

MUSCAT DAILY

AN APEX MEDIA PUBLICATION

ISSN 2075-1575


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MONDAY, JANUARY 01 2024

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Muscat Daily wishes its readers a Happy New Year!



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H M the Sultan's greetings conveyed to Pope Francis

Muscat - Mahmoud Hamad al Hassani, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to the Swiss Confederation, presented his credentials to Pope Francis, Chief of State of the Vatican City, as Oman's Non-Resident Ambassador to the Vatican City.

The ambassador conveyed
His Majesty Sultan Haitham



bin Tarik's greetings and wishes of good health to Pope Francis, along with His Majesty the Sultan's wishes of well-being for the people of the Vatican.

Hassani stressed the importance accorded to coexistence, tolerance and peace in the sultanate.

Sayyid Badr, UK Foreign Secretary Cameron discuss situation in Gaza

Muscat - H E Sayyid Badr Hamad al Busaidi, Foreign Minister, received a phone call from David Cameron, British Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, on Sunday.

The two ministers discussed the current situation in the Gaza



Strip and maritime navigation through the Red Sea. They stressed the need for concerted international efforts to reach a comprehensive ceasefire, provide humanitarian aid in the Gaza Strip and pave the way for peace.

Sur gears up as Arab Tourism Capital for 2024

Our Correspondent

Muscat

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, in coordination with the Governor of South Sharqiyah, is gearing up to start a series of events, activities and programmes in the wilayat of Sur from January 1 in celebration of becoming the Arab Tourism Capital for the year 2024.



Work will be assigned to create many facilities for diverse tourist experiences

H E SALIM AL MAHROUQI

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, in coordination with the Governor of South Sharqiyah, is gearing up to start a series of events, activities and programmes in the wilayat of Sur from January 1 in celebration of becoming the Arab Tourism Capital for the year 2024.

H E Salim Mohammed al Mahrouqi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism, described Sur as rich in culture, heritage and history, besides having the infrastructure to highlight and attract tourists from within and outside the sultanate. Tourism activities will further enhance the status of the wilayat.

He informed that there is a plan to develop areas adjacent to Sur city. This follows the announcement of a ministerial decision in October after approval of the Council of Ministers designating Wadi Shab area in Tiwi as a tourist area. Consultations are currently being held for the scope of work in the area.

"Work will be assigned to create many facilities for diverse tourist experiences," H E Mahrouqi said.

"Coinciding with celebrations marking Sur being named Arab Tourism Capital for 2024, in the next two months consultation services will be assigned for the Maritime History Museum in Sur. We hope it will be com-

pleted within two years. Work will also be assigned to establish a visitors' centre in Qalhat archaeological site, which is registered on the World Heritage List."

He added that archaeological surveys, and excavation and restoration works of historical sites in Sur, including Ras al Hadd and Ras al Jinz, are ongoing.

Dr Yahya bin Badr al Ma'awali, Governor of South Sharqiyah, described Sur as deserving of the title of Arab Tourism Capital owing to its historical, cultural and social heritage, besides infrastructure to showcase these.

With elevation to Arab Tourism Capital, Sur will be able to assert its place on the global tourism map.

LAST SUNSET OF 2023



New Year's Eve revellers frolicked in beaches and parks or thronged entertainment venues which offered varied options for dining and leisure activities. The last sunset of 2023 was a delightful sight to most strollers at Shatti al Qurm, as it was for shutterbugs around the globe (v K Shafeer)

Pact inked to set up centre to host global sports events

Our Correspondent

Muscat

The Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth and Oman Sail signed an agreement on Sunday to establish Oman Events Centre (OEC) to host local and international sports events in the sultanate.

The concept of OEC is an outcome of an investment lab organised by the ministry with support from Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up Unit and the National Programme for Investment and Export Development - Nazdaher.

On the occasion, H E Basil bin Ahmed al Rawas, Undersecretary for Sports and Youth in the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, said, "The Oman Events Centre will be actively engaged in studying regional and international sports tournaments and events, and evaluating the benefits of hosting these in sporting, economic and social terms. Prospective events will be carefully scrutinised by regulatory authorities in close coordination



Great efforts are exerted to secure hosting rights, in the process developing national capabilities in the fields of organisation, management, marketing and media

MUHAMMAD AHMED AL AMRI

with specialists and event organisers."

He added, "The centre will play a crucial role in the strategic endeavour to elevate Oman's standing as a premier destination for global sports events."



Oman will be the FIH Hockey5s World Cup 2024 from January 24 to 31.

According to Muhammad Ahmed al Amri, Director General of Sports Activities in the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, OEC will play a pivotal role in evaluating and analysing prospective regional and international sports tournaments for the benefits of hosting these to the country prior to making formal proposals.

"The centre will train specialists in the ministry and private in-

stitutions engaged in the sports field to organise tournaments and events.

"Hosting major sports events and activities has become a major industry in which countries compete. Great efforts are exerted to secure hosting rights, in the process developing national capabilities in the fields of organisation, management, marketing and media. Hosting international sports events is also an opportunity to highlight the country's tourism potential," Amri added.

As 2024 begins, Oman stands optimistic, contemplating varied strategies for development, particularly to promote growth in tourism. With unwavering commitment to showcasing its cultural richness and natural beauty, Oman is geared up for innovative initiatives to make the New Year a milestone for tourism. What kind of events would you like to witness Oman host in 2024 to promote tourism? Here's what *Muscat Daily* readers said –

Khalid al Amri
Filmmaker

Oman can captivate global audiences in 2024 by organising film festivals that celebrate cinematic diversity. We have already witnessed a number of film festivals in the country. Muscat International Film Festival has a global appeal; it is attended by many international stars. Such cultural initiatives can draw filmmakers, industry professionals and movie enthusiasts, creating a vibrant atmosphere and spotlighting Oman's potential as a unique backdrop for cinematic storytelling.

Salim Ahmed
Private sector employee

There are many places in Oman with no light pollution. Oman's potential as a stargazing destination could shine in 2024 with astronomy events and festivals. We can bring to-



gether astronomers, astrophotographers and space enthusiasts; these gatherings can capitalise on our clear night skies, creating a celestial tourism experience.

Mohammad al Hinai
Government employee

In 2024, I would love to see Oman host international cultural festivals that showcase our rich heritage, music and arts. These events can draw global attention, inviting people to experience the unique blend of tradition and modernity that defines our nation.

Deepa Punjabi
Astrologer and vastu consultant

International sports events including cricket and football, fashion shows, Bollywood music events, Filmfare awards, GCC interschool tournaments and comedy events hosted in the sultanate will put Oman firmly on the global tourism map.

Mohammad al Abri
Government employee

Oman could become a hub for MICE and eco-

tourism events in 2024, organising conferences and exhibitions focused on sustainability and environmental conservation. This approach will align with our commitment to preserving the natural beauty as well as to have more businesses making Oman a unique destination.

Qaseem al Balushi
Salesman

Oman is a country of diverse food in different governorates. In 2024, Oman could host gastronomy festivals featuring our rich culi-

nary traditions. Inviting renowned chefs and organising food-related events can introduce international visitors to our delectable cuisine, fostering a culinary exchange that adds a flavourful dimension to Oman's tourism appeal.

Amit Kumar
Private sector employee

Oman is known for its passion for sports, mainly football. Of late, we have also seen growing popularity of other sports, including cricket and hockey. I believe that hosting major sporting events in 2024, like international tennis, golf and T20 cricket will be fantastic for tourism. The combination of world-class athletic competitions and Oman's stunning landscapes can attract sports enthusiasts, providing a dynamic platform to showcase our country on a global stage.

Samuel Joseph
Private sector employee

The dawn of 2024 holds promise for Oman's tourism landscape. I hope to witness the nation host cultural festivals and eco-friendly events, drawing international attention to the richness of its traditions and the allure of its pristine landscapes. There is scope for more adventure sports activities and zip lines among the mountains to attract attention of global tourists.

Khalid al Jabri
Businessman

I would love to see Oman host sports events, mainly beach games. There are lovely beaches and infrastructure in the country and one must resolve to make Oman a sports destination in 2024. Also, we can have open air film festivals and star gazing events on beaches. It will be an opportunity for families to come together besides presenting scope for economic activities.



NEXT ON YOUR SAY

What can be done to improve the immigration process at Muscat International Airport?

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

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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MUSCAT DAILY

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MTCIT meeting reviews digital transformation in government sector



Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MTCIT) on Sunday organised the first meeting of heads of teams tasked with the 'management of change and digital transition' in government institutions.

The meeting was part of a series of gatherings that has been initiated to expedite the process of digital transition in the government sector, with the prime objective of realising the goals and indices of the Government Digital Transition Programme 2021-2025.

The meeting announced a 'change management knowledge community' to help accelerate digital transition and secure its success and sustainability

The meeting discussed the importance of activating the role of change management teams to ensure the success of digital transformation plans in government institutions, and of the executive plan for the national change management strategy to implement several digital transformation programmes in 2024.

The meeting also reviewed the unified national portal for e-

government services, the challenges facing change management teams in government institutions, and ways to contribute to the change management goals in the Government Digital Transition Programme for 2024 in solving these challenges.

The meeting also reviewed change stories for projects in digital transformation to focus on

how to manage the human element and direct it towards new technology effectively and constructively to ensure full benefit from digital transformation.

It stressed the importance of enhancing interaction between change management teams in government institutions to accelerate the work of digital transformation teams and the necessity of transferring knowledge and benefiting from successful experiences.

During the meeting, a 'change management knowledge community' was announced. The community will help accelerate digital transition and secure its success and sustainability.



