

3 new hubs in Dhofar to boost economy

Our Correspondent
Muscat

In alignment with Oman Vision 2040, Dhofar is set to witness the development of specialised cities aimed at bolstering the national economy. Plans include establishment of an industrial city in Thumrait, a meat production hub in Salalah and an agricultural city in the Najd area, marking significant strides towards sustainable economic development.

On Monday, H H Sayyid Marwan bin Turki al Said, Governor of Dhofar, met Hassan bin Marhoon Ahmed al Marhoon, Director General of Thumrait Industrial City Project at Madayn, alongside key representatives from government and private sectors, to discuss the project's progress. According to an official statement, the initiative seeks to create an economic and commercial hub in Thumrait, contributing to Oman's comprehensive sustainable development goals.

Thumrait Industrial City, spread over 4mn sqm, is poised to enhance local industries and the economy, create employment opportunities, and foster technological innovation. The city



will offer logistical services and incentives for tenants, including 50% discounted rent. It will focus on mining industries such as gypsum and limestone, alongside light industries, and support services including vehicle maintenance, storage facilities, fuel stations and commercial ventures.

Concurrently, Municipal Council of Dhofar Governorate, under the leadership of H H Sayyid Marwan, deliberated on several developmental projects, including establishment of a hub dedicated to meat production. This project aims to position Dhofar as self-sufficient in food production within the sultanate.

Furthermore, the council eval-

uated 23 additional projects aimed at improving infrastructure, road networks, tourist sites and municipal services. These initiatives are designed to bolster small and medium enterprises

cultural development and food processing on a large scale. A recent visit by a Japanese delegation, led by Hiroshi Hiraoka from the Japan International Cooperation Agency, aimed at exploring

contributing to Oman's economic diversification efforts and achieving self-sufficiency in key sectors in line with Oman Vision 2040.

Nitaj is also exploring investments in food processing and value-added factories, including ketchup and fruit drying plants, and local manufacturing of agricultural tools and implements. The project will target crops that address the current food gap and are suitable for Najd's environment - fruit crops such as citrus, mango and banana; vegetable crops such as potatoes, onions, garlic, tomatoes, zucchini, okra and eggplant; and field crops such as wheat, sunflower, corn and canola.

Plans include establishment of an industrial city in Thumrait, a meat production hub in Salalah and an agricultural city in the Najd area

and support productive families in the governorate.

The proposed agricultural city in Najd, a pioneering agri-industrial initiative led by Oman Food Investment Holding (Nitaj), signifies a major step towards agri-

investment opportunities and food security strategies in Najd, underpins the government's ambition to transform the area into the sultanate's food basket.

These developments underscore Dhofar's commitment to



(Supplied photo)

Karwa Motors launches new intercity buses

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Karwa Motors, a joint venture between Oman Investment Authority and Qatar Transportation Company, unveiled a new line of intercity buses on Tuesday.

Designed to carry 45 passengers, the buses comply with Gulf specifications and those set for the oil and gas sector's transportation needs.

Launch of the new line was celebrated on Tuesday with delivery of two units to Sultan al Shizani Company, a prominent transport service provider in the sultanate, for supporting operations of OQ company.

With this, Karwa Motors has introduced a new category of buses in the local market, responding to growing interest and demand from both corporate entities and individual customers

for reliable intercity transportation solutions.

Karwa Motors aims to leverage this launch to penetrate further into local and regional markets, capitalising on the enhanced production capacity of its factory in Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD). This strategic expansion is driven by positive reception and operational success of Karwa buses, particularly noted during the Qatar World Cup 2022.

According to a press release, delivery of the two units marks the inaugural introduction of the company's intercity bus model in the Omani market. With several orders already placed by local clients, Karwa Motors anticipates additional deliveries in the coming months, signalling prospects of increased intercity travel in Oman and potentially the region.



Aziza al Mugheiry to speak at British Omani Society



Stars on the BAFTA 2024 red carpet

'Partnership and Integration' programme launched to empower private sector

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI), in cooperation with the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, launched a programme called 'Partnership and Integration' on Tuesday.

The programme aims to overcome the obstacles impeding the private sector's development in Oman. It is strategically aligned with the Oman Vision 2040 objective of nurturing a dynamic and forward-looking private sector essential for achieving a diversified and sustainable economy.

The programme's launch was

attended by ministers, including H E Qais bin Mohammed al Yousuf, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion; H E Said bin Mohammed al Saqri, Minister of Economy; H E Dr Mahad bin Said bin Ali Ba'owain, Minister of Labour; and Sheikh Faisal bin Abdullah al Rawas, Chairman of OCCI.

Sheikh Faisal's address to the gathering highlighted the challenges faced by the private sector and outlined potential solutions to improve its performance. He reiterated OCCI's dedication to revising legislations and policies to enhance the business climate, encourage high-value investments, and bolster the national



Sheikh Faisal al Rawas

economy. "The chamber strives to facilitate dialogue between the business community and government bodies, fostering an ecosystem where the private sector can thrive," he said.

H E Yousef acknowledged the critical nature of the solutions presented at the meeting for

boosting the sector's competitiveness, tailored to meet its specific needs. "Our ministry is fully committed to streamlining processes, enhancing services and cultivating a competitive business landscape to empower the private sector, thereby generating new business ventures, attracting quality investments and promoting exports," he stated.

H E Saqri, Minister of Economy, highlighted the programme's goal to integrate and reinforce the national economy. He encouraged the private sector to leverage the opportunities presented by government initiatives and economic projects, especially those in Special Economic Zone

at Duqm, free zones and other targeted projects.

On his turn, H E Ba'owain stressed the importance of cooperation between the public and private sectors in creating a vibrant business atmosphere, crucial for the latter's sustainability and growth.

"Such collaboration is key to strengthening the private sector's contribution to the national economy and its role in employing the Omani workforce. Partnership between government and private entities is vital for enhancing economic development and establishing a business-friendly environment in Oman," H E Ba'owain stated.

MoCIIP issues clarification on quality of M91 petrol

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) held a meeting on Tuesday with Consumer Protection Authority, OQ Refineries and Petroleum Industries and fuel marketing companies to address concerns about the quality of M91 petrol in some parts of the sultanate.

A statement issued by MoCIIP said, 'OQ confirmed that it takes full responsibility of the quality of fuel and its distribution to local fuel marketing companies. They are committed to addressing complaints received through these companies and disclosing information about the quality of fuel 91, effects of usage on vehicles and boats, and the results of laboratory tests.'

The ministry emphasised the importance of OQ adhering to the approved standard specifications for unleaded petrol and providing the Directorate General of Standards and Metrology a certificate of conformity for its products.

