catch to dismiss England's Ben Duckett off the bowling of Pat Cummins (2L) in their first Ashes Test on Sunday (AFP)

Australia strike between showers in Ashes Test

Birmingham, United Kingdom - The weather turned in Australia's favour as England lost both openers in their second innings of the first Ashes Test at Edgbaston on Sunday.

England were 28-2, a lead of just 35 runs, when a huge down-pour sent the players hurrying off the field at 3:50 pm (1450 GMT) on the third day.

They had been making steady progress at 26-0 off 6.5 overs when an initial rain delay stopped play for an hour-and-a-quarter.

That might have been it for

the day before the advent of modern drainage methods and floodlights being used in Tests to counter the gloom.

But after the match resumed in overcast skies, conditions were now hugely in favour of World Test champions Australia's pace attack.

Only 20 minutes' more play were possible before the weather intervened again, but that was enough time for England to lose two wickets for no runs in four balls as 27-0 became 27-2.

Australia captain Pat Cum-

mins led the way, Ben Duckett edging to Cameron Green, who dived forward to hold his latest excellent catch in the gully.

Scott Boland then had Zak Crawley caught behind off a superb full-length ball that angled in and straightened to take the edge.

But the rain then checked Australia's advance, with Ollie Pope and star batsman Joe Root, whose unbeaten 118 was the cornerstone of England's 393-8 declared, both yet to get off the mark.

Khawaja's epic

Earlier, England finally saw the back of Usman Khawaja but only after his painstaking century had effectively turned the first of a five-match series into a one-innings showdown.

Khawaja's 141 was the cornerstone of Australia's 386 all out - just seven runs behind on first innings, with the Ashes-holders all out on the stroke of lunch.

Australia, bidding for a first Ashes series win in England in 22 years, resumed on 311-5.

AFP

Sensational victory

Al Zubair seals race win at International GT Open in Hungary

Hungaroring, Hungary: Oman's Al Faisal al Zubair and German team-mate Fabian Schiller delivered a devastating display of controlled aggression to snatch victory in the opening International GT Open race at the Hungaroring in Hungary on Saturday.

The Al-Manar Racing by Get-speed Mercedes AMG GT3 started the race from third in the Pro class and Schiller stormed through the field in the closing laps of the second stint to overhaul his rivals and snatch a famous win.

The Al-Manar Racing Mercedes finished 5.810 seconds clear of the second-placed Eastal-

ent Racing Audi R8 of Simon Reicher and Christopher Haase. The Oregon Team Lamborghini Huracan finished third.

Al-Zubair said: "It was a very good race today in the GT Open. Honestly, the car was amazing. The team did a great job and Fabi was the driver to give credit to this time."

I pitted from P4 and Fabi did all the hard work. But it's another win and we are excited for the second race but the 20-second handicap will not be easy."

International GT Open drivers took to the Mogyoród circuit for a pair of one-hour free practice sessions on Friday.

The Al-Manar Racing Mercedes was classified in second place with a best run of 1min 45.078sec during a 28-lap opening stint. The quickest tour of the session fell to the Liqui Moli Team Engstler Audi R8 LMS of Kwanda Motswasele Mokoena and Luca Engstler. The Al-Manar Racing car was classified fourth of the Pro category runners in the second practice stint with the session win falling to Reece Barr and Mikael Pitamber in the SPS Automotive Performance Mercedes in customary warm summer racing conditions.

Al Zubair took the hot seat in the first qualifying session and the

Omani posted a best lap of 1min 43.709sec to put the Al-Manar Racing Mercedes into third of the Pro class cars on the grid for the opening 70-minute race. The Oregon Team Lamborghini Huracan GT3 Evo2, driven by Maximilian Paul, was the quickest of the Pro class cars.

Al Zubair took the wheel for the first stint of the race and climbed to second of the Pro runners and fifth overall after five laps. Maximilian Paul continued to lead the class by just over a second in the Huracan, while Martin Kodri led outright in the ProAm Bonaldi Motorsport Lamborghini.