Dakhliyah to organise investment forum in Jan

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Dakhliyah governorate is organising its first business forum of 2024 in the very first month of the New Year, under the patronage of Abdulsalam bin Mohamed al Murshidi, President of Oman Investment Authority.

To boost investment in the governorate and increase its contribution to the national income, the forum is looking at exploring 35 investment opportunities, organisers said.

The forum will be held in partnership with the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP), the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning (MHUP), the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MHT), the Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises Development (ASMED), the Oman

Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI), and the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates 'Mada'yn'.

According to the organisers, the forum targets several investment sectors such as the industrial, heritage, tourism, agricultural and municipality. It aims to attract the largest possible number of investors, support national industries, and create job opportunities for residents.

RO6mn earmarked for projects

The Governorate of Dakhliyah has announced a number of projects worth over RO6mn to be completed by the end of 2025.

Governor Hilal bin Saeed al Hajri underscored the importance of having more public spaces, and parks and gardens for family retreats and hubs for cultural events.

These additions are in direct response to the needs of a burgeoning population.

Among the anticipated projects are the Dakhliyah Boulevard, the Nizwa Park, the Nizwa entrance project, and the Jabal Akdar Park.

"By 2025, we aim to pave around 600km of internal roads. Commercial areas, marketplaces, and a bus station in the Farq area are on the horizon," the governor said, elaborating on the road map.

The Dakhliyah Boulevard project, designed as a health and recreational milestone, is scheduled to begin next year.

Hajri spoke about the strides taken in internal road projects, focusing on residential developments. He confirmed that the groundwork for the same has been completed with execution set to roll out next year.

Bids invited for development of two heritage sites in N Batinah

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MHT) has floated two tenders for the management and development of Saham Fort and Haibi Fort in North Batinah.

The strategic location of the governorate along the Sea of Oman and its significant population make it a key area in Oman's overall development process.

Saham has several historical sites, such as Al-Fulaij Castle, Al Rawashid Castle, Al Hulis Castle, Al Reddah Castle, Saham Fort, Al Shiekh Fort, Daqal Castle and Al Ghayz Castle.



'The ministry is looking for partnerships with private sector groups for the development and management of those two heritage sites,' MHT said in a statement.

The ministry confirmed that the competing companies must submit a study that should include ways to market the two sites commercially and culturally, ideas on cultural workshops,

organising artistic and cultural events, and plans for various activities to revive the two heritage sites.

Competing companies must highlight the architectural uniqueness of the forts and involve the local community in various cultural and social events, the ministry added.

February 15 has been notified as the deadline for the submission of bids. An investor will be granted a rental period of up to three years, MHT stated.

North Batinah is set to invest around RO14mn over the next three years in a series of urban renewal and development projects,

officials from the governorate said.

These projects have been taken up to further improve its city life through developments of waterfronts, parks and gardens; besides the improvements of the entrances to various wilayats, beautification of wadi banks and establishment of sports pathways and tourism infrastructure.

Oman is hugely investing in heritage sites, which are a big draw for international tourists, apart from the local ones.

MHT data indicates that the sultanate's heritage sites attracted 80,317 visitors till the end of September of this year.



36 films chosen for 2nd Sharqiyah International Film Festival in Sur

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The 2nd Sharqiyah International Film Festival - to be held in the port city of Sur from January 11 - has accepted 36 films for competitions under various categories.

Organisers of the event confirmed that a group of highly acclaimed film critics picked up 36 films from 255 entries coming from 35 countries for screening during the four-day festival.

It is a proud moment for the Omani Film Society (OFS) and the Oman Theatre Society (OTS), the organisers of the event, to find 16 Omani films qualifying for the event as against 20 international films.

Dr Humaid bin Saeed al Ameri, chairman of the OFS Board of Directors and president of the festival, said that the two organisations seek to spread the cinematic culture across Oman spearheading a movement through film festivals in various governorates.

Anwar al Ruza'iqi, director of the event, said that the 2nd Sharqiyah International Film Festival is part of that nation-wide movement.

"It is the fifth stop in the series of international festivals launched by the two societies."

The festival's jury, Ruza'iqi in-

formed, consists of Walid Ahmed Darwish from Syria as head of the committee, and Dr Hossam al Din Mustafa Dagher from Egypt and Oman's Khamis al Rawahi as members.

In its second edition, the festival will host a number of film actors, namely Ibrahim al Sallal, Khaled Amin and Khairallah al Anzi from Kuwait; Khalil al Rumaithi from Bahrain; Dina Mohsen Wizo, Mustafa Masoud Ramadan from Egypt; and Enas Muhammad from the United Arab Emirates.

Regarding the festival's award categories, Ruza'iqi said that the organisers will give away 12 awards distributed in six categories. They are Best Narrative Film (Omani), Best Narrative Film (International), Special Jury Awards for Short Narrative Films in Omani and International categories.

In the Short Documentary Film category, awards will be given for the Best Documentary Film (Omani), the Best Documentary Film (International), and the Special Jury awards. In the Short Animation Film category, there are the Best Animation Film, and the Best Screenplay awards, Ruza'iqi added.

The festival envisages offering a platform to local filmmakers to explore their capabilities and creativity.

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FOREX RATES

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India	216.08
Pakistan	723.45
Bangladesh	285.39
Philippines	143.79
Sri Lanka	842.28

*Rates as on December 31
Source: xe.com

BRIEFS

Russia to raise wheat export duty to \$46.5 per tonne

Russia's duty on exports of wheat will be raised to 4,165.9 rubles (\$46.51) per tonne from January 11, 2024, from the current rate of 3,859.7 rubles (\$43.09) per tonne, according to the country's agriculture ministry.

The duty on barley will be zero, the duty on corn will be increased to 1,431.7 rubles (\$15.98) against 1,148.6 rubles (\$12.82) per tonne.

The export duty rate for wheat is calculated based on an indicative price of \$250 per tonne, for barley - \$172.3 per tonne, for corn - \$195.2 per tonne.

The floating duty on Russian grain exports is effective from June 2, 2021. The Ministry of Agriculture determines the amount of the duty for a period of one week.

Oman's refinery output increases 6.6% in 2023

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman's petroleum refineries have experienced significant growth in the production of various fuels and petrochemicals, driven by improved local demand and increased exports in 2023.

According to preliminary statistics released by the National Center for Statistics and Information (NCSI), the sultanate's total refinery output increased by 6.6% during the first 11 months of 2023 compared to the same period in 2022.

The production of M91 grade petrol rose by 16.3% year-on-year to 14.73mn barrels during the January-November period of 2023 compared to the same period in 2022. Local sales of M91 grade petrol increased by 11% to 13.4mn barrels, while exports amounted to 1.22mn barrels during the same period.

On the other hand, the output of M95 grade petrol fell 20.7% to 10.66mn barrels in the first 11 months of 2023, as indicated by NCSI data. Local sales of M95 grade petrol also decreased to 11.08mn barrels, while exports amounted to 580,400 barrels in January.

Volumes of diesel production increased by 5.9% in the January-



Production of M91 grade petrol rose by 16.3% year-on-year to 14.73mn barrels during the January-November period of 2023. Local sales of M91 grade petrol increased by 11% to 13.4mn barrels

November period compared to the same period in 2022, reaching 31.15mn barrels. Diesel sales increased to 13.14mn barrels, with diesel exports reaching 17.8mn barrels during the first 11 months of 2023.

Furthermore, the production of jet fuel increased by 32%, totaling 9,292,200 barrels, with sales of 4,048,700 barrels.

In petrochemicals, the production of benzene jumped by 78.7%, reaching 133,100 metric

tonnes, while the production of paraxylene reached 465,100 metric tonnes, representing a 216.6% surge. The production of polypropylene, however, decreased by 2.1%, amounting to 222,900 metric tonnes.

The production of liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) increased by 20.9%, reaching 7.41mn barrels. Additionally, liquefied petroleum gas, paraxylene, and benzene products recorded robust growth in exports, with a growth rate of 103.8%, 214.7%, and 95.9%, respectively.



Oman Flour Mills' new feed factory starts operations

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman Flour Mills Company (OFM) announced on Sunday the initiation of commercial operations at its new animal feed and premix factory, set to enhance the company's feed production capacity by 50%.

The company recently inaugurated the factory, equipped with a production capacity of 20 tonnes of animal feed per hour, along with a pre-mixing unit capable of producing six tonnes of premix per hour.

OFM disclosed the successful launch of the new factory for feed and premix to its valued shareholders, stating, 'The trial period of the factory has been completed, and commercial operations have commenced', in a disclosure to the Muscat Stock Exchange on Sunday.

This development significantly strengthens Oman Flour Mills Company's position within the food sector. The company

emphasised, 'The production capacity of the new feed mill stands at 20 tonnes per hour, thereby increasing the company's current production capacity by 50%.'

In addition, the premix plant provides a production capacity equivalent to 6 tonnes per hour, meeting the company's requirements for these blends and addressing the needs of local feed mills, OFM added.

The new factory is strategically located in Muscat's Muttrah area and aligns with the circular economy principles of utilising local raw materials, fostering economic sustainability, and adhering to environmentally friendly practices.

The facility employs innovative technology, including robotic systems for packaging operations, to ensure efficiency, productivity, and a safe working environment. The high level of automation enables precise control over ingredients, mixing, and production processes.

Sohar International, U-Capital sign liquidity provider agreement

Muscat - Sohar International has entered into a strategic partnership with Ubhar Capital (U-Capital), a leading brokerage firm on the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX).

This collaboration marks a significant development in Oman's financial landscape, as U-Capital takes on the role of the market liquidity provider, facilitating the continuous flow of supply and demand orders for Sohar International shares.