'Fuel marketing companies are responsible for receiving complaints through their call centres and customer service. Within two business days of receiving a complaint, these companies are required to provide OQ full details if a complaint is confirmed to be true. This includes information such as the name of the station, region, fuel type and production lot number,' MoCIIP stated.

'There is a mechanism agreed upon by relevant authorities to address complaints related to fuel quality from consumers.'

Ministry of Housing, Tawoos Group forge historic relationship

Muscat - In a landmark initiative poised to shape the future of Oman's urban development, Tawoos Group has entered into a significant relationship with the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning (MHUP) to pioneer the development and construction of cutting-edge mixed-use towers within the highly anticipated Al Khuwair Downtown project.

Tawoos will build the first mixed-use towers that will act as a lighthouse for the Al Khuwair Downtown project. The 12,000 sqm site will comprise 60,000 sqm GFA incorporating offices, residential and retail units.

The project is an integral part of Oman's National Spatial Strategy (ONSS), guiding the nation's journey towards Oman Vision 2040. It underlines the importance of planning new developments and infrastructure to maximise opportunities while preserving the country's natural heritage. The ground-breaking project is strategically designed



H H Sayyid Tarik bin Shabib al Said (R) greets H H Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said at the signing of the agreement as H E Khalfan Said Mubarak al Shueili (C) looks on (Supplied photos)

to manage urban growth, optimise infrastructure services, and create vibrant, inclusive communities.

H E Khalfan Said Mubarak al Shueili, Minister of Housing and

Urban Planning, emphasised the significance of the collaboration. "The agreement between MHUP and Tawoos Group marks a pioneering moment in Oman's urban evolution. By uniting our



This landmark destination will change the perception, work ethic and habits of the entire ecosystem which will reside within it

SAMIR FANCY

vision with Tawoos Group's aspirations, we are setting new standards for sustainability, architectural excellence, and community-centric urban development."

Renowned architectural firm Zaha Hadid Architects, founded by the late pioneering architect Zaha Hadid, has been entrusted with crafting the master plan for the Al Khuwair Downtown district, heralding a new era of transformative urban design.

Samir Fancy, Chairman of Tawoos Group, added, "As they say, we shape our buildings; thereafter they shape us. This landmark destination will change the perception, work ethic and habits of the entire ecosystem which will reside within it. Our mixed-used towers will serve as a lighthouse that inspires the Al Khuwair Downtown project."

The towers envisioned by Tawoos Group are poised to redefine the standard for commercial, residential, and retail spaces, offering an unparalleled experience tailored to diverse needs and preferences.

H H Sayyid Tarik bin Shabib al

Said, Director of Tawoos Group said, "We congratulate MHUP for their far-sighted vision and on this key milestone towards realising the objectives of Oman Vision 2040. Tawoos is honoured to be part of this extraordinary project. These towers will be innovative, sustainable and aligned with green building principles, attracting domestic and international investment positioning Oman as a dynamic, progressive destination."

Ibrahim Waili, Executive Director of Oman National Spatial Strategy (ONSS) at MHUP, who has played a key role in laying the groundwork for the project said, "Through ONSS, Oman envisions a future where investment in infrastructure is carefully orchestrated to enhance livability, economic vitality, and environmental sustainability. We are confident of the partnerships we have forged, and optimistic about realising the vision of the government."

Omani undergrad set to be youngest speaker at British Omani Society

Our Correspondent
Muscat

An Omani physics and astronomy undergraduate at Cardiff University has been invited to give a lecture at British Omani Society in London, becoming the youngest speaker the society has had since its inception in 1976.

At 20, Aziza al Mugheiry is the first GCC national to be employed by UK Research and Innovation (UKRI), a milestone for Gulf Arab representation in science. She is currently completing an industrial placement at ISIS Neutron and Muon Source for research at the Science and Technology Facilities Council in Oxfordshire, which comes under UKRI.

Aziza's lecture - 'How Modern Science Unravels the Secrets of the Ancient Worlds' - on February 21 will cover the brief history of subatomic and particle physics, how neutrons and muons were first discovered and produced, and why they are helpful.

"Some of the most significant figures of Oman and Britain have delivered phenomenal lectures over the years at the society. It feels rather unsettling and exhilarating simultaneously to be invited," she said.

Regarding her lecture, Aziza added that since the sciences are



Some of the most significant figures of Oman and Britain have delivered phenomenal lectures over the years at the society. It feels rather unsettling and exhilarating simultaneously to be invited

AZIZA AL MUGHEIRY

seen as very difficult and "not to most people's taste", the central theme of the lecture is to demonstrate that "the sciences are not in a world of their own - they are tools to help us learn about the world - from our histories to our biology. It is fascinating".

Her lecture will further delve on how neutrons and muons have shed light on artefacts from the Roman Empire and Ancient Egypt. "Personally, my favourite are the animal statues of Ancient Egypt. For centuries, it was uncertain what those statue-like objects contained and whether any animal remnants were inside. The saying, 'X-ray vision', is possible with physics!"

She informed that neutron studies have revealed mesmerising facts about the ancient Roman economy - a time filled with civil unrest and political upheaval. "Neutrons were used to study the debasement of coins of that period. Coins from the Northumbrian Kingdom will also be discussed, among other things."

"These subatomic particles have proved extremely useful in studying countless archaeological artefacts."

Those interested can register to join via Zoom on www.britishomani.org

First Omani female umpire officiates in ITTF World Team Championships



Our Correspondent
Muscat

Aisha bint Saeed al Saidiya, the first female umpire from Oman and the Gulf Cooperation Council to earn the prestigious elite blue badge in international table tennis officiating, is currently making history at the ITTF World Team Championships in Busan, Korea, which will continue till February 25.

Aisha described the tournament as one of the most competitive international events under the International Table Tennis Federation (ITTF). Over 2,000 male and female players from 40 countries, grouped into eight divisions, are participating.

She noted the exceptional calibre of players participating, emphasising the intense

Over 2,000 male and female players from 40 countries are participating in the ITTF World Team Championships in Busan, Korea till February 25

competition and the narrow margins that separate the contenders vying for top honours. The tournament's structure consists of three rounds for participating teams.

Aisha noted the high standard of matches she has officiated

and expressed her ambition to umpire Olympic table tennis matches.

Her journey as an umpire began in 2016, and since then, she has officiated numerous local, regional and international tournaments. Her portfolio includes prestigious events such as the WTT Star Contender championships, the French International Paralympic Championship, and the Tunisian International Championship.

Aisha's achievement as the first Omani and GCC female umpire to attain the elite blue badge in table tennis not only marks a milestone in her career but also serves as an inspiration, highlighting the growing presence and recognition of women officials in the realm of international sports.

Mobile rehabilitation units launched

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Social Development (MoSD), in collaboration with Petroleum Development Oman, has unveiled two mobile rehabilitation units dedicated to serving people with disabilities in Al Wusta.