Oman's Al Faisal al Zubair and his German team-mate Fabian Schiller celebrate after their victory

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OVERTOURISM

Trendy French island limits visitors to fight 'overtourism'

Brehat's bane



The 19th century Lighthouse of the Paon is a popular monument to visit

The small French island of Brehat, a popular north coast tourist destination, is restricting the number of visitors this summer after seeing as much as 15 times its population arrive at its rocky shores in a single day.

Off the coast of Brittany, Brehat is joining numerous other sites around France pushing back against 'overtourism' amid concerns over waste management and environmental protection.

The number of day visitors, who access the island via a 10-minute boat ride from the mainland, would be limited to a

maximum of 4,700 between July 14 and August 25, mayor Olivier Carre said in a decree issued this week.

The island, home to just 377 permanent residents, is part of the EU conservation network Natura 2000 that aims to promote biodiversity by protecting habitats of the most vulnerable species.

The idyllic landscape is a hotspot for tourists, with as many as 450,000 people visiting the island in one year, according to a study by the firm Littomatique. In the spring and summer, the number of visitors can peak to nearly 6,000 in a single day.

'The commune is unable to handle the volume of waste' that increases



Brehat is an archipelago comprising two main islands and many smaller ones

10-fold during the peak tourism months, said the mayor's statement. The influx is also eroding paths leading to the picturesque lighthouse on the island's north and impacting protected areas.

The crowds are also a drag for the tourists themselves, resulting in a rapid decline in visitor satisfaction, according to one study by Ponant Islands Association (AIP).

Demarketing

The France Tourism Alliance noted earlier this year that 80% of tourists flock to just 20% of territory in the country.

The Paris tourism office projects upward of 37 million visitors to the capital alone this year, nearly matching pre-pandemic levels. The first quarter of this year saw volumes near that of 2019, while spending exceeding 2019 figures, it announced Wednesday.

The France Tourism Alliance has recommended tourism operators promote less popular sites to disperse the crowds, along with the adoption of techniques like daily quotas at sites, scheduled ticketing, and higher tariffs.

'Demarketing' campaigns - advertising images of overcrowded sites to make them seem less appealing - were successfully adopted by seaside Marseille in 2021 and Corsica's Porto-Vecchio in 2022 to reduce the influx.

More recently, the Calanques national park near Marseille announced it would maintain a reservation system for visiting the Sugiton coves that was first implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic.

With travel at the time limited, the rocky trails along the crystalline Mediterranean water saw an influx of tourists to as many as 2,500 per day, trampling the lush vegetation.

The reservation system, which cost 100,000 euros to implement according to park director Gaelle Berthaud, ensures just 400 people can visit the site on a given day.

The national park on the Porquerolles island off France's southeast coast has for three summers limited daily visitors to 6,000 in a similar effort to protect the landscape.

AFP

Ominvest led Consortium makes a 100% cash takeover offer providing fair and equal treatment to all shareholders of Ahli Bank SAOG

Consortium led by Ominvest has made a Public Announcement of a Cash Takeover Offer to acquire 100% of the issued share capital of Ahli Bank SAOG (Ahli Bank) pursuant to the Takeover and Acquisition Regulation (E/2/2019) issued by Capital Market Authority (CMA) subject to regulatory approvals.

The major members of the Consortium include Ominvest, a joint stock company listed on MSX, Arab Bank Plc, a company incorporated under the laws of Jordan as a public shareholding company ("Arab Bank") and certain entities separately controlled by them.

The Consortium sees Ahli Bank as one of the best-performing bank in the Sultanate of Oman, with a visionary board, capable leadership team, and leading operating and risk systems. The Consortium members will be strong and committed anchor shareholders, supporting Ahli Bank's growth during the intervening period and preparing it for a potential merger with Oman Arab Bank (OAB) in due course, under the guidance of the esteemed Board of Directors of both banks.