Ahmed al Musalmi, Chief Executive Officer of Sohar International, said, "At Sohar International, our steadfast commitment revolves around enriching shareholder value. This collaboration harmonises with MSX strategies and initiatives

aimed at fostering public offerings, broadening capital market solutions, and catalysing investment, thus facilitating market enhancements and revitalising the role of capital markets in the economic advancement of the Sultanate of Oman. It also underscores the bank's unwavering dedication to nurturing innovation and attaining excellence in a dynamic market landscape."

"Moreover, this collaboration ushers in a realm of possibilities, further empowering our stakeholders. The amalgamated expertise is poised not only to augment the liquidity of Sohar International shares but also to propel innovation within Oman's financial domain," he added.



The primary objective of this partnership is to strengthen and optimise the liquidity of Sohar International shares, which are listed on MSX. This collaboration strictly adheres to the regulatory guidelines established by MSX for the financial market industry.

By joining forces with U-Capital, Sohar International positions itself to unlock new opportunities, elevate shareholder value, and enhance liquidity, reaffirming its position as a pioneer in Oman's financial sector.

Sohar International's post-merger market capitalisation stands at approximately RO500mn, with an asset size of over RO6.5bn, an increase in market share of 50%.

Sheikh Abdulaziz Khalifa al Saadi, Chief Executive Officer of Ubhar Capital, said, "We are profoundly thrilled about our collaboration with Sohar International, which presents a significant opportunity to deliver substantial value to its shareholders. This strategic alliance is poised to set a cutting-edge standard within the industry, and our collective efforts will introduce an unmatched experience for the shareholders of Sohar International."

As Sohar International and U-Capital work hand in hand to optimise liquidity, adhere to regulatory standards, and pioneer new possibilities, they solidify their positions as leaders in Oman's financial landscape.

Abraj adopts robust records management framework

Muscat - Abraj Energy Services, Oman's leading provider of drilling and well services, announced a groundbreaking initiative in collaboration with the National Records and Archives Authority (NRAA).

Abraj has adopted a comprehensive Records Management Manual and Retention Schedules, becoming the country's first drilling and well services provider to comply with national records regulations.

By collaborating with NRAA, Abraj demonstrates an unwavering commitment to operational excellence, transparency, and responsible information management.

The newly adopted framework establishes a transparent and efficient system for document control, storage, retrieval, and archiving, ensuring implementation with the provisions of the Archives and Records Law and its amendments.

"Implementing this robust Records Management Manual



reinforces our dedication to upholding the highest standards in all aspects of our operations," stated Eng Saif al Hamhami, CEO of Abraj Energy Services.

"This initiative further optimises our internal processes, enhances transparency, and strengthens our operational efficiency, ultimately enabling us to deliver the highest quality service to our clients. We are proud to be pioneers in our industry, leading the way in regulatory

compliance and aligning our strategies with Oman's Vision 2040."

The significance of Abraj's initiative extends beyond operational benefits. As a publicly listed company, Abraj recognises the importance of fostering trust and confidence with shareholders. Implementing this robust Records Management framework demonstrates Abraj's commitment to long-term value creation for all stakeholders.

India's forex reserves rose by \$58bn in 2023

New Delhi, India - India's foreign exchange (forex) reserves increased by \$4.471bn to \$620.441bn in the week ending December 22, 2023, hitting a 21-month high, the latest data released by the Reserve Bank of India showed. In the calendar year 2023, the RBI added about \$58bn to its foreign exchange kitty.

Last week, India's foreign currency assets (FCA), the biggest component of the forex reserves, rose \$4.698bn to \$549.747bn, the central bank's weekly statistical data showed.

In 2022, India's forex kitty slumped \$71bn cumulatively. Gold reserves during the week, however, declined by \$102mn to \$474.74bn.

Forex reserves are assets that are held by a nation's central bank or monetary authority. It is generally held in reserve currencies, usually the US dollar and, to a lesser degree, the Euro, Japanese Yen, and Pound Sterling.

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- 12- Residential/commercial Land with an area of 750 square meters in Duqum

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Bank Muscat opens new Green Sports fields

In line with the bank’s commitment to enhance its leading role in Social Corporate Responsibility (CSR), Bank Muscat remains committed to support youth sports teams through its annual Green Sports program.

Recently, the Bank handed over the Green Sports field to the Al Etihad Sports team from the Wilayat of Bahla, Al Dakhliyah Governorate. The event was held in the presence of the Sheikh Dr Salim Salayum al Junaibi, member at the State Council, Rabea Mubarak al Khalili, head of the Al Etihad Sports Team, Juma Khamis al Yaqoubi, regional manager, Al Dakhliyah, and a number of officials and team members.

Earlier, the Bank also celebrated the completion of another sports field in the Wilayat of Al Awabi, South Batinah Governorate, which was attended by Adnan Ahmed al Balushi, assistant regional manager - South Batinah, Abdullah Abbas al Kharousi, head of the Etihad Al Awabi Sports and Cultural Team, and a number of team members.

During the ceremony, Yaqoubi congratulated Al Etihad Sports Team in Bahla for the successful completion of the project. He said, “This is a major achievement that will contribute in enhancing the facilities and infrastructure for the team. We hope that the new facility would help the Al Etihad team to rise to greater heights, improve community bonding and harness the talent of Omani youth. We will continue to develop local sport teams and enhance youth’s talents and support sports sector in the country.”

Rabea added, “We thank Bank Muscat for the continuation of Green Sports programme which is a great supporter to local sports teams in the sultanate. The inauguration of the field will have a positive impact as it would help the team to have better sport infrastructure which will enable the team to serve all members and community.”

Kharousi also said, “The support from Bank Muscat in the lighting system project for the Etihad Al Awabi team is an important addition since it is enhancing the field’s infrastructure. Local sport fields have been an essential contributor to supporting different community activities. Green Sports programme from Bank Muscat is a positive initiative, which supports youth and national sports sector.” He further expressed his happiness with the completion of the project and affirmed that the team will continue to work hard to develop the talents of its members and support the different activities organised for the whole community.

Bank Muscat’s Green Sports programme is one of the leading CSR programmes in Oman, which provides support to local sports teams as part of the bank’s efforts to develop sports infrastructure and green spaces throughout the Sultanate of Oman. The support includes greening of football fields, water desalination and lighting. It is a matter of great encouragement that the Bank Muscat’s Green Sports programme has so far benefitted 183 teams with over 50,000 team members across the Sultanate of Oman.

‘Roam like home’ with Ooredoo’s Shahry Plans

‘Roam like home’ with Ooredoo’s new ‘take your local data and voice abroad’ service that the company has added to its Shahry postpaid plans.

It means, you can now travel to the UK, Thailand, Turkey and other top destinations while using your local data and minutes abroad without paying anything extra. So go ahead and access the internet, make calls, and use your mobile while travelling, just as you would in Oman. Keep talking, posting, reading, streaming, gaming, and scrolling wherever the road, plane, car, or bus may take you, a press release said.

As the year draws to a close and winter breaks are around the corner, Ooredoo wants Shahry customers to enjoy hassle-free travels. On top of the new service, enabling customers to roam like home in 30 specific destinations, Shahry also offers flexible roaming services in 95 other

countries. Requiring no contract, all Shahry Endless and Omanuna customers can enjoy making calls and high-speed internet in Oman, the GCC, and many other countries. They also enjoy the flexibility to upgrade or downgrade plans based on their individual needs.

Starting from just RO10 per month, Shahry Endless customers can enjoy local and GCC data of up to 40GB, up to 10GB bonus data and up to 5GB world roaming. Plus, on using all of the local and GCC data quota, speeds will be reduced to 128kbps, with no extra ‘Pay as You Go’ charges.

Meanwhile, starting from RO25 per month, Shahry Omanuna customers can enjoy up to 2TB local & GCC data, up to 30GB bonus data and up to 50GB world roaming. And on top of all of this, Shahry Omanuna plans also come with a free subscription to STARZPLAY!

Ford Territory SUV offers style and strength

Ford Territory SUV enhances the joy of driving with its impressive style, confident stance and array of features and technology. The Territory is a great companion to navigate what the city or the country roads have in store.

The Ford Territory was the outcome of Ford’s new ‘Progressive Energy in Strength’ design philosophy, which is based on the rich heritage of the brand and its iconic aesthetics. It embodies three fundamental design principles: commanding, agile, and responsive, a press release said.

The Ford Territory has an eye-catching exterior design highlighted with an integrated grille and signature light – balanced with lower graphics, with full LED lighting, which drives the focal point higher and communicates purpose, stability, and capability. The headlamps show off a unique design, with daytime running LED lights incorporated with a strong horizontal grille bar, which adds to the eye-catching appearance.



The form also has function, with the headlamps lowered towards the ground for an expanded lighting areas that also creates a more powerful front look. The bold grille bar is manufactured with high quality materials that help to reflect Ford’s global design DNA on the car.

Adding comfort and indulgence on every journey is the territory’s impressive interior. The horizontal coast-to-coast design evokes a connecting space in an embracing gesture, creating openness and spaciousness. Comfort and function are maximised through premium leather seats, with a 10-way adjustable ergonomic driver’s seat.

Built to optimise loading capacity, Territory is also equipped with more than 20 spacious storage compartments – as well as an extensible trunk with a 448-litre volume – allowing passengers to flexibly use storage spaces throughout the car.

LuLu opens 100th customer centre in UAE

LuLu inaugurated its 100th customer engagement centre at Q1 Mall, Al Warqa, Dubai. This achievement reinstates the company’s commitment to enhancing customer experience and expanding its reach in the region.

The newly opened customer engagement centre takes the tally of global engagement centres under LuLu Financial Holdings to 314, a press release said. It was inaugurated by Satish Kumar Sivan, Consul General of India, Dubai, alongside Adeeb Ahamed, managing director of LuLu Financial Holdings and Richard Wason, CEO, Lulu Financial Holdings.