The units were launched under the auspices of Sheikh Mohammed bin Ali al Ghufaili, Wali of Haima, on Monday, marking a significant step forward in the sultanate's efforts to enhance accessibility to rehabilitation services.

Introduction of the mobile units in the wilayats of Haima and Al Zajar aims to benefit 80 individuals, with plans underway to extend similar services to the wilayat of Mazyunah in Dhofar.

This initiative is part of a broader strategy of MoSD to ensure rehabilitation services reach all corners of the country, facilitating the integration of people with disabilities into society.

The mobile units are designed



to offer a comprehensive range of services, including special education, occupational therapy, natural therapy, as well as behavioural and psychological rehabilitation. Additionally, these provide speech and language therapy, vocational training programmes, and a variety of cultural, sports and recreational activities, aiming to empower individuals with disabilities.

An official of MoSD informed that the units have trained staff, including a special education

specialist, a physical and occupational therapist and four speech/language specialists, ensuring a multidisciplinary approach to rehabilitation.

According to data released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI), there were 44,513 individuals with disabilities in the sultanate at the end of 2022, accounting for 0.9% of the total population underscoring the growing need for robust rehabilitation services.

According to NCSI data, 66 individuals were enrolled in programmes at the Vocational Assessment and Rehabilitation Centre, which plays a crucial role in facilitating their integration into society.

Launch of the mobile rehabilitation units reflects Oman's commitment to supporting people with disabilities, ensuring they have access to essential services that encourage their participation and inclusion in all aspects of life.



Modern rest area for taxi drivers opened in N Batinah

Our Correspondent
Muscat

North Batinah Municipality has launched the first-of-its kind modern rest area for taxi drivers in Suhar.

A statement issued by North Batinah Municipality said, 'The Municipality unveiled the first

rest area for taxi drivers in the wilayat of Suhar on Tuesday. The facility is equipped with toilets and modern amenities.'

North Batinah Municipality recently assigned construction of five air-conditioned rest areas for taxi drivers in several locations in Suhar to a local company.

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GED results to be announced on Thursday

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Ministry of Education (MoE) has announced that results of the General Education Diploma (GED) and equivalent examinations for the first semester of the 2023/2024 academic year will be declared on Thursday at 4pm.

H E Dr Madiha bint Ahmed bin Nasser al Shibaniya, Minister of Education, approved the results on Tuesday. An MoE statement said, 'Students can SMS their exam seat numbers to 90200 via Omantel or Ooredoo and receive the results, and also check on the Oman Education Portal.'

MoE informed that it registered 29 violations during the examinations. Students can apply for re-evaluation of up to three papers from February 25 to 29.



Tender Announcement

Duqm Quarries SAOC is pleased to announce the following tender:

Tender No	Tender Name	Last date for Collecting Documents	Last Date for Submission of Tender	Tender Document Price
DQ-TD-2023-02	Supply and Delivery of 700 TPH Fixed Limestone Crusher to Al Duqm	26-Feb-24	12-Mar-24	100 OMR

Tender Conditions:

- 1 Interested Bidders shall send an Expression of Interest (EOI) to tenders@duqmquarries.om. The last date to receive the Expression of Interest (EOI) is 26th Feb 2024 at 04:00 p.m. The bidders shall mention the Tender Name and Tender Number in the Expression of Interest (EOI).
- 2 Proposals shall be submitted in two separate envelopes (Technical and Commercial) sealed with red wax and addressed to the Honorable Audit Committee Chairman at Duqm Quarries Company. The Number and Name of the Tender shall be written on the outside, provided that the name of the bidder or what he refers to is not written on the envelope.
- 3 A bank guarantee or certified check from one of the banks operating in the Sultanate shall be attached to the bid, at a value of 1% of the value of the bid, and it shall be valid for 90 days. Bids that do not meet the guarantee will not be considered.
- 4 The company is not obligated to accept the lowest or any other bid. The company has the right to accept or reject any bid without stating the reason.

MARKET WATCH

MSX304,581.50

Sensex73,057.40

FOREX RATES

(RO1 equals)

India	215.48
Pakistan	726.49
Bangladesh	285.16
Philippines	145.46
Sri Lanka	810.38

*Rates as on February 20

Source: xe.com

BRIEFS

Oil prices mixed amid Red Sea tension

Oil benchmarks were mixed in early trade on Tuesday ahead of the release of key US Federal Reserve data and offset by ongoing tension in the Middle East and the Red Sea.

The international benchmark crude Brent traded at \$83.55 per barrel. The US benchmark, West Texas Intermediate (WTI), traded at the same time at \$78.41 per barrel, up 0.24% from Monday's close of \$78.22 per barrel.

Ongoing tension in the Middle East and the Red Sea put upward pressure on Brent on Tuesday.

Brent climbed towards three-week highs on Tuesday, buoyed by a positive demand outlook in China, the world's second-largest economy.

Salalah Free Zone signs 5 new deals worth RO44mn

Our Correspondent Muscat

Salalah Free Zone, a regional business hub for industrial and logistics activities, has signed five new investment agreements worth RO44mn with a local and international investors from Kuwait, Iraq, Jordan, and Hong Kong.

The first agreement was signed with Naseem Salalah Trading and Manufacturing Industries Company, representing Iraqi investment, to establish a factory to produce paper tissues with an investment of RO38mn.

The zone signed second agreement with Kuwait Engineering Industries Company, which will establish a modern factory for manufacturing air conditioning devices bearing the brand name 'Moria' at an investment cost of RO4.56mn. The factory will have a production capacity of 90,000 air conditioning units annually.

The third agreement with Tawfiq Medical Supplies Company from Jordan includes the establishment of a specialised factory for the production and re-filling of blood sugar test strips,



with an investment amounting to RO760,000 and a production capacity of up to 100mn sugar test strips annually.

The fourth agreement was with an Omani firm, Wadi Hawjar Company, to establish a specialised factory for mixing and producing raw materials from frankincense derivatives with an investment amounting to RO247,000.

The fifth and last agreement was with Green Stream Solutions Company from Hong Kong, which plans to establish an import, repackaging, and export company for potash fertilizers in Salalah Free Zone with an investment of RO57,000.

The agreement signing ceremony was attended by Dr Ali bin Mohammad Tabuk, CEO of Salalah Free Zone, and a number of officials in the region and investing companies.

Earlier this month, Salalah Free Zone, which is operated by Asyad Group, celebrated the inauguration of three new export-oriented projects in the foods, petrochemicals, and mining industries.

Salalah Free Zone reported impressive investment growth in 2023, securing new investments worth RO728mn during last year.

The zone signed nine new investment agreements, allocated 1.2mn square meters of leased land, and issued eight construction permits during 2023, according to data issued by Salalah Free Zone.