Fair and equitable treatment to all shareholders of Ahli Bank

The Consortium has made a



cash offer of 200 bz per share to all the shareholders of Ahli Bank, irrespective of their shareholding, legal status and jurisdiction. This cash offer provides a fair and equal treatment to all shareholders including minority shareholders to participate and benefit from the Offer.

The offer is in strict compliance with Article (5)(b) of Takeover and Acquisition Reg-

ulation which warrants all offerors to provide fair and equal treatment to all shareholders.

Offer objective

Members of the Consortium already have a substantial stake in Oman Arab Bank SAOG (OAB) and the acquisition of Ahli Bank is viewed as a strategic opportunity to strengthen Ahli Bank in advance of a poten-

tial future merger of Ahli Bank with OAB.

Subject to regulatory approvals, the Consortium intends to merge OAB with Ahli Bank in due course by adopting a phased and structured approach. They will support the capable leadership teams of Ahli Bank and OAB during the intervening period to continue their transformation journey

and be positioned to maximise synergies and benefits created from a merger of stronger banks. At the time of the intended merger, legal, financial, valuation and tax due diligence exercise will be conducted for both the Banks to determine a fair share swap ratio which will be attractive to all shareholders. The consortium will work with the relevant regulatory authori-

ties and stakeholders to keep the timeline as streamlined as possible in order to eliminate any uncertainty.

Following a successful merger, the new combined banking institution will gain benefit of size and scale as well as be better positioned to meaningfully contribute to the economic development of the Sultanate, supporting larger government projects of national interest. Furthermore, the Islamic window of Ahli Bank will be transferred to Alizz Islamic Bank, which is a fully owned subsidiary of OAB. This will provide additional scale and a significant boost to Alizz's operations.

Flexibility to all the shareholders of Ahli Bank

All shareholders of Ahli Bank will have an option to accept Consortium's cash offer or remain the shareholder in Ahli Bank. The shareholders opting for cash will benefit from 100% cash payment during the prevailing high interest rate environment and tightened liquidity condition. Any shareholder not accepting the offer will continue as a shareholder in Ahli Bank and will benefit from the Consortium's value creation initiatives to capture merger synergies by adopting a structured approach. The shares of Ahli Bank will continue to be

traded on Muscat Stock Exchange till the merger is completed.

Funding and foreign direct investment

The proposed Cash Offer will be funded by the members of the Consortium from their own funding sources, thereby resulting in a positive foreign direct investment (FDI) in the Sultanate of Oman. This will mean that there will be no constraint on Ahli Bank or OAB's capital or lending ability as a result of the Offer. Ahli Bank has disclosed earlier during the year, its plan to raise RO 50 million of rights issue to support its growth. Banking is capital intensive and Consortium has the capability and willingness to provide support as and when required.

Ominvest has a strong track record of successfully executing large and complex transactions in excess of OMR 385 million in the recent past. Ominvest is thankful to the regulatory authorities for their continued support and guidance, without which these transactions would not have been possible.

Given the combined track record and strength of Ominvest and Arab Bank, the Consortium look forward to working with all stakeholders of Ahli Bank and the concerned regulatory authorities to outline the next phase of the acquisition process.

PERMACULTURE

PLANET-FRIENDLY FARMING TAKES SHAPE IN DROUGHT-HIT TUNISIA WHERE FARMERS ARE RESORTING TO TIME-TESTED, NATURAL METHODOLOGIES OF AGRICULTURE



Farmer Saber Zouani arranges his organic vegetables to sell at the French primary school in Bizerte

Returning to roots



Saber Zouani lost his job as a waiter when the COVID-19 pandemic ravaged the Tunisian tourism sector, so he decided to try something new and started a permaculture farm.

Now he grows all the food he needs and has become a pioneer of the style of ecological agriculture that is gaining fans worldwide, including in his North African country.

Many hope it will help Tunisia weather the impacts of climate change and wean it off its reliance on global supply chains, including grain and fertiliser imports from war-torn Ukraine and Russia.