Sivan said, “LuLu Exchange’s remarkable growth is a testament to its dedication to providing essential financial services. This 100th customer engagement centre is a significant step forward, reflecting the company’s commitment to the community.”

Ahamed added, “Our commitment to a value-driven approach is evident in every aspect of our operations, ensuring that integrity and customer satisfaction guide our actions. We actively work towards financial



inclusion, recognising the importance of accessible financial services for all. This commitment aligns with our broader vision of making a positive impact on the communities and environment with a focus on sustainability.

“The persistent support from the leadership and governance of the UAE has been instrumental in our growth journey. Their strategic vision and commitment to excellence have provided a solid foundation for our success. As we celebrate this milestone, LuLu Exchange remains dedicated to upholding high standards in financial services.”

Telegu ‘Sankranti’ fest on Jan 12

The Telegu community of Oman, represented by the Chiru Mega Youth Force (CMYF), is organising a special cultural programme on January 12 in celebration of Makara Sankranti/Pongal in Al Falaj Hotel in Muscat.

The event will feature orchestras, dance performances, and other entertaining activities, the organisers informed.

Makara Sankranti, also referred to as Uttarayana, is an auspicious occasion for the people in India, which marks the transition of the sun from the zodiac of Sagittarius (dhanu) to Capricorn (Makara).

The Royal Mega Mix team along with the 25 members from the Telugu film industry are set to take part in the event, in the distinguished presence of veteran actor and business tycoon Murali Mohan Rao.

An estimated 2000 people



are expected to attend this cultural extravaganza. Apart from working for the promotion of culture, this organisation also majorly contributes to social causes.

CMYF has a great track record when it comes to donating blood, a member of the force said.

“We call upon individuals to donate blood promptly at the Central Blood Bank in Bausher,” the member said, following a request from the Department of Blood Banks Services (DBBS) for more blood donations.

The blood banks in Oman are running short of supply and there is an urgent need to replenish the dwindling stock.

Ramdas Chandaka, a member of the force’s organising committee, asserted that the CMYF has a commendable track record of organising blood donation camps every three months. for the past 20 years, despite the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

150 Palestinians killed as Israeli forces continue onslaught on Gaza: Ministry

Ankara, Turkey - At least 150 Palestinians have been killed and another 286 injured as the Israeli forces continued their ongoing onslaught against them in the besieged Gaza Strip, with 12 families becoming the latest victims in the past 24 hours, the Health Ministry in the blockaded enclave said on Sunday.

The Palestinian death toll from the Israeli army's ongoing attacks on Gaza since October 7 has risen to 21,822, with 56,451 injured, the ministry said.

Israel has launched relentless air and ground attacks on the Gaza Strip following a cross-border attack by Palestinian group Hamas on October 7. Authorities claim the Hamas attacks have killed around 1,200 Israelis.

The Israeli onslaught has left Gaza in ruins, with 60 per cent of the enclave's infrastructure damaged or destroyed and nearly two million residents displaced amid acute shortages of food, clean water, and medicines.

Erdogan's call

Turkey President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said on Sunday that 'all countries and institutions' ought to unite in their opposition to the killing of defenceless women and children in the Gaza Strip for a better future. "All countries, institutions need to take a united stand against the killing of innocent children and women in Gaza," Erdogan said in his video message on New Year eve.



The death toll from the Israeli army's ongoing attacks on Gaza since October 7 has risen to 21,822, with 56,451 injured, the health ministry said (Anadolu Agency)

"We hold hope for a better future for humanity. So-called democratic, freedom-loving countries must stop supporting bloody terrorists for this to happen," the president said. Beginning with the war between Russia and Ukraine, he stressed, sincere attempts should be made to put an end to

conflicts that cause suffering for people and waste national resources. "We need to see that wealth of societies, which has been exploited for centuries, their dignity trampled upon, is used for their future, prosperity, security," he added. Erdogan stressed that the goals for 2023 were just begin-

ning as they are about to launch the real takeoff with Turkey's Century in conjunction with 2024. As the world faces global crises, he stressed: "We will elevate the star of Turkey by once again demonstrating our difference through production, employment, growth, and development. From the fight

against terrorism to economic traps, the fundamental purpose behind problems we face in areas is to obstruct the construction of great, powerful Turkey." **ICJ urged to expedite proceedings** The Palestinian Foreign Ministry on Saturday urged the Interna-

tional Court of Justice (ICJ) to expedite proceedings on a case filed by South Africa accusing Israel of 'genocidal' acts in the Gaza Strip. The case claims 'alleged violations by Israel of its obligations under the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (the 'Geno-

cide Convention') in relation to Palestinians in the Gaza Strip', according to an ICJ press release. Noting that South Africa and Palestine are signatories to the United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, the Palestinian ministry said 'what South Africa presented, relying on Article 9 of the convention, and Israel's violation of Articles 2 and 3, completely aligns with the duties of nations to prevent the commission of this crime'. The ministry called on the ICJ to swiftly respond to South Africa's request to prevent the 'genocidal' acts by issuing a decision to halt Israeli aggression with a ceasefire in Gaza. Meanwhile, Hamas called on more countries to submit similar requests to international courts against Israel as it has threatened global peace and security. The ICJ is the principal judicial organ of the United Nations. It was established by the UN Charter in June 1945 and began its activities in April 1946. Meanwhile, Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant and War Cabinet Minister Benny Gantz refused to attend a news conference by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu late on Saturday. The Israeli broadcasting authority reported on X that Gallant and Gantz refused to attend the conference without specifying the reason. Agencies

22 people dead in attack on Russian city of Belgorod

Moscow, Russia - The death toll from Ukraine's Saturday attack on the Russian city of Belgorod has risen to 22 after another person died of his injuries overnight, local authorities said on Sunday. Belgorod region Governor Vyacheslav Gladkov said in a statement on Telegram that the attack injured 109 people, 25 of whom sustained serious wounds and will be transported to Moscow for treatment. The governor said three children were among the victims in the attack that damaged 381 apartments in 30 buildings, several private houses, and numerous vehicles. This was a 'terrorist attack' that was deliberately directed at civilians, Russia's Permanent

Representative to the United Nations Vasily Nebenzya said at a meeting of the UN Security Council in New York, blaming the UK and US for helping plan and carry out the 'crime'. "A deliberate act of terrorism directed against civilians... the organisation of this terrorist attack involved American and British consultants who regularly incite the authorities of present-day Ukraine to commit bloody crimes," he stressed. Earlier on Saturday, the Russian Defence Ministry said Ukraine used two Olkha missiles with cassette munitions and Czech multiple rocket launcher systems Vampire. The strikes were directed at residential quarters, it added. Anadolu Agency

US shoots down Houthi ballistic missiles

Washington, US - For the second time in a week, the US on Sunday shot down two anti-ship ballistic missiles in response to a Houthi attack on a merchant vessel, the US Central Command stated. The US military shot down two missiles on Sunday morning, the container ship *Maersk Hangzhou* reported, adding that the vessel was struck by a missile while transiting the Southern Red Sea. "USS Gravelly shoots down two anti-ship ballistic missiles while responding to Houthi attack on merchant vessel. Today at approximately 8:30pm (Sanaa time), the container ship *Maersk Hangzhou* reported that they were struck by a missile while transiting the Southern Red Sea," the 7US Central Command (CENTCOM) stated in a post shared on X. The *USS Laboon*, a guided-missile destroyer, and F-18 fighter



The US military shot down two missiles on Sunday morning, the container ship *Maersk Hangzhou* reported

The USS Laboon, a guided-missile destroyer, and F-18 fighter jets from the Eisenhower carrier strike group are in the southern Red Sea as part of a US-led coalition

The report noted that this was the 23rd attack by the Houthis on international shipping since November 19. In response, the *USS Gravelly* shot down the two anti-ship ballistic missiles from Yemen directed at their merchant vessels, the report stated. "While responding, the *USS Gravelly* shot down two anti-ship ballistic missiles fired from Houthi-controlled areas in Yemen toward the ships. This is the 23rd illegal attack by the Houthis on international shipping since November 19," the CENTCOM posted. The US military informed that the vessel was seaworthy and no one was injured in the shooting down incident. This marked the second time that the US shot down Houthi anti-ship missiles in a week, according to the report. ANI

'Systematic Israeli theft' occurring in civilian homes in Gaza: Rights monitor

London, UK - Israel, while attacking Gaza, is also 'systematically' engaging in 'property theft and looting', a human rights monitor said. "The Israeli army has unleashed its soldiers in the Gaza Strip to not only kill, but to engage in immoral activities such as property theft and looting during raids on Palestinian civilian homes," the Geneva-based Euro-Med Human Rights Monitor said in a statement on Friday. Citing reports and testimonies, the rights group said Israeli soldiers are participating in and witnessing the 'deliberate theft of the assets and money' of Palestinian civilians, including computers, gold, and cash. Mentioning that the Israeli



army has been conducting military operations in the besieged enclave since October, the Euro-Med said the operations include raiding homes, storming residential areas, and conducting arbitrary arrests of civilians.