Salalah Free Zone achieved significant milestones during 2023, including a substantial increase in investment size, quantity, and the leasing of extensive land areas, emphasizing the zone's commitment to the sultanate's economic development.

These accomplishments have led to a substantial surge in the cumulative investment in Salalah Free Zone, now exceeding RO4.5bn. The land occupancy rate has crossed the 50% mark, with 129 investments and a leased land area of 6mn square meters, the data showed.

By December 2023, as many as 39 projects were operational

in the Salalah Free Zone, with an additional 21 projects under construction, showcasing the zone's growing attractiveness to businesses and investors.

Salalah Free Zone, in collaboration with Omani authorities, is dedicated to providing comprehensive support facilities for hosted industrial projects. The zone's goal is to identify opportunities across various economic sectors and establish enduring partnerships with customers. This involves creating modern, integrated infrastructure in a strategically located area, offering attractive incentives, a secure environment, and reliable services.

As a premier hub for high-quality industrial and logistical activities, Salalah Free Zone extends various economic incentives, advantages, and facilities to investors. Noteworthy among these are tax exemptions and the right to full foreign ownership of investment projects.

Additionally, the zone's strategic location next to the Port of Salalah, overlooking major global shipping routes, positions it among the world's top-tier commercial ports.

Russia plans to triple LNG output by 2030

Moscow, Russia – Russia has announced plans to dramatically increase its liquefied natural gas (LNG) production from 33mn tonnes in 2023 to 110mn tonnes by the year 2030, according to a report by Russian news agency TASS.

The ambitious target that aims at bolstering Russia's position in the global LNG market and diversifying its gas supplies was revealed by Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak.

According to Novak, the major increase in production will be distributed across Russia's key LNG clusters, with a planned increase to 110mn tonnes per year by 2030, which he said is already secured through projects that are either underway or in the pipeline.

Similarly, the Baltic cluster is set to undergo a significant expansion, with production projected to grow more than sixfold to 15mn tonnes from a modest 2.2mn tonnes.

Furthermore, the Sakhalin cluster in Russia's Far East and the Murmansk cluster in the northwest are anticipated to increase production to 15mn tonnes and 20mn tonnes, respectively, marking substantial growth in these areas.



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CHAIRMAN REPORT

Dear esteemed Unit Holders

On behalf of the board, I am pleased to present to you the United GCC Fund's full year financials for its thirteenth full year of operation. The United GCC Fund returned +23.4% surpassing the S&P GCC benchmark by 1700 basis points. This significant accomplishment, amid global economic shifts, underscores our strategic agility and the resilience of the markets in which we operate.

The year 2023 was characterized by the robustness of worldwide markets, witnessing recoveries in both developed and emerging sectors. The year concluded positively for most asset classes, driven by a decline in inflation and accommodative policies from the Federal Reserve

Influenced by global trends, the S&P GCC Index concluded with a +6.2% increase. This gain in the GCC markets reflected the positive global sentiment, bolstered by stable oil prices and effective diversification strategies. Notably, the index's rise was primarily propelled by significant advances in the Dubai and Saudi markets, which saw gains of +21.7% and +14.2%, respectively. In contrast, Oman and Abu Dhabi were the top laggards, closing at -7.1% and -6.2% respectively.

In 2023, the oil markets faced a downturn with Brent crude prices dipped by -10.3%. This was influenced by a complex mix of factors: OPEC+ production adjustments, global demand slowdown and increased output from the U.S. Despite this, projections indicate that oil market demand will continue to grow until at least 2028, according to OPEC and the EIA despite differing their perspectives on when oil demand will peak.

The year 2023 was notable for the GCC, especially in project awards. The total value of contracts signed reached an impressive \$200 billion, doubling the figure from 2022 and marking the highest level since 2003. This remarkable increase was predominantly driven by the markets in Saudi Arabia and the UAEs. Looking ahead, the IMF forecasts the GCC to outperform the global growth rate, projecting a 3.4% increase compared to the global average of 2.9% in 2024. This growth is anticipated to be driven largely by the non-oil sector, which is expected to see a 4% increase for the region. Highlight events like the Riyadh Expo and FIFA 2034, alongside major 'giga projects', are setting a foundation for a robust investment climate in the long run. This environment is likely to yield benefits such as lower unemployment, demographic growth, and a boost in tourism.

From an investment perspective, the GCC markets present an appealing opportunity, currently undervalued compared to their 5-year average. This scenario is likely to attract foreign investors seeking portfolio diversification who are currently underweight and will be drawn by the region's long-term potential and the prospect of higher earnings growth, enhancing its appeal. Additionally, 2024 is anticipated to be a pivotal year with potential shifts in monetary policies, including likely rate cuts in the second half of the year, which should positively impact the equity market.

Despite a slowdown in IPO activity compared to 2022, the market's appetite remains robust, as evidenced by high oversubscription rates. This reflects strong interest, bolstered by government initiatives and rising foreign investment inflows. The growth in IPOs in the GCC is attributed to regulatory reforms, incentives from exchanges, listing of new sectors, and efforts to improve market liquidity. These factors are anticipated to positively shape the long-term market outlook in the GCC.

In conclusion, 2023 was a year in which our fund effectively navigated challenges and capitalized on opportunities, demonstrating our commitment to delivering value to our investors. The outlook for 2024 is cautiously optimistic supported by the robustness of the non-oil sector in this region, alongside favorable monetary conditions, and the ongoing process of economic diversification. This is in light of ongoing geopolitical tensions and a year brimming with elections. However, it's important to recognize that, despite facing numerous headwinds in the past, our fund has weathered these storms and continued to deliver long-term rewards to our shareholders. Our strategy is firmly centered on harnessing these opportunities to drive sustained growth and success. In line with this, we are dedicated to dynamically adjusting our investment approach to align with changing market trends and geopolitical developments.

On behalf of the Fund management team, I would like to thank His Majesty Sultan Haitham Bin Tarik for his leadership, and The Capital Market Authority (CMA) and Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) for their support. I also extend my gratitude to our investors, patrons, and stakeholders for their continued trust and confidence.