In his western home town of Cap Negro, Zouani, 37, proudly showed off his three-hectare farm, set up to mimic natural ecosystems in line with ideas popularised in the 1970s by Australian ecologists.

Permaculture, as an alternative to industrial agriculture, aims to work in harmony with the environment, keep soil structures intact, and do without artificial inputs such as chemical fertilisers or pesticides.

"No, these are not weeds," said Zouani, a biotechnology graduate, pointing to nettles and dandelions



Farmer Saber Zouani inspects trees in a grove grown using permaculture

We need to create living soil, attract earthworms, fungi and all the nutrients for our plants and trees

SABER ZOUANI

growing wild all around his rows of onions, peppers and radishes.

When he harvests his vegetables, he said, he puts the excess green matter back onto the soil to slow evaporation - hoping to keep the ground as moist as a forest floor covered with fallen leaves.

Create living soil

Such methods are especially useful in Tunisia where an unprecedented drought has parched the countryside and left water reservoirs at dangerously low levels this spring.

At his farm, Zouani captures precious rainwater in a pond and only sparingly waters his plants, which are all grown from his own seeds.

Zouani also keeps cows, sheep, goats and chickens and composts their droppings to create soil enriched with the nitrogen-rich natural fertiliser.

"We need to create living soil, at-

Bring back biodiversity

The goal, Mathlouthi said, is to demonstrate to the authorities and other farmers that permaculture is a profitable and efficient agricultural system which brings back biodiversity when the soil is depleted from ploughing and chemical inputs.

She said the initiative, with funding from Switzerland and others, even covers Tunisia's sun-baked arid regions and aims to entice jobless young people to cultivate abandoned family land.

It also hopes to help change a model 'where the Tunisian farmer loses money because he is constantly spending, for a very small yield, on seeds, fertilisers and pesticides', said Mathlouthi.

Permaculture also aims to help Tunisia adapt to the searing drought that has badly impacted a farm sector centred on wheat, barley and other water-intensive cereals.

"Crises such as water stress or the Ukraine war are opportunities to promote solutions such as agroecology and permaculture," said Mathlouthi.

To help Tunisia's new eco-farmers sell their organic produce and spread the word on permaculture, the association has promoted farmers' markets and created a 'citizen food' label.

Families flocked to a recent workshop at a school in the northern city of Bizerte, where they learnt green farming techniques and sampled their tasty produce.

"These are healthy products," enthused father-of-three Salem Laghouati, 44. "It's important to know what you're eating."

Maissa Haddad, a 49-year-old schoolteacher, said she was proud to be educating children on permaculture and teaching them that it is 'beneficial for our planet and our lifestyle'.

AFP



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Gulf's AC market to grow 8% annually

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Driven by growing population, shifting climatic conditions and changing consumer lifestyles, the GCC air conditioners market is expected to generate steady sales in near future and record a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of around 8% from 2023 to 2031, according to a latest industry report released by Astute Analytica.

All around the world, there is a steady rise in the requirement for residential and commercial space cooling. Previously regarded as a luxury, air conditioners now seem to be a need. The GCC air conditioners market is being driven by shifting climatic conditions and consumer lifestyles.

'Due to the hot and humid weather in the GCC countries, the air conditioner market has reached saturation. However, the start of several massive

projects is projected to increase the supply of air conditioners in the region over the ensuing years,' Astute Analytica said in its report.

As per the report, manufacturers of air conditioners have significantly contributed by lowering the cost of units, raising their efficiency, and using better materials and technology.

With rising demand, the industry's level of competition has increased, and there are now many businesses offering air conditioning systems and units in the GCC countries.

'In the GCC, the temperature and weather are hot and dry. The hot weather lasts the entire year, with sporadic wintertime rain. According to hot days and nights based on temperature thresholds, summers are getting longer and winters are getting shorter,' the report noted.

As per the estimates given in another report from Research and Mar-



kets, the GCC air conditioner market attained a value of US\$4.124bn in 2022.