The group accused the Israeli army of doing these 'property theft and looting' as part of a 'systematic strategy'. "Based on the testimonies ... preliminary estimates suggest that the Israeli army may have

looted valuable possessions worth tens of millions of dollars, in addition to stealing personal belongings from Palestinian civilians," the release said. Thabet Salim, a 40-year-old Palestinian, told Euro-Med that he and his two sons were taken into custody by the Israeli army from their house in the Zaytoun neighbourhood, and members of the army had 'pilfered' all of the gold and cash that was on hand. "The amount of money the soldiers took from my house is worth more than US\$10,000," Salim said adding that they also took nearly the same amount of gold from his wife, and the spouse of his eldest son. Anadolu Agency

Syrian army attack kills 2 in Idlib

Idlib, Syria - Two civilians were killed on Saturday and 15 injured in an attack by the Syrian army on the city centre in Idlib. Syrian army forces stationed in the eastern Saraqib district of Idlib, along with Iran-backed terror groups, launched a ground-to-ground artillery attack on the city centre. Two civilians were killed in the attack, according to information from the Syrian Civil Defence, or White Helmets. The injured civilians were transported to hospitals. In a 2017 meeting, Turkey, Russia and Iran decided to establish four de-escalation zones in areas not under the control of the Syrian government. Despite the agreement, the Assad regime, supported by Iranian-backed militants and Russia, continued attacks, seizing three



of the four designated zones and turning its focus toward Idlib. While Turkey and Russia reached an additional agreement in September 2018 to reinforce the cease-fire, attacks escalated again in May 2019. Following a new agreement between Turkey and Russia in March 2020, the cease-fire has largely held. Between 2017 and 2020, approximately two million civilians

fleeing attacks were forced to migrate to areas near the Turkish border. Syria has been embroiled in a vicious civil war since early 2011 when the Bashar al-Assad regime cracked down on pro-democracy protests with unexpected ferocity. Hundreds of thousands of people have been killed and more than 10mn others displaced, according to UN estimates. Anadolu Agency

North Korea planning to launch 3 more military spy satellites in 2024

Pyongyang, North Korea - North Korean leader Kim Jong Un is planning to launch three additional spy satellites next year, Yonhap news agency reported, citing Korean Central News Agency (KCNA).

The announcement comes after the successful launch of the country's first military reconnaissance satellite last month.

North Korean leader set forth the goal as he wrapped up five days of the plenary meeting of the Central Committee of the Workers' Party of Korea on Saturday, as reported by KCNA.

"Based on the experience of successfully launching and operating the first spy satellite in 2023 in the space development sector, the task of launching three more spy satellites in 2024 was unveiled and all-out measures to spur the development of space science technology were discussed," the report said.

Recently, North Korea successfully put a military spy satellite, Malligyong-1, into orbit on November 21 after two failed attempts in May and August.

However, there are suspicions that North Korea might have received technical support from Russia in return for its arms supplies for use in Moscow's war in Ukraine, reported Yonhap news agency.

"We need to swiftly respond to a possible nuclear crisis and



North Korean leader Kim Jong Un also called for developing powerful unmanned armed aerial vehicles and means for digital warfare

North Korea successfully put a military spy satellite, Malligyong-1, into orbit on November 21 after two failed attempts in May and August, with suspected technical support from Russia

mobilise all physical means, including nuclear force, in a bid to accelerate preparations for the great event of putting the entire

territory of South Korea under our control," Kim said.

He further boosted the country's nuclear arsenal as the top

policy priority for next year and ordered the Navy to enhance its military capabilities, Yonhap news agency reported citing KCNA.

Kim called for developing powerful unmanned armed aerial vehicles and means for electronic warfare in a bid to accomplish its key defence projects.

Highlighting the inter-Korean ties, Kim stated that he will no longer consider South Korea a

counterpart for reconciliation and unification, adding that Seoul has declared the North as a main enemy.

The Workers' Party has also concluded that unification with South Korea is not possible, Kim was quoted as saying, Yonhap news agency reported.

Calling for a 'fundamental change' in dealing with South Korea, the North's leader said that inter-Korean relations have

become those of 'two hostile countries' or 'countries engaged in the state of combat'.

Reportedly, relations between South and North Korea remained sharply strained this year as the latter focused on advancing its nuclear and missile programmes, including the launch of solid-fuel intercontinental ballistic missiles.

North Korea's leader vowed an 'offensive and ultra-powerful' stance against the US in 2024, denouncing 'Washington's deployment of strategic assets to the Korean Peninsula and its military drills with Seoul.

"If the US and the South pursue military confrontations with us, we will not hesitate to take critical action against them with our nuclear deterrence," Kim said. Earlier in September, North Korea amended the constitution to enshrine the policy of strengthening its nuclear force, according to Yonhap news agency.

Moreover last year, the country enacted a new nuclear law authorising the preemptive use of nuclear arms, calling its status as a nuclear state 'irreversible'.

At last year's party plenary meeting, Kim called South Korea an 'undoubted enemy' and called for an 'exponential' increase in the country's nuclear arsenal and the development of tactical nuclear weapons.

ANI

India-UAE military exercise from Tuesday

New Delhi, India - The Joint Military Exercise 'Desert Cyclone 2024' between India and UAE will be held from January 2 to 15 in Rajasthan.

The joint drills under 'Desert Cyclone 2024' will aim to enhance interoperability by learning and sharing best practices in urban operations.

India and the UAE enjoy strong bonds of friendship which are founded on millennia-old cultural, religious and economic intercourse between the two regions.

According to the Ministry of External Affairs, potential areas of bilateral cooperation in the defence field are the production and development of defence equipment; joint exercises of armed forces, particularly naval exercises; sharing of information on strategy and doctrines; technical cooperation in respect of Intermediate Jet Trainer etc.

In recent years, bilateral defence cooperation has been strengthened, notably in the field of defence training and supply of defence inventory, besides regular exchange programmes.

ANI

Indian Navy to enhance security in Arabian Sea region: Officials

New Delhi, India - Indian Navy chief Admiral R Hari Kumar has issued directions to take all possible actions to enhance security in the Arabian Sea region, officials said on Sunday.

As per officials, the Indian Navy chief has asked to keep a close lookout for any suspicious activity in the region, which saw incidents of attacks on merchant vessels recently.

He further directed to carry out thorough checks on the suspicious boats to ensure the safety of our merchant vessels and mariners, they added.

The directions from the Navy Chief comes amid recent attacks on cargo ships in the Red Sea, Gulf of Aden and Central Arabia Sea. The vessels that came under attack included the India-bound *MV Chem Pluto*,



This file photo shows the India-bound merchant vessel, *MV Chem Pluto* being escorted back by the Indian Coast Guard Ship *Vikram* after coming under attack by a drone in the Arabian Sea last Sunday (ANI)

which was carrying 21 Indians onboard.

However, the vessel was later escorted by Indian Coast Guard Ship *Vikram* to the Mumbai coast.

While the *MV Chem Pluto* was attacked on December 23, another ship, *MV Ruen*, was hijacked in the Arabian Sea on December 14.

Meanwhile, as per officials,

Navy has deployed task groups comprising warships - 'destroyers' and 'frigates' - to have a complete maritime domain awareness in the region.

ANI

Chinese spy balloon linked to US-based Internet provider

Istanbul, Turkey - The US claimed that a Chinese spy craft, which traversed above the US earlier this year, was in communication with China through the services of a US-based Internet provider.

Unnamed US intelligence officials alleged that, based on investigations, a US Internet company provided services to maintain the communication network of the Chinese balloon, NBC News said on Friday.

Officials reported that the internet company was used for sending and receiving information from China through the balloon.

The company, whose name is not disclosed for security reasons, said in its internal investigation that no supporting evidence was found for the claim.



"As we had made it clear before, the airship, used for meteorological research, unintentionally drifted into US because of the westerlies and its limited self-steering capability," said a spokesman at the Chinese Embassy in Washington.

Spy balloon crisis

The Pentagon reported on February 3 that a high-altitude intelli-

gence balloon belonging to China flew over the continental US and passed over sensitive military facilities, including nuclear warhead and long-range missile depots in the state of Montana.

China claimed the balloon was a civilian aircraft used for meteorological research that accidentally drifted into US airspace due to limited control capabilities influenced by winds.

Beijing's explanation did not satisfy Washington, and on February 4, when the balloon ascended over the Atlantic Ocean, it was shot down by a US military aircraft over American territorial waters, under President Joe Biden's orders. China protested against the US for 'using force to intervene in a civilian unmanned aerial vehicle'.

Anadolu Agency

Thousands continue to protest against snap election results in Serbia

Belgrade, Serbia - Thousands of residents in Serbia's capital gathered on Saturday to protest the results of snap general and local elections.

The rally in Belgrade was organised by one of the coalitions that competed in the polls - Serbia Against Violence.

The protests have been ongoing on for 12 straight days in different locations.

Demonstrators are demanding the cancellation of the elections and chanting: "We do not accept."

Opposition officials participated in the protest, which was described as 'a flood of people in Belgrade' in media reports.

"I said everything necessary. These elections must be cancelled," Marinika Tepic told the crowd. Tepic is one of the key opposition figures.

Tepic has been on hunger strike for 13 days.

Media reports said she was taken to the hospital after her address. She was able to get to the stage with the help of two people.

Later, demonstrators walked to the Constitutional Court building and ended their protests.

Meanwhile, a 24-hour road closure, which was initiated by a group of university students by setting up a tent on Friday on one of the main roads in Belgrade at noon, ended with the arrival of the protesters.

Protesters applauded the students who spent the night outside. The opposition's objections were rejected

The opposition demanded that hundreds of people from the Republika Srpska (RS), one of the two entities of Bosnia and Herzegovina, be taken to Belgrade by buses to vote December 17, and the election should be cancelled to eliminate that irregularity.



People gathering to protest results of snap elections in Belgrade on Saturday

The State Election Commission (RIK) announced that objections made by the Serbia Against Violence coalition regarding the election were rejected.

RIK Vice President Marko Jankovic said the grounds for objection and said,

"The objections mostly addressed situations such as dou-

ble registration, vote buying, inequality in election campaigns and irregularities in the delivery of election materials. However, no irregularities were found in

the election centres where the objections were made," said Jankovic.