Yours sincerely,



Mustafa Ahmed Salman
Chairman, United GCC Fund



المتحدة للصناديق
United GCC Fund

Audited statement of Comprehensive Income
for the full year ended 31st December 2023

	Year ended 31 st Dec 2023	Year ended 31 st Dec 2022
	RO	RO
	Audited	Audited
Income		
Interest income	1,521	822
Dividend income	600,443	472,559
Fair value change on financial assets at fair value through profit or loss	1,827,100	(463,851)
Realized gain/(loss) on sale of financial assets at fair value through profit or loss	1,852,505	522,574
Foreign exchange (loss)/gain	27,773	(71,047)
Other Income	0	0
Net investment income/(loss)	4,309,342	461,056

Expenses		
Management fees	(167,951)	(169,776)
Custody and administration fees	(29,391)	(29,711)
General and administrative expenses	(255,518)	(220,288)
Incentive fees	(240,859)	(183)
	(693,719)	(419,958)

Profit and total comprehensive income/(loss) for the period and increase/(decrease) in net assets attributable to the unit holders	3,615,623	41,097
Profit/(loss) per unit	0.310	0.003

Audited statement of Financial Position on 31st December 2023

	As at 31 st Dec 2023	As at 31 st Dec 2022
	RO	RO
	Audited	Audited
ASSETS		
Cash and cash equivalents	777,645	2,385,921
Financial assets at fair value through profit or loss	17,809,551	13,042,143
Other receivables	54,912	13,723
Total assets	18,642,108	15,441,787

LIABILITIES		
Payables and accruals	287,478	139,274
Net assets attributable to unitholders	18,354,630	15,302,514
Total liabilities and net assets attributable to unitholders	18,642,108	15,441,787
Net assets attributable to the unitholders per unit	1.588	1.311

For subscription details please contact UGCC Fund Admin @ 24763362 or email ugccfund@usoman.com

CBO issues treasury bills worth RO70mn

Our Correspondent Muscat

The Central Bank of Oman (CBO) this week announced the issuance of two tenders of government treasury bills worth RO70mn.

The value of the allotted treasury bills stood at RO30mn, for a maturity period of 28 days. The average accepted price reached RO99.605 for every RO100 bills, while the minimum accepted price also arrived at RO99.605.

The average discount rate and the average yield reached 5.1491% and 5.1695%, respectively.

The value of the allotted treasury bills amounted to RO40mn, for a maturity period of 91 days. The average accepted price reached RO98.666 for every RO100 bill, while the minimum accepted price arrived at RO98.665.

The average discount rate and the average yield reached 5.3486% and 5.4209%, respectively.



The Central Bank of Oman acts as the Issue Manager and provides the added advantage of ready liquidity through discounting and repurchase facilities (repo).

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

UAE is 4th largest Islamic finance market

Abu Dhabi, UAE – The Central Bank of the UAE (CBUAE) has revealed that the main Islamic financial markets are located in the GCC, Southeast Asia, and South Asia. The UAE ranks fourth among the largest Islamic financial markets in the world (in terms of assets) according to the Islamic Finance Development Indicator report 2023 (IFDI 2023).

The CBUAE said in its UAE Islamic Finance Report 2023 that the Islamic finance sector grew by 11% in 2022, bringing the value of global Islamic financial assets to \$4.5tn. The sector has achieved a 69% increase over five years and a 163% increase over the past 10 years.

The report explained that Islamic finance has developed in the UAE since the establishment of the first Islamic bank in 1975



through several sectors including Islamic banking, takaful insurance, and sukuk.

The CBUAE said that the assets of Islamic banks and windows in conventional banks currently represent 23% of total banking assets in the UAE, after achieving a growth of 16% over the past five years. The sukuk market is also witnessing an expansion in the UAE, as the federal government recently issued Islamic treasury sukuk in the UAE dirham, which could be a catalyst for other entities to issue Islamic sukuk.

The report noted that the Islamic finance sector has played a major and growing role in the field of sustainability globally due to the great compatibility and integration between the requirements of Islamic law and the aspirations of the Sustainable Development Goals.

The rapid growth rate of ESG-related sukuk issuances is one of the indicators of the rapid development of sustainable Islamic finance, with total issuances reaching AED120.3bn by the first half of 2023.

WAM

Russia intends to fully meet its OPEC+ quota

Moscow, Russia – Russia intends to fully meet its OPEC+ quota in February despite a decrease in refining, Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak said.

"We will fulfill our obligations," he told reporters when asked whether Russia will boost export of oil in February to offset a decline in refining.

Russia's OPEC+ obligations imply reduction of both supplies of oil and petroleum products. Bloomberg reported earlier that Russia cut the production of petroleum products in the middle of February.

Russian oil company Lukoil said in January that the operation of a unit at the Nizhny Novgorod Refinery had been temporarily suspended due to an incident.

Lukoil is one of the leading refining enterprises with petroleum profile in Russia with an installed oil processing capacity of 17mn tonnes per year.

The international oil demand will grow until 2040 as a minimum, Russian Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak said during the plenary session at the Russia Expo international forum.

"Many say oil renders moot. I can confidently say this is not so. According to many forecasts of experts, oil consumption will continue growing for a long time. Growth rates will be about 14% until 2040 as a minimum, and this is the incremental demand of about one



According to many forecasts of experts, oil consumption will continue growing for a long time. Growth rates will be about 14% until 2040 as a minimum

ALEXANDER NOVAK

million barrels per day annually," Novak said.

Overall, the extra demand will be about 700mn metric tonnes of oil during that period, the deputy prime minister said.

Specifically, oil production in East Siberia in 2023 reached 54mn metric tonnes. Offshore oil production amounted to 24mn metric tons, Novak

noted.

The International Russia Expo is running from November 4, 2023 to April 12, 2024 in Moscow. Its goal is to demonstrate Russia's major achievements in various sectors of the economy, with all 89 Russian regions participating.

Russia's Ministry of Energy expects domestic oil production will total 523mn metric tonnes this year, minister Nikolay Shulginov said at a press conference.

"Oil production will provisionally total 523mn metric tonnes and gas production around 667bn cubic meters. Refining will be slightly lower than in the last year," Shulginov said.

Oil and gas condensate production in Russia in 2023 contracted annually by 0.8% to 530.6mn metric tonnes. TASS

Israel's economy slumps 20% as Gaza war takes toll

Jerusalem – The ongoing Gaza war has caused the Israeli economy to contract nearly 20% in the last quarter of 2023, according to the country's Central Bureau of Statistics on Monday, almost double the market expectation.

"The contraction of the economy in the fourth quarter of 2023 was directly affected by the outbreak of the Iron Swords War on October 7," the statistics bureau said in a statement.

Israel's economy has been badly affected by its war with Hamas following the attack on Israel on 7 October 2023.

Preliminary figures released by the bureau showed that Israel's gross domestic product (GDP) shrank an annualised 19.4% in the final three months of last year.