Astute Analytica said that health issues in the area could be brought on by the region's rising trend of extreme

heat. 'Unless GCC climate change and urban planning issues are addressed, the observed pattern of temperature increase is troubling, and temperatures in the region may further rise within a few years. As a result, there is a tremendous increase in the demand for the use of air conditioners in residential structures, which protects occupants indoors, boosts productivity, and lowers the infant mortality rate,' the report said.

Higher demand for split AC

Due to their ease of installation, quiet operation, and ability to simultaneously chill various spaces with a multi-split system, split air conditioners are currently in higher demand than other types of air conditioners in the GCC, according to Astute Analytica.

Over the following few years, the split AC segment will likely continue to lead. Additionally, a high demand rate for window air conditioners is likely in the near future.

According to the report, Variable Refrigerant Flow (VRF) segment is

likely to record a maximum growth rate during 2021-2027. Relying on the need, VRF systems alter the refrigerant flow to interior units. The VRF technology is best suited for applications with variable loads or where zoning is essential owing to its capability to handle the quantity of refrigerant supplied to fan coil units spread across a building.

The commercial sector has emerged over time as the GCC's most significant end-user of air conditioners. The demand for ACs in the commercial sector is growing rapidly and is anticipated to continue doing so over the coming few years. The expansion of the tourism sector in the UAE is also expected to make the hospitality sector a lucrative opportunity for market players.

'A rise in the demand for air conditioners is anticipated in the GCC, largely as a result of consumers' rising disposable income and ability to buy upscale goods,' Astute Analytica said.

eXtra introduces widest range of air conditioners and services in Oman

eXtra, the leading electronics retailer in Oman, is proud to announce its comprehensive range of air conditioners and exceptional services, catering to the diverse needs of customers across the country. With a commitment to delivering superior cooling solutions and unmatched customer satisfaction, extra has become the go-to destination for all air conditioning requirements.

eXtra offers an extensive selection of air conditioners, ranging from split ACs to portable units and window ACs.

One of the key advantages of choosing extra is the convenience of their nationwide delivery service. Customers can enjoy hassle-free shopping from the comfort of their homes and have their air conditioners delivered to their doorstep, anywhere in Oman. extra's reliable delivery network ensures prompt and efficient service to customers across the country.

In addition to offering a wide range of air conditioners, eXtra goes the extra mile to ensure customer satisfaction. They provide professional AC cleaning services for all customers, irrespective of whether they purchased their units from eXtra or not. This dedicated service ensures that customers can enjoy the optimal performance and longevity of their air conditioning units.

With branches conveniently located in Ghubra, Mawaleh and Sohar, eXtra is easily accessible to customers in these areas. Their knowledgeable and friendly staff are always ready to assist customers in selecting the perfect air conditioner for their specific requirements.

eXtra also offers an online platform and a user-friendly mobile application. Customers can browse the extensive range of air conditioners, compare specifications, read customer reviews, and make their purchase conveniently through the eXtra website (extra.com) or the eXtra mobile app.

eXtra is committed to providing exceptional value to its customers, and they regularly run promotions on air conditioners. Customers can take advantage of these offers, which often include free installation on a wide range of models. These promotions allow customers to enjoy the benefits of a premium air conditioning system without any additional costs.

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Energy efficiency and sustainability take centre stage

The HVAC industry is experiencing significant growth and undergoing transformative changes as it adapts to evolving demands and environmental concerns.

China stands at the forefront of air conditioner demand, with 42.1mn units consumed in 2020. Furthermore, the global HVAC market is anticipated to reach a staggering US\$367.5bn by 2030, exhibiting a CAGR of 3.9% between 2020 and 2030. By 2050, the global stock of air conditioners is expected to soar to 5.6bn units, with China leading the pack at 730mn units.