Elections are being repeated in more than 30 election centres in line with the decision of the

The rally in Belgrade was organised by one of the coalitions that competed in the polls - Serbia Against Violence. Protests have been ongoing on for 12 straight days

commission, voting is being held again on Saturday in more than 30 election centres.

Three of the centres, where 19, 543 registered voters voted

again, are located in towns in Belgrade.

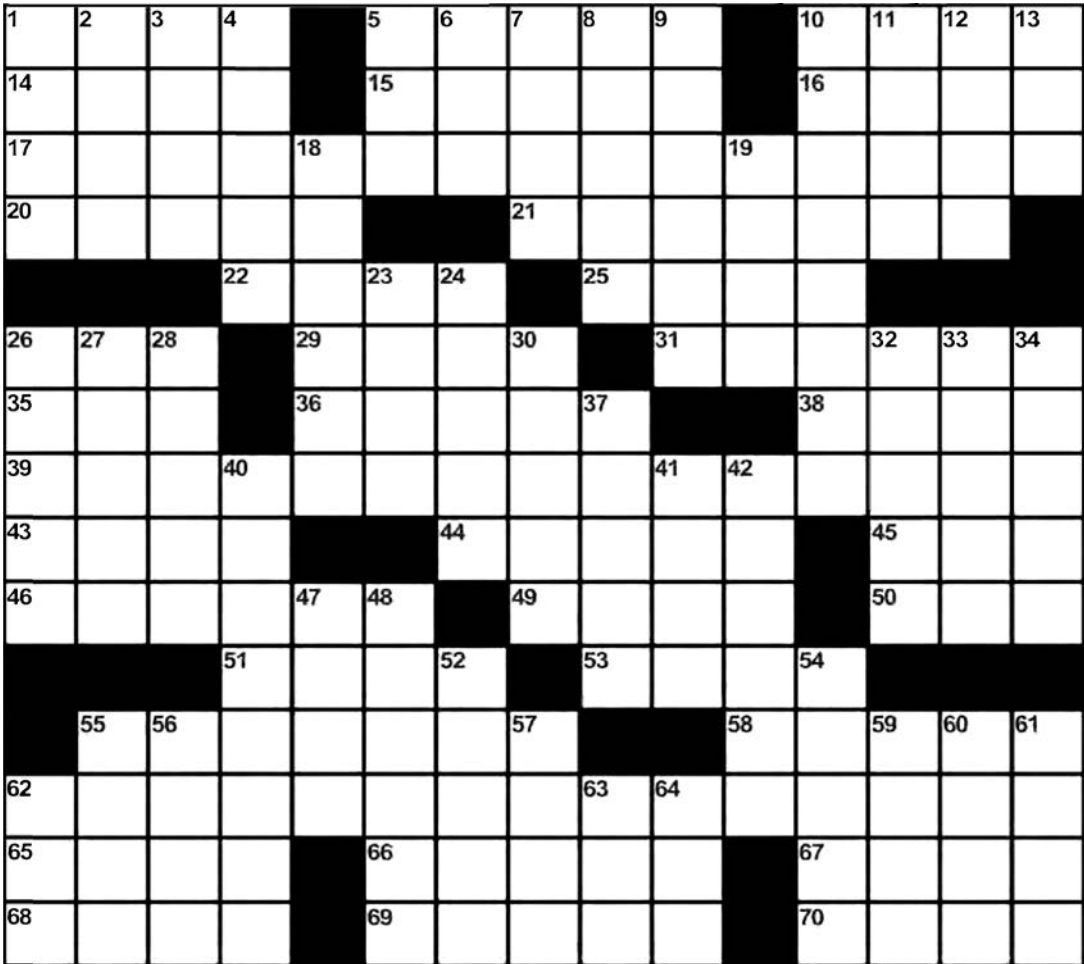
The commission also announced that voting will be held again in eight additional centres on January 2.

Media reports said results in places where elections were repeated will not change the general picture as more than 8,000 centres were opened during the elections in which more than 6.5mn registered voters cast ballots.

According to unofficial results announced by the Election Commission, the Aleksandar Vucic-Serbia Must Stop alliance, supported by President Aleksandar Vucic and led by the Serbian Progressive Party (SNS), which has been in power since 2012, finished ahead, receiving 46 per cent of the vote. The Serbia Against Violence alliance was second with 23 per cent.

Anadolu Agency

DAILY CROSSWORD



ACROSS

- 1) Boys
- 5) They're effective when nutty?
- 10) "For goodness' _!"
- 14) Between continents, perhaps
- 15) Cognizant
- 16) Blender sound
- 17) Three hard things
- 20) Asparagus unit
- 21) Holds high
- 22) Fizzes out
- 25) Cause for a lawsuit
- 26) Summit
- 29) Spanish appetizer
- 31) Lunch or dinner, e.g.
- 35) Physicians' org.
- 36) Desktop pictures
- 38) Carve in stone
- 39) Three hard things
- 43) Knowing about
- 44) Andean animal
- 45) "We_ the World"
- 46) Afternoon nap
- 49) Clapton of music fame

- 50) Bow maker's wood
- 51) Little ones
- 53) Bowl over
- 55) Sort of cigar
- 58) Bang or boom, e.g.
- 62) Two hard things
- 65) Like a noted ranger
- 66) "Encore!"
- 67) _ mortals
- 68) Former communist coun-try
- 69) Harps' kin, way back when
- 70) "Thank you, Jesus!"
- DOWN**
- 1) Research sites
- 2) " ... and make it fast!"
- 3) Editor's notation, some-times
- 4) "Rabbit food"
- 5) Barnyard noise
- 6) Possess
- 7) Put on board, as cargo
- 8) Chancy get-together
- 9) Pie chart part
- 10) Climbing flowering plant
- 11) "Beg pardon ... "
- 12) Smooch

- 13) "... he drove out of sight..."
- 18) One making pans
- 19) Not there
- 23) A head
- 24) Sewing kit feature
- 26) Crunchy munchies
- 27) Yemen's neighbor
- 28) Adhesive stuff
- 30) Cronelike
- 32) Cornered
- 33) Accompanying music for a film
- 34) Tossed
- 37) Accident reminders, sometimes
- 40) Innkeeper
- 41) Give off, as light
- 42) Missing portion of text
- 47) Spelling ofT V
- 48) Hardly melodious
- 52) Damp and spongy
- 54)_Jean (Marilyn Monroe's birth name)
- 55) Corporate leaders, briefly
- 56) Barnyard cluckers
- 57) Bygone autocrat
- 59) Gossip tidbit
- 60) Arid

NOTE PAD

M	A	G	E	B	A	T	O	N	E	C	H	O
O	P	A	L	A	G	O	R	A	G	O	O	F
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YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE

ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

You are starting to become a bigger part of a new friend's love life, but ask yourself if you're getting too involved. Today, step out of the situation unless you find yourself becoming one side of a complicated triangle. They need to go off on their own and build on what they have started. You might miss out on the fun times, but you need to let them develop their relationship alone. The good news is you can now spend more time with folks you may have been neglecting.

LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

Beware of getting stuck within the system today. You need to be free and unencumbered by rules. This isn't to say that you should break any rules; it's just that you should try to avoid putting yourself in situations where you'll be expected to do a certain thing in a certain way. So while this wouldn't be an ideal day to start a new job, it would be a great day to have a job interview. The open-ended questions will give you the freedom you need to promote yourself perfectly.

SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

Your communication skills are as good as ever right now, but they can't perform miracles. You'll be able to charm some folks with your witty and creative small talk, but you won't be able to convince people to change their minds about controversial issues or renegotiate a complicated arrangement. Stick to having light interaction with people today and you will be fine. If you get embroiled in any heavy debates, you could be overly enthusiastic and come across as pushy.

TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

There are lots of people around you who are buzzing with excitement about lots of new projects. Today, their intense energy is going to be quite contagious, so keep your distance if you don't want to get involved in any new stuff. But if you are intrigued, then hang around these movers and shakers. Before the end of the day, you will start to feel your ambition get stronger. You could be one of the people making things happen in the world.

VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

It's not a good day for you to travel, because if you go off somewhere you are likely to miss out on some neat opportunities right here at home. You'll be very glad you stayed put today, not only because it's a good time to enjoy where you are but also because sticking close to home will give you a front row seat to some wonderful entertainment. Someone's got some good news to share with you, and you'll want to be there in person to hear it!

CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

Moving forward too far too fast is a dangerous thing, so beware. You wouldn't want to go so quickly that you miss a remarkable quiet moment. Today, you will have to perform a delicate balance between pursuing your goals and standing still long enough to enjoy the fruits of all your labors. Someone needs you to slow down long enough to give them some attention and answer some questions. There is no rush to the finish line. Life is a continual race, so pace yourself.

GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

All of the choices in front of you today might make you feel a bit overwhelmed, but don't panic. If you can keep a cool head, you'll be able to navigate the day just fine. You can't make a decision because you think that someone's losing patience with you. If you do, you will only end up changing your mind once you learn a few new facts. Take your time in everything you do today. Taking a good look might delay your progress, but it will ensure you're going in the right direction.

LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

Distractions abound today, so it could be a bit of a struggle to keep your eye on the ball. The good news is that before the end of the day you could get a sneak preview of what things will be like when you have finished this project. You're due for some major recognition. Are there possible financial rewards as well? Let your people know that socializing is not in the cards right now. Your time needs to be devoted to your latest mountain-climbing expedition.

AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

Inspiration could flood you today. Enjoy having your curiosity tickled and excited. You're extremely open to new ideas right now, so why not try a few new things? If you're shopping for a new outfit, try a look that you wouldn't normally go for. If you're planning a meal, pick out some exotic ingredients. If you're searching for a place for a date, skip the standard locales. There's no telling what you can come up with once you start working with unfamiliar materials and tools.

CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

There may be some tantalizing social stuff going on, but you might not be able to take part in it. You have bigger fish to fry, and fried they must be by the end of the day. Your deadline has to come first no matter how much you'd rather be off having fun. You are familiar with getting things done in a timely manner, so as long as you focus and stick to your task without stopping every two minutes to check your messages, you'll be done sooner than you think.

SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

Remember how much your attitude can sway a given state of affairs today. The way you think can directly affect the way things work out. Plus, how you express yourself will help sway the attitudes of the people around you. So make sure to put only positive and confident energy out into the Universe today, especially if you're going to be a part of some kind of competition. Showing that you are confident is the first step toward intimidating your opponent.

PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

Life is a balance between ugly and pretty, soft and hard, sweet and sour. And the more you can mix up these extremes today the better. If you spend the first half of the day by yourself, make sure you get social this afternoon. If you usually like listening to mellow music while you work, crank up some more rocking tunes later. Variety is the spice of life, and you need to dig into a feast as soon as possible. Accept any and all invitations from new people.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

01. When were the first colour pictures transmitted from the surface of the planet Mars?

A. 2021
B. 1971
C. 1976
D. 1997

02. The commentator for British TV series "Robot Wars" is better known as a British commentator for what?

A. Football (soccer)
B. Fashion shows
C. Science Expos
D. Crufts

03. With how many pieces does each player start a game of Backgammon?

A. 5
B. 10
C. 20
D. 15

Answers: 1. C 2. A 3. D

KIDS COLOURING



BOGGLER

A	U	K	T
A	C	C	M
O	R	B	A
E	M	A	R

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

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

DO YOU SUDOKU?

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

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

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

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



Zeeshan Maqsood and Aamir Kaleem of Majees CC

Majees CC ease past VLCC; Renaissance beat Powertech

Muscat - Majees CC defeated VLCC by six wickets in the Premier Division League 2023-24 powered by Muscat Pharmacy LLC at the Oman Cricket Academy Turf 1 on Friday.

Batting first, VLCC posted 206 with Sahil Dias making 90. Sajjad Khan (44) and Sultan Ahmed (41) also came up with fine contributions. Zeeshan Maqsood and Aamir Kaleem picked two wickets each for Majees. In response Zeeshan Maqsood played a stunning innings (112) and with Aamir Kaleem (63) stitched a 191-run partnership to reach the target with ease. Sohail Ahmed picked up two wickets for VLCC.

In another Premier Division match on Saturday, Renaissance beat Zawawi Powertech by 13 runs at the Oman Cricket Academy Turf 1.

Renaissance posted 208 thanks to substantial contribu-

tions from Hammad Mirza (40), Asif Khan (39) and Mohd Adeeb (33). Saishiv Narayan picked four wickets for Powertech while Sivaraj Dheenadhayalu claimed three.

In response, Powertech fell just short of the target despite Kalaiaarasan Natarajan scoring 51 and Prabhakaran Kannan making 35. Skipper Sufyan Mehmood picked up three wickets.

Brief scores: VLCC 206/7 in 50 overs (Sahil Dias 90(120); Zeeshan Maqsood 2/33) lost to Majees 210/4 in 40.4 overs (Zeeshan Maqsood 112 (124), Aamir Kaleem 63(106); Sohail Ahmed 2/23) by 6 wickets.

Renaissance 208/10 in 49.5 overs (Hammad Mirza 40(67); Saishiv Narayan 4/25) beat Zawawi Powertech 195/10 in 49.1 overs (Kalaiaarasan Natarajan 51(63); Sufyan Mehmood 3/37) by 13 runs.

SAVOUR THE MAGIC OF NADAL WHILE IT LASTS

Spain's 22-time Grand Slam champion says this will be his final year on tour

Brisbane, Australia - Rafa Nadal refused to definitively close the door on playing beyond the 2024 season but, amidst the flicker of hope, acknowledged the stark reality: there's a "high percentage" chance he may not grace the courts next summer.

The 22-time Grand Slam champion had arthroscopic surgery on the iliopsoas muscle in his left hip in June after sustaining an injury during his second-round defeat at the 2023 Australian Open by Mackenzie McDonald.

Nadal had previously said he expected to bring the curtains down on his glittering but injury-plagued career in 2024, but in a press conference ahead of his comeback at the Brisbane International he left the door ajar.

"The problem about saying it's going to be my last season is that I can't predict what's going on 100 per cent in the future. That's the thing," Nadal said ahead of a doubles match on Sunday with partner Marc Lopez. "That's why I say probably."

The Brisbane tournament is a tune-up for the January 14-28 Australian Open during the height of the country's summer.

Nadal plays Austria's Dominic



Rafael Nadal

Thiem in his Brisbane singles opener on Tuesday - a blockbuster rematch of their 2018 and 2019 French Open title clashes, both of which the 37-year-old Spaniard won.

Speaking to media at the Brisbane International, Nadal reiterated that this will "probably" be his final year on tour.

"The problem about saying that it's going to be my last sea-

son is I can't predict what's going on 100 per cent in the future. That's why I say probably," Nadal explained.

"It's obvious that it's a high percentage that this is going to be my last time playing here in Australia. But if I am here next year, don't tell me, 'You said (this is) going to be your last season', because I didn't say it," he added with a smile.

Nadal admitted he "went through a lot to be back on a tennis court", so was trying to avoid thoughts of retirement just yet.

"I can't predict how (I'm) going to be in the next six months," said the former World No.1.

"I can't predict if my body will allow me to enjoy tennis as much as I enjoyed the past 20 years. I don't know if my body will allow

me to be competitive. I mean, not in a way to win the most important events, but (in) the way that makes me happy, feel myself competitive to go on court and to feel that I can compete against anyone."

After almost a year on the sidelines with a hip injury, the 37-year-old is feeling somewhat optimistic.

"In a realistic world, I'm happy the way that I am practising," Nadal said. "Of course, I don't have the expectations that I used to have in the past, especially for the beginning."

"It's (been) one year. It's surgery. It's a long period of time not practising at a decent level. For me, it is a little bit unpredictable how things (are) going to be. Competing is different than practising. But in terms of practising with the guys here, I am quite happy because I am able to feel competitive against the players that I played."

"That's a lot for me because I (didn't) know one month ago if I would have the chance to come here or feel myself enjoying the practices. I feel ready to compete. Then what can happen in the competition, I can't know. I don't know."

New Zealand beat Bangladesh in rain-hit final T20 to level series

Mount Maunganui, New Zealand - New Zealand clawed back from the brink to snatch a thrilling 17-run victory over Bangladesh via the Duckworth-Lewis-Stern method in the rain-hit final T20I in Mount Maunganui, levelling the series 1-1.

Skipper Mitchell Santner led the charge with a four-wicket haul, restricting Bangladesh to a modest 110 despite Najmul Hos-



Bangladesh's Najmul Hossain Shanto and New Zealand's Mitchell Santner with the trophy

sain Shanto's fighting 39. The chase started disastrously for New Zealand, tumbling to 49-5 before Santner (18) and Jimmy Neesham (28) steadied the ship.

With rain playing spoilsport, the Black Caps were just 16 runs shy of the DLS par score when the heavens opened, sealing their victory.

"It got quite tight in the end," admitted Santner, praising Bangladesh's bowling throughout

the series. "Credit to Bangladesh, their bowlers have bowled extremely well in both series and they put us under some pressure again today, and nice to get over the line in the end."

The Bangladesh skipper, Shanto, was proud of his young team's fighting spirit despite the narrow defeat. "As a squad Bangladesh have been outstanding. Their seamers obviously have done a very good job up

front," he said. "We know how good their spinners are and then batting as well. It was a hard-fought series and same with the ODIs."

Bangladesh coach Chandika Hathurusinghe echoed Shanto's sentiments, expressing satisfaction with his team's performance: "This young group had no fear. They wanted to compete. The leadership shown by Najmul Hossain Shanto was outstanding.

Tactically he was spot on and very clear with messages to players."

While the trophy eluded them, Bangladesh can take heart from their impressive display throughout the series, pushing the Black Caps to the limit. Both teams now turn their attention to the upcoming T20 World Cup, determined to translate their fighting spirit into success on the global stage.

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BIRTHDAY WISHES



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DRAMATIC WIN

Late goal takes Villa level with Liverpool

Birmingham, England - Douglas Luiz scored a dramatic late penalty as Aston Villa edged a five-goal thriller against 10-man Burnley to move level on points with leaders Liverpool.

Leon Bailey's opener was cancelled out by Zeki Amdouni, and after Moussa Diaby had restored Villa's lead, Lyle Foster equalised for a Burnley team who had lost Sander Berge to a second booking.

But substitute Jhon Duran won a spot-kick that Douglas Luiz converted in the 89th minute to secure Villa's first win in three matches.

Unai Emery made two changes to the side who lost from 2-0 up at Old Trafford in mid-week. Alex Moreno and Diaby replaced Lucas Digne and Leander Dendoncker. Vincent Kompany made one change from defeat at Turf Moor, Johann Gudmundsson replacing Mike Tresor.

Villa quickly asserted their dominance and their pressure paid off in the 28th minute, as Ollie Watkins drifted infield and spread the ball wide to Bailey who cut in from the right and fired a deflected shot high into the net.

Burnley responded quickly. Gudmundsson's floated free-kick was met by Dara O'Shea at the far post. He headed across goal for Amdouni to stab home for his third goal of the season.