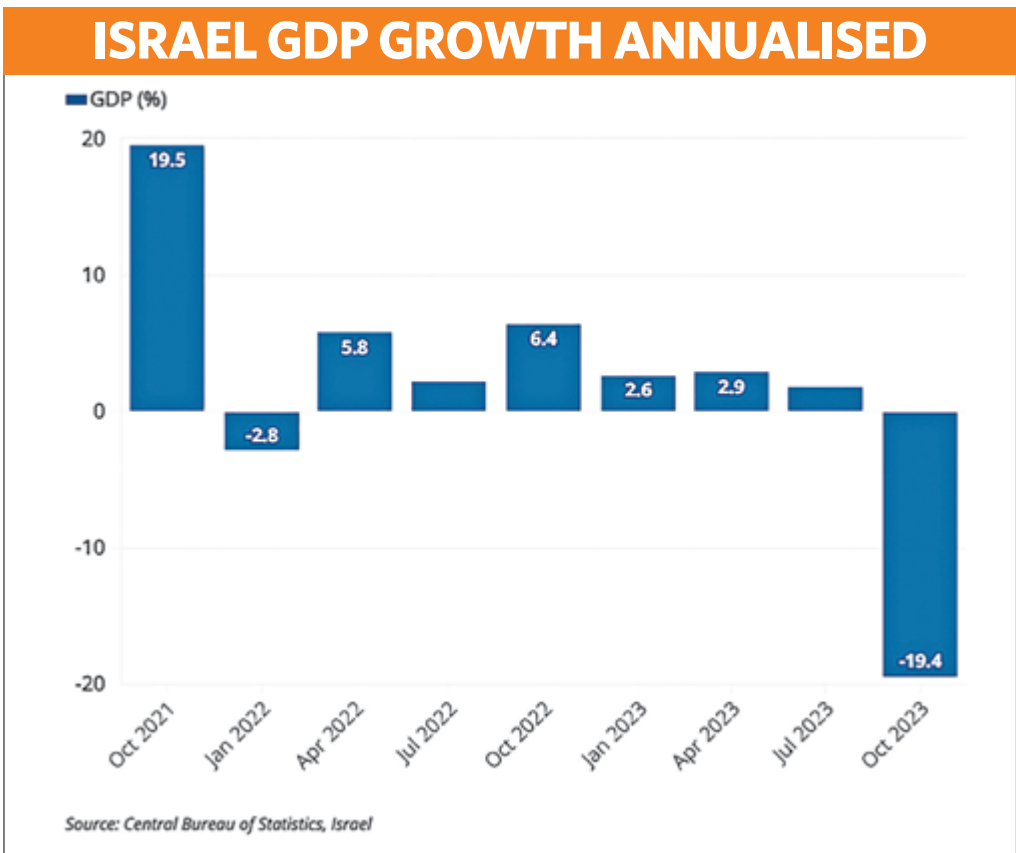
It said the decline was driven by a 26.9% drop in private consumption, as confidence plummeted amid the Gaza war and households cut back on spending.

The decline was partially due to a dive in business activity as workers were called up for military duty and Palestinian employees were denied entry to Israel.

In the first quarter of 2023, the GDP growth rate was 3.1%, 2.8% in the second quarter and 2.7% in the third quarter.

For all of 2023, the Israeli economy grew 2%, down from 6.5% in 2022.

Israel has launched a deadly offensive on the Gaza Strip following a Hamas attack that Tel



During the last quarter of 2023, business investment in Israel plunged by 67.8%, while its exports declined by 18.3% and imports slipped by 42%

Aviv says killed nearly 1,200 people. The ensuing Israeli attacks have killed nearly 29,092 and injured about 69,028 with mass destruction and shortages of necessities.

The Israeli war on Gaza has pushed 85% of the territory's population into internal displacement amid acute shortages of food, clean water and medicine, while 60% of the enclave's in-

frastructure has been damaged or destroyed, according to the UN.

Israel stands accused of genocide at the International Court of Justice. An interim ruling in January ordered Tel Aviv to stop genocidal acts and take measures to guarantee that humanitarian assistance is provided to civilians in Gaza.

During the last quarter of

2023, business investment in Israel plunged by 67.8%, while its exports declined by 18.3% and imports slipped by 42%.

Moody's, one of the world's largest credit rating agencies, last week lowered Israel's credit rating, saying: "The negative impact on the country's institutions and public finances... may prove more severe than Moody's currently assesses."

The ratings are a guide for investors over assessing the risk of a country's bonds, based on factors such as economic perspectives and political risk.

Agencies

Egypt says Suez Canal revenues drop 50% amid Red Sea tensions

Cairo, Egypt – Suez Canal revenue has recorded a considerable decline of up to 50% with the escalating tension in the Red Sea region, Russian news agency TASS reported Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi as saying on Monday.

"The situation in the Gaza Strip and events related to it affect Egypt as well. In particular, previously the Suez Canal brought in some \$10bn per year, and now we register a decrease in revenues by 40-50%," the president said in his keynote speech at the opening of the EGPES-2024 (Egypt Energy Show).

Despite these setbacks, the Egyptian president gave assurances that the country would continue to fulfil its commitments to international partners across various sectors.



The situation in the Gaza Strip and events related to it affect Egypt as well. In particular, previously the Suez Canal brought in some \$10bn per year, and now we register a decrease in revenues by 40-50%

ABDEL FATTAH AL-SISI

The Suez Canal, a critical maritime route for global trade, significantly contributes to Egypt's economy and foreign currency reserves.

Last year, revenues from the canal exceeded \$10bn, underscoring its importance to the national economy.

The decline in revenues comes in the wake of heightened tensions following the escalation

of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict in the Gaza Strip.

The Ansar Allah movement (the Houthis) issued warnings of targeted strikes on Israeli territories and obstructed ships linked to Israel from traversing the Red Sea and the Bab el-Mandeb Strait.

This blockade is in response to Israel's military actions against the Palestinian group

Hamas.

The Houthis have since launched attacks on numerous civilian vessels in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden, escalating the situation further.

A recent attack by Houthi rebels targeted the UK vessel, Rubymar, in the Gulf of Aden, causing substantial damage and putting the ship at risk of sinking. Anadolu Agency



Shell Oman Marketing Company SAOG
Post Box 38, Mina Al Fahal, Postal Code 116, Sultanate of Oman

INVITATION FOR THE EXTRAORDINARY GENERAL MEETING AND THE ANNUAL ORDINARY GENERAL MEETING

The Board of Directors of Shell Oman Marketing Company SAOG (the "Company") are pleased to invite all the shareholders of the Company to attend the Extraordinary General Meeting and the Annual Ordinary General Meeting of the Company (collectively hereinafter referred to as the "Meetings") scheduled to be held at **3 pm on Thursday, 7 March 2024** through the electronic platform hosting general meetings. The platform can be accessed through Muscat Clearance and Depository Company's SAOC website (www.mcd.gov.om). In the event of not meeting the legal quorum for any of the Meetings, the Meetings shall be then held at 3 pm on Thursday, 14 March 2024, through the electronic platform hosting aforesaid, to discuss the following agenda:

Agenda for the EGM:

- To consider and approve decreasing the number of the Board of Directors to (9) members and amending the Articles of Association.