Residential sector

With the advent of early summers and an increasing occurrence of heatwaves, the demand for air conditioning in residential properties is on the rise. Homeowners are investing in air conditioning units to ensure livable environments during the hottest months. Moreover, heat pumps that provide both heating and cooling are gaining popularity due to their versatility in all seasons.

Japan takes the lead in air conditioning usage, with over 91% of households equipped with some form of air conditioning. Urban areas also show a higher probability of AC usage, with a 9% increase. North America is witnessing substantial demand for air conditioners, exceeding 15mn units in 2020. The global AC unit count is predicted to rise by an additional 5.5bn by 2050, mainly driven by densely populated countries such as India, China, and Indonesia.

Smart technology

To combat the rising electricity bills associated with prolonged AC usage, homeowners are turning to smart technology solutions. The adoption of smart thermostats or AC controllers allows users to optimise energy consumption, resulting in significant cost savings.

Intelligent thermostats can even learn users' preferences and make automatic adjustments, further enhancing energy efficiency. As the HVAC industry continues to evolve, smart thermostats are expected to gain even more popularity in the years ahead.

The global smart thermostat market, valued at US\$2.2bn in 2020, is projected to reach US\$25.5bn by 2030. North America leads in WiFi thermostat production, accounting for 85% of global output. Furthermore, the North



American smart thermostat market is anticipated to grow by 20.1% annually, reaching US\$5.5bn by 2030.

The region also dominates smart thermostat consumption, capturing a substantial 71% market share, followed by Europe at 19%.

Electricity demand

The rising global temperatures have led to an increase in Cooling Degree Days (CDD), reflecting the additional cooling

required for indoor comfort. This surge in CDDs has driven higher demand for air conditioning, resulting in an uptick in electricity consumption.

A study by Climate Central reveals that 95% of US cities experienced an increase in CDDs since the 1970s, including northern regions like Minneapolis and Portland. Air conditioners currently account for approximately 6% of all electricity produced in the US, and this figure is expected to rise in the

By 2050, global energy demand due to ACs is expected to reach 6,205 TWh. However, doubling the energy efficiency of ACs could reduce this demand to 3,407 TWh

coming years.

Space cooling is projected to contribute to a 37% growth in global electricity demand from 2018 to 2050. AC units and fans presently consume nearly 20% of the world's total electricity. By 2050, global energy demand due to air conditioning is expected to almost triple, reaching a staggering 6,205 TWh. However, doubling the energy efficiency of air conditioning could reduce this demand to 3,407 TWh,

showcasing the significance of efficient systems in reducing environmental impact.

HVAC and the environment

The increasing use of air conditioning worldwide has resulted in soaring energy consumption and elevated carbon emissions. To counteract this trend, the HVAC industry is placing greater emphasis on energy-efficient systems. Consequently, energy efficiency is becoming a primary focus of HVAC innovation.

Consumers are increasingly conscious of their energy usage and carbon footprint. This growing sense of social responsibility has led to a shift towards efficient HVAC units and smart thermostats to reduce electricity consumption.

According to the International Energy Agency (IEA), addressing growing cooling demand is one of the most critical energy challenges. High-efficiency HVAC systems can significantly reduce annual energy bills and contribute to a cleaner, more sustainable future.

Looking forward

The HVAC market is set to continue its expansion and evolution in response to rising demands and environmental considerations. Energy efficiency and sustainability will remain key focal points for the industry.

HVAC manufacturers are investing in cutting-edge technologies to develop products that reduce energy consumption. By enhancing air conditioning efficiency and promoting greener alternatives, the industry aims to mitigate the strain on electricity demand while providing optimal comfort to consumers.

With a growing desire for greener products, today's consumers are willing to pay more for eco-friendly solutions. As climate change concerns continue to influence consumer behaviour, transitioning to energy-efficient HVAC technology has become imperative for both manufacturers and consumers alike. Embracing these trends will not only benefit the environment but also contribute to long-term cost savings and a sustainable future for the HVAC industry.