The momentum was with the visitors and Foster thought he had put Burnley ahead, latching on to a ball in behind Villa's high line and slotting beyond Emiliano Martinez, but the forward was



Aston Villa's Douglas Luiz celebrates after scoring against Burnley on Saturday

marginally offside.

With only a few minutes remaining of the first half, Villa's lead was restored.

Watkins was again at the heart of the move, running on to a pass over the top before cutting a low ball back that was tucked away by Diaby for his fourth goal of the campaign.

Despite an encouraging start to the second half, Burnley's task was made harder when in the 55th minute they were reduced to 10 men when Berge was shown a second yellow card for a pull on Douglas Luiz.

Burnley's task was made harder when in the 55th minute they were reduced to 10 men

Shortly after the hour-mark came a flurry of chances for Villa to extend their lead. John McGinn forced James Trafford into a strong low save with his shot from range before the young goalkeeper was called into action to parry a follow-up from Diaby.

Moments later Villa came close again, Jacob Ramsey shooting over from close range from Ezri Konsa's low cross.

Much against the run of play, Burnley hit back to punish Villa for their wastefulness in front of goal. A long goal kick was flicked on by Gudmundsson to Foster who held off several Villa defenders and fired past Martinez at his near post. With just minutes remaining of the 90, the hosts were presented with a golden opportunity to take the lead for a third time when Aston Villa academy graduate Aaron Ramsey, who now plays for Burnley, caught second-half substitute Duran in the penalty box.



Nottingham Forest's Morgan Gibbs-White celebrates with Anthony Elanga on Saturday

Gibbs-White scores as Forest beat Man Utd

Nottingham, England - Nuno Espirito Santo guided Nottingham Forest to a second win in a row, claiming a first home Premier League win over Manchester United, winning 2-1 to climb to 15th in the table thanks to Morgan Gibbs-White's brilliant curling shot.

Man Utd's hopes that their incredible comeback win over Aston Villa a week ago would mark a change in their fortunes were hit by a ninth league defeat of the season that leave them nine points off the top four.

Nuno made two changes from the side who won 3-1 at Newcastle United, with Ryan Yates and Nicolas Dominguez returning for Callum Hudson-Odoi and Ibrahim Sangare.

Erik ten Hag was forced into one change, with Antony coming in for the ill Rasmus Hojlund, meaning Marcus Rashford played down the middle.

It was a spirited start by Forest with Chris Wood, whose confidence was high after his Boxing Day hat-trick on Tyneside, having an early sight at goal but firing narrowly over.

In a first half of few chances, United had just one shot on target, a deflected effort from Aaron Wan-Bissaka that Matt Turner saved easily in the 33rd minute.

Despite Forest having the brighter opening to the second half, United came closest to breaking the deadlock when Diogo Dalot struck a post with a well-hit shot from distance.

That sparked the match into life, with Gibbs-White earning a yellow card for a set of rash challenges, before Varane was also booked for tripping Elanga.



Manchester City goalscorer Julian Alvarez celebrates with Phil Foden

Man City ease past Sheff Utd to move up to third

Manchester, England - Manchester City eased past Sheffield United to move up to third in the table thanks to goals in each half from Rodri and Julian Alvarez.

The champions were in control from the first minute to the last at the Etihad Stadium and secured their first back-to-back wins since the start of November, moving two points behind the leaders Liverpool, who play on Monday. Man City made two changes from Wednesday's win at Everton, with Josko Gvardiol coming in for the injured John Stones while Mateo Kovacic replaced Matheus Nunes.

Kevin De Bruyne was named on the bench after recovering from a hamstring injury that has

kept him out of action since the opening weekend.

Chris Wilder made five changes to the defeat to Luton Town. Anel Ahmedhodzic, James McAtee, Gustavo Hamer, Oliver McBurnie and Cameron Archer were replaced by Jayden Bogle, Oliver Norwood, Luke Thomas, Anis Ben Slimane and William Osula.

City made a dominant start and took a deserved lead in the 14th minute as Rodri drove through Sheff Utd's midfield and produced a fine shot from range into the bottom-left corner for his fourth goal of the season.

It is the second time the Spaniard has scored against Sheff Utd this season, having got

the 88th-minute winner in the reverse fixture.

Opportunities were at a premium for Sheff Utd but they did fashion a half-chance through Osula, who controlled Bogle's cross before seeing his effort deflected behind by Manuel Akanji.

City then put the contest to bed in the 61st minute when Alvarez scored a tap-in at the far post after being set up by Phil Foden as the Argentinian scored his fourth goal in his last three matches in all competitions.

Sheff Utd barely threatened City's goal, only producing four shots in the entire match. They remain rooted to the bottom of the table with nine points from 20 matches.

Rabiot scores winner against Roma as Juve close in on Inter

Turin, Italy - Adrien Rabiot's second-half strike secured Juventus a 1-0 win against AS Roma in Serie A on Saturday, pushing the Bianconeri within two points of league leaders Inter Milan.

Rabiot, capitalising on Dusan Vlahovic's flick just after half-time, coolly slotted home the winner, leaving Massimiliano Allegri's Juve brimming with confidence.

"It was a good game, because playing against Roma is never easy, especially when Mourinho is on the opposition bench," Allegri said, praising his team. However, the Juve boss wasn't without concerns, acknowledging the need for tighter ball control and improved build-up play from the back.

Roma, under the ever-outspoken Jose Mourinho, started aggressively, with Bryan Cristante's volley rattling the post. Despite their intent, they struggled to generate clear chances after conceding, their valiant comeback attempts, a hallmark of their season, failing to materialise this time.

"We talked about this before the game and we created really more than anyone expected against a defensive wall in Turin," Mourinho said, despite the disappointment of the result. He hailed his team's strategic approach and character, but lamented the lack of points, acknowledging the fight on for Champions League qualification.

"If we get there, it would be



Adrien Rabiot of Juventus celebrates with teammates after scoring against AS Roma in Serie A on Saturday

absolutely fantastic, considering our conditions and limitations. If you do not dream, you will never get there," said, keeping Roma's Champions League aspirations alive, albeit hanging by a thread.

Pulisic powers Milan

Elsewhere in Milan, Christian Pulisic emerged as the hero, his skillful chip over Andrea Consigli in the 59th minute securing a 1-

0 victory for AC Milan against Sassuolo. The American's winner not only sealed three crucial points for Stefano Pioli's men but also saw him etch his name in Serie A history, surpassing Weston McKennie's record for most league goals by an American in a single season with his sixth strike.

Milan's depleted backline, missing Fikayo Tomori, Malick

Thiaw, and Pierre Kalulu due to injuries, didn't deter their fighting spirit. Pioli was effusive in his praise. "We can play and create even more but I think we had the right approach today. I am happy with the way we played and suffered together and how we won this game. This is the team's victory. This is a group that, during my time here, has never given up in difficult moments."

TOP 5
ICE RINKS IN
LONDON



Winter Wonderland, Hyde Park
Winter Wonderland is London's hotspot at Christmas time. Besides festive food and warm beverages, there is so much fun to be had here. A real ice slide, a funhouse, a Christmas circus, an ice bar, and plenty of thrilling fairground rides are just some examples of the activities you can book.
Ice skating on the UK's largest open-air rink is an unmissable experience though. Glide around the iconic Victorian bandstand as musicians perform in the centre. This year Isabella Stavrou and Lulu May will be alternating gigs.



Hampton Court Palace, Surrey
Imagine being able to say you have ice-skated in Henry VIII's historic home! Transport back in time on the outdoor ice-rink, while admiring a glorious Tudor Palace. Hampton Court Palace in Surrey has to be one of the most picturesque ice-rinks in London.
The rink is large and surrounded by 60 acres of gardens. There is also the UK's oldest hedge maze and the historic chocolate kitchen, which you can pre-book.



Skylight, Tobacco Dock
Europe's only real-ice rooftop ice-rink lies on Skylight Tobacco Dock, with an igloo village and an après ski lodge. Plus, there are thirty decorated Christmas trees and the pergolas are smothered in baubles.
From Thursday to Saturday DJ's will be livening the party atmosphere, while Sunday afternoons are dedicated for family time, allowing the kids to have a go on the ice.
The ice rink is small in comparison to the other rinks on this list and it is suggested that guests usually spend around 15-20 minutes on the ice. If you want to witness London's skyline, but can't stand the cold, Skylight Tobacco Dock has brand-new heated igloos, with blankets and table-service.

It's the season for ice-skating in cold countries. So, if you dig this sport and have a trip to London coming up, don't miss the top 5 rated ice rinks in London



Queen's House, Greenwich
Queen's House, which is one of the Royal Museums of Greenwich, was designed in the 17th century as a royal 'house of delights', but it is now an elegant art gallery.
The architectural views surrounding Queen's House Ice Rink, Greenwich are mesmerising. On one side, the Queen's House is lit in light blue, adding to the frosty feel. On the other side, stands the Chapel of St Peter and St Paul, glowing a gold warmth across the skyline that shimmers in between the symmetrical steeples.
Ice skate in the centre of a UNESCO World Heritage Site, on the spacious rink, which is open-air. You can go inside the Queen's House for free between 10am to 5pm to see their 2023 exhibition 'The Van de Veldes: Greenwich, Art and the Sea'.



Somerset House, Strand
The Switzerland Tourism Board have brought their destination to Somerset House's courtyard for Chilled Out skate sessions or lessons with the Skate School. You can even book onto a specially curated session inspired by the Swiss regions of Bern, Lucerne and Valais.
Somerset House is an art gallery, with Neoclassical architecture, overlooking the River Thames. It's a stunning setting, made festive with their 40ft Christmas tree, decorated by Swiss International Air Lines, which stands at the opposite end of the rink, facing Somerset House.

(Source: The Travel Magazine)