Agenda for the AGM:

- To consider and approve the Board of Directors' Report regarding the Company's activities and financial position during the financial year ended 31 December 2023.
- To consider and approve the Board of Directors' Report regarding Corporate Governance for the financial year ended 31 December 2023.
- To consider and approve the Auditors' Report regarding the audited financial statements for the financial year ended 31 December 2023.
- To consider and approve the proposed cash dividend to shareholders as of the date of the AGM, equivalent to 36 Baisa per share for the financial year ended 31 December 2023.
- To approve the sitting fees of the Board of Directors and sub-committees payable to the Board of Directors for the previous financial year and to determine the sitting fees for the next financial year.
- To consider and approve the proposal of distributing the total sum of RO 42,400 as remuneration for the Board of Directors of the Company for the financial year ended 31 December 2023.
- To inform the shareholders about Related Parties Transactions entered by the Company during the financial year ended 31 December 2023.
- To inform the shareholders about the expenditure in support of social services during the financial year ended 31 December 2023.
- To consider and approve the proposal of allocating RO 36,000 to support social services for the financial year ending 31 December 2024.
- To approve the criteria set out to appraise the Board of Directors' performance.
- To appoint an independent external consultant to evaluate the performance of the Board of Directors for the financial year ending 31 December 2024 and fix their remuneration.
- To elect new members in the Board of Directors of the Company. Any person who wishes to be nominated to the Board of Directors of the Company is required to fill in a Director's Nomination Form and deliver it to the Company at least five (5) business days prior to the date of the AGM of the Company (by the end of working hours on Wednesday, 28 February 2024). The Company shall not accept any applications received after such date. Candidates must meet the required conditions for the Board of Directors' membership.
- To appoint the Auditors for the Company for the year ending 31 December 2024 and fix their remuneration.

In accordance with the Company's Articles of Association and CMA's regulations on holding EGMs and AGMs using the electronic platform, we would like to bring to your kind attention the following:

- Any juristic person is entitled to authorise any natural person to attend the EGM and AGM and vote on their behalf through the electronic platform, provided that the natural person has an investor number in Muscat Clearing and Depository Company.
- Voting on any of the agenda items mentioned in the notice commences three (3) days before the date of the commencement of the EGM and AGM and until the end of the voting process on the day of the EGM and AGM. In the event that the shareholder's balance changes, the voting shall be considered void, and he/she shall vote again on the day of the EGM and AGM.

For subsequent information, kindly contact **Mr. Azzan Hamed Al Yahmadi** on telephone number: **96622566**



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ANNOUNCEMENT TO LIQUIDATION CREDITORS

The Official liquidator of Adam International Trading & Contracting LLC C.R No. 1095418 (Under Liquidation) announce that, the members of the company have passed a resolution on 22/10/2023 to liquidate the company, the liquidation has been published in the official Gazette issue no. 1524 dated 19/12/2023.

All creditors are requested to file their official claim supported by statement of account with the liquidator within six months from the date of official gazette announcement (not later than 18/6/2024). All Debtors are requested to settle their dues directly to the liquidator.

The liquidator address is: Telephone No. 99461960
Email: bekry70@gmail.com
Office Location: Al Raid commercial center, Qurum, 1st floor, office no. (28).

SALE OF ITEMS OF A COMPANY UNDER LIQUIDATION

The liquidator of one of the companies announces the sale of the following items through sealed envelopes;

- 1) Various Building Materials (Electrical/ Plumbing, sanitary ware and Iron mongery).
- 2) Power Tools & Accessories.
- 3) Construction Equipment.
- 4) Light/ Heavy Vehicles.

Interested parties can view the items on Monday 26/2/2024 between 9 - 1 at Jifnain store.
Last date for submission the offers is Sunday 3 March 2024 at 2:00 pm

For more details please contact; 99461960

MG among top five best selling cars in GCC

MG Motor continued its successful upwards trajectory in the rankings of the Middle East's top car manufacturers, moving up another place in 2023 to secure 5th position with yet another record-breaking year.

With total sales of 63,691 units over the twelve months, the year concluded with MG recording an impressive 4.2% market share, a press release said.

By increasing its sales by 10.8% in 2023, MG continued its record for registering double-digit growth every year since it kicked off its operations in the Middle East region. Now one of the top five automotive brands in the region, MG continues to experience large increases in market share across the Middle East.

Nowhere is this more evident than in Oman, where the



brand enjoys a 10% market share, and ranks number two in the sultanate, while in Iraq last year ,it reported a 9.9% market share and fourth place ranking.

MG's continuous growth reflects customer trust and confidence and has been made possible by the support provided by its ever-growing sales and after-sales network. To meet this growing customer demand across the region, MG plans to open 17 new showrooms in 2024, to complement the 49 currently in operation.

The brand's commitment to exceptional customer service will be further enhanced with the opening of 26 new service facilities, taking the total number of state-of-the-art service centres to 73.

Oman Post hosts DG of universal postal union



Oman Post, the national postal operator, hosted Masahiko Metoki, director general of the Universal Postal Union (UPU).

This high-profile visit, which came in parallel to the first Arab Postal Leaders Forum held in Muscat, highlighted Oman Post's pivotal role in the international postal community and its commitment to global postal service standards, a press release said.

Metoki's visit included a tour of the state-of-the-art operations and fulfillment centre of Oman Post and Asyad Express, and was attended by Sheikh Ibrahim bin Sultan al Hosni, acting CEO of Oman Post and Asyad Express, and the management team.

"Oman Post has consistently played a vital role in enhancing postal services and the logistics ecosystem," said Sheikh Hosni. "This was the perfect occasion for us to showcase our achievements in the postal service, particularly in light of Oman's digital transformation and global connectivity initiatives as part of Oman Vision 2040. We remain committed to driving excellence in mail operations, trackability, e-commerce facilitation, and customer service, as well as upholding the standards advocated by the UPU."

Oman Post places significance on its partnership with the Universal Postal Union by reaffirming its commitment to meeting international postal service standards and facilitating seamless international mail exchanges. By adhering to the Universal Service Obligation, Oman Post makes postal services available to the public with the required quality at a reasonable price.

Additionally, Oman Post's capabilities and readiness to provide International Financial Services (IFS) showcase its role

to become a facilitator of essential financial services that transcend geopolitical barriers. This will enable customers at post offices to benefit from financial services, including international money transfers to any country within the UPU network.

Oman Post, part of Asyad Group, has significantly enhanced its postal services to meet international standards, a commitment that has been recognised through prestigious awards. Notably, it was ranked the first in Express Mail Service (EMS) globally and the third in customer experience globally.

Additionally, Oman Post was lauded with the Excellence Award in the Postal Development Index and received the International Addressing Standard Certificate, underscoring its dedication to overall operational excellence and service quality.