The need for energy-efficient air conditioners

As the world's population continues to grow, so does the demand for energy. Using ACs and electric fans to stay cool accounts for nearly 20% of the total electricity used in buildings around the world today, according to the International Energy Agency. This is a major problem, as it contributes to climate change and rising energy bills.

There are a number of reasons why it is important to have energy-efficient air conditioners. First, they can help to reduce your energy bills. In fact, the US Department of Energy estimates that one can save up to US\$500 per year on energy bills by upgrading to an energy-efficient AC.

Second, energy-efficient ACs can help to reduce carbon footprint. ACs that are not energy-efficient can emit large amounts of greenhouse gases, which contribute to climate change. By upgrading to an energy-efficient AC, you can help to reduce your impact on the environment.

Third, energy-efficient ACs can improve your indoor air quality. ACs that are not energy-efficient can recirculate dirty air back into your home, which can lead to health problems such as asthma and allergies. Energy-efficient



ACs have filters that help to remove pollutants from the air, which can improve your indoor air quality.

There are a number of things you can do to choose an energy-efficient air conditioner. First, look for the ENERGY STAR label. This label indicates that the AC meets certain energy efficiency standards.

Second, consider the size of the air conditioner. An air conditioner that is too large or too small for your home will not be as energy efficient. You can use an online calculator to determine the right size air conditioner for your home.

Third, consider the features of the air conditioner. Some air conditioners have features such as programmable thermostats and timers that can help to improve energy efficiency.

Fourth, compare prices from different retailers. Energy-efficient air conditioners can be more expensive than non-energy-efficient air conditioners, but they can save you money in the long run on your energy bills.

By choosing an energy-efficient air conditioner, you can save money on your energy bills, reduce your carbon footprint, and improve your indoor air quality. These are all important reasons to make the switch to an energy-efficient air conditioner today.

50% OF THE MIDDLE EAST RESIDENTS TAKE ACTION TO BREATHE CLEAN AIR: DAIKIN’S ART OF AIR SURVEY



Daikin Middle East and Africa, a leading global manufacturer of Heating, Ventilation, Air Conditioning & Refrigeration (HVAC-R) solutions today released its first Art of Air survey findings shedding light on the impact of Indoor Air Quality amongst residents in the Middle East.

Daikin collaborated with Censuswide, an independent market research consultancy, to conduct the study with the aim of increasing awareness of the importance of Indoor Air Quality - enabling residents to take action to improve quality of life.

The air we breathe determines the quality of life we can lead. The survey concluded that while 90% said the air quality around them impacts their quality of life and overall health only half take action to breathe clean air. The Art of Air survey by Daikin reminds us that Indoor Air Quality plays a critical role in our overall health and well-being. Indoor air temperature and humidity have a strong effect on our comfort, sleep, and health at home.

Studies show that indoor air can be several times more polluted than outdoor air. This is particularly relevant in the Middle East, where the region’s weather conditions often lead people to spend over 90% of their time indoors. Whether in homes, offices, shopping malls, hospitals, or gyms, individuals are exposed to this potentially harmful environment. Consequently, it becomes imperative to prioritise and maintain fresh, clean Indoor Air Quality.

Apart from the impact the quality of air has on our health, investing in sustainable air conditioning systems is key. Air condi-

tioning accounts for as much as 70 per cent of electricity consumption. Overall, well designed, and high-quality air-conditioning system and air purification are vital to our health as much as a healthy diet.

Unfortunately, concentrations of some pollutants indoors are often two to five times higher than typical outdoor concentrations leading to a range of health issues, including allergies, respiratory problems, sleep, and reduced productivity. With a strong commitment to creating healthier living environments, the leading expert of Air, Daikin, is at the forefront of innovation, providing advanced systems that optimize air conditioning, heating, ventilation, climate control, and air purification.

“When it comes to being healthy, people tend to change their lifestyle, eat healthy, and activate a fitness routine as part of their everyday life. However, people often don’t realise, nor give importance to the air they breathe indoors. Good air quality, humidity and temperature are important for overall health,” said Tuna Gulenc, Vice President at Daikin Middle East and Africa.

“Our recent research proved that residents are in fact aware of the role their air conditioning system plays. Ninety-three per cent agreed that regular inspection and upgrading of air conditioning systems will help improve Indoor Air Quality and energy efficiency. At Daikin, we are committed to developing innovative solutions that improve Indoor Air Quality, ensuring healthier and more comfortable living and working spaces for individuals around the world.”

Daikin’s mission is to provide its customers with technology innovation that will help improve the living and working condi-

tions, health and comfort while taking the lead on limiting and reducing the impact on the energy consumption. Daikin’s efforts to increase energy efficiency, and manufacture high-quality durable, and reliable products such as their inverter air conditioners is in their DNA.

In addition, Daikin also uses lower global warming refrigerants to reduce environmental and climate impacts, such as R32. Daikin aims to make all aspects of its business carbon neutral by 2050 through its net-zero strategy.

While the survey stated that only 46% of the UAE residents use an air purifier to breathe clean air, more than half regularly service their air conditioning system. Air conditioners actually make an impact as the majority of the people in the region rely on it for increased comfort and to breathe fresh air indoors due to the changing climate. We want people to be proactive and take control of their own health by learning more about how air quality impacts them,” said Gulenc.

“It is important for people to understand that servicing and upgrading their air conditioning system is vital for energy efficiency, prolonged lifespan, improved indoor air quality, enhanced performance, reduced malfunctions and overall comfort and safety of their family,” he concluded.

Daikin is all about the Air. Its vision is to develop air conditioning systems, globally, that are energy efficient. The Art of Air campaign. Daikin’s Fusion 25 management strategy focuses on implementing solutions that provide new value for the environment and air while contributing to sustainable growth.

DAIKIN

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Muscat Electronics LLC

the art of air

Recreating air is a science, but making it happen is an art.

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Ionocaloric cooling may help replace refrigerants and provide safe, efficient cooling and heating for homes

"The landscape of refrigerants is an unsolved problem: No one has successfully developed an alternative solution that makes stuff cold, works efficiently, is safe, and doesn't hurt the environment," said Drew Lilley, a graduate research assistant at Berkeley Lab and PhD candidate at UC Berkeley who led the study. "We think the inocaloric cycle has the potential to meet all those goals if realized appropriately."

Finding a solution that replaces current refrigerants is essential for countries to meet climate change goals, such as those in the Kigali Amendment (accepted by 145 parties, including the United States in October 2022). The agreement commits signatories to reduce production and consumption of hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs) by at least 80% over the next 25 years.

HFCs are powerful greenhouse gases commonly found in refrigerators and air conditioning systems, and can trap heat thousands of times as effectively as carbon dioxide.

The new ionocaloric cycle joins several other kinds of 'caloric' cooling in development. Those techniques use different methods - including magnetism, pressure, stretching, and electric fields - to manipulate solid materials so that they absorb or release heat. Ionocaloric cooling differs by using ions to drive solid-to-liquid phase changes. Using a liquid has the added benefit of making the material pumpable, making it easier to get heat in or out of the system - something solid-state cooling has struggled with.

Lilley and corresponding author Ravi Prasher, a research affiliate in Berkeley Lab's Energy Technologies Area and adjunct professor in mechanical engineering at UC Berkeley, laid out the theory underlying the ionocaloric cycle. They calculated that it has the potential to compete with or even exceed the efficiency of gaseous refrigerants found in the majority of systems today.

They also demonstrated the technique experimentally. Lilley used a salt made with iodine and sodium, alongside ethylene carbonate, a common organic solvent used in lithium-ion batteries.

"There's potential to have refrigerants that are not just GWP [global warming potential]-zero, but GWP-negative," Lilley said. "Using a material like ethylene carbonate could actually be carbon-negative, because you produce it by using carbon dioxide as a pro-

This work was supported by the DOE's Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy Building Technologies Program.

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