Amouage introduces Love Delight

The universe of Amouage has always encompassed a breathtaking variety of landscapes. From the boundary-pushing territory of the Library Collection, to the complex realm of the Exceptional Extraits, each facet of the House's creativity has reflected the numerous possibilities offered by the art of perfumery.

Now, having formed a distinct stylistic profile, Amouage's Secret Garden has been re-imagined, ready to embark on further journeys of creative exploration. To mark the occasion, a brand new composition, Love Delight joins the collection – a delicious creation that adds an alluring dimension to the quartet's expression of womanhood.

From the moment they emerged, the aim of the Secret Garden scents has been clear — each Eau de Parfum has explored



a facet of contemporary femininity by pairing a tantalizingly flavoursome accord with a distinctive floral note.

"In the case of Love Delight, I absolutely knew I wanted to stay faithful to the idea at the core of all the Secret Garden perfumes," explains chief creative officer, Renaud Salmon, "but I wanted to push the olfactory vocabulary into areas we had not really explored before."

Oman Avenues Mall introduces Babyshop

Oman Avenues Mall, the ultimate family shopping destination located in the heart of the city, announces the addition of Babyshop to its exciting range of retail offerings.

This significant inclusion of the popular children's apparel brand is testament to the mall's commitment to offering an unparalleled shopping experience for its discerning customers, a press release said.

The grand opening of Babyshop at Oman Avenues Mall on February 14 was graced by top executives from Lulu Group International and Landmark Group, marking a momentous milestone in their enduring partnership. Ushering in a new era of shopping excellence at the mall, the new Babyshop store sprawls across 600sqm of prime retail space, boasting an extensive array of children's apparel, accessories, toys, and baby gear.

With a commitment to premium quality and an unmatched variety, the store endeavours to become the go-to destination for



families seeking the best for their little ones.

Gogi George, general manager of Leasing and Development for Lulu Group International, said, "We are thrilled to further our partnership with the Landmark Group with the opening of Babyshop at Oman Avenues Mall. The launch of this popular brand enriches our existing portfolio, elevating the diversity of retailers available to our cherished shoppers. We eagerly anticipate further collaborations with Landmark Group, promising more exciting brand introductions in the future."

Oman Avenues Mall recently extended its strategic collaboration with the Landmark Group, ushering in the expansion of the mall's retail portfolio with popular fashion and accessory brands.

The introduction of MAX Fashion to the mall's retail repertoire in 2023, brought patrons an extensive selection of high-quality, stylish, and affordable attire for men, women, and children. Following its resounding success, MAX Fashion is now poised for a substantial expansion to the mall's first floor, resulting in 1,500sqm of fashion-forward shopping brilliance.

Awareness campaign for technical-vocational education held

The Ministry of Education, represented by the Technical and Vocational Education Implementation Team (Business Administration and Information Technology) in the Office of the School Education Management, Development, and Structuring Project, organised an awareness campaign for technical and vocational education paths for business administration and information technology (BTEC) majors in a number of educational schools in North Al Batinah.

The campaign targeted students in the grade 10 of basic education, at Halima Al-Saadia School for Basic Education, and Kaab Bin Barsha School for Basic Education, a press release said. It included a series of meetings



with the target groups of students to register and choose technical and vocational education paths for business administration and information technology (BTEC) majors that are compatible with the educational materials.

During the meetings, the team discussed the programme, which is an international technical vocational programme from Pearson Education in partnership with the Modern College for Commerce and Science. It includes five basic subjects (Islamic education, Arabic language, mathematics, and social studies), and four specialised subjects in business administration (introduction to business, commercial marketing, business decision-making, and training in the world of business), and four specialised subjects in the field of information technology (information systems management, database management, programming and development, robotics and social media in business), in addition to talking about the English language programme.

The campaign's awareness programme also included talking about the importance of educational systems and the solutions provided by the Technical and Vocational Education Pathways Programme for business administration and information technology (BTEC) majors, including

learning time, reducing the gap between school education and university education, and the problem of the relationship between theory and application and achieving a balance between theoretical teaching, practical application, and evaluating the impact of learning using various evaluation methods that focus on acquired competencies.

Students who join the BTEC programme will receive two certificates - a certificate from the Ministry of Education and a certificate from Pearson, which is recognised in many countries of the world, to help them enter the labour market and compete in the unified admission to complete studies in most specialisations that are non-scientific.

TIGGO 8 PRO MAX interprets ‘Life in Motion’ in luxury class

Continuing the high-end positioning of the TIGGO 8 family, Tiggo 8 Pro Max is a luxury and commercial SUV with both forceful powertrain and advanced technology launched for the urban new middle-class elites.

By virtue of its dynamic and energetic exterior design, ‘2.0T+7DCT+4WD’ superior power, intelligent entertainment cabin and ultimate safety, Tiggo 8 Pro Max has successively received a number of international awards and successfully set a new benchmark for flagship SUVs, a press release said.

Designed by a team of top international designers, Tiggo 8 Pro Max perfectly interprets the design concept of ‘Life in Motion’. Particularly, the exclusive diamond front grille design of the PRO family and the unique wrapping parts contribute to the distinctive front end, bringing a strong visual impact and highlighting its standing as a flagship SUV.

In terms of the side appearance, Tiggo 8 Pro Max has three waistlines running across the side of the body, which not only conform to the fluid dynamics and can effectively reduce wind resistance, but also extend the overall body contour to bring a smooth and beautiful visual sense, showing its dynamic tem-



perament both internally and externally as a high-end SUV product without compromise.

Regarding the interior decoration, the model fully showcases the charm of technological luxury, bringing a new driving experience with an intelligent entertainment cabin. Specifically, in terms of the design of central control, it adopts a new horizontal layout style, making it simple, stylish and full of technological attractions.

In particular, the 24.6-inch large smart curved screen that first came into view seamlessly integrates the 12.3-inch full LCD instrument panel and the 12.3 inch suspended central control screen. In addition, it also adopts

the integrated optical fitting process to support multi-touch and multi-screen linkage, which combines technology and practicality, thus adding a lot of fun to the journey during driving.

Furthermore, Tiggo 8 Pro Max

also possesses the offline voice function. You can turn on the air conditioning, open the sunroof and conduct more operations with a single sentence, without using the network or any complicated operation settings, which achieves simpler and more direct interaction, as well as a better experience.

Additionally, Tiggo 8 Pro Max also provides a quiet environment like being in a library with its excellent NVH performance.

You can turn on the air conditioning, open the sunroof and conduct more operations with a single sentence, without using the network

Besides, with the support of these advanced configurations, including the Sony brand audio system, intelligent dual zone and three-row independent air conditioning in the front seats, and the application of the CN95-level air conditioning purification technology, it can bring VIP-level comfort for users with the super large seating space like a first-class cabin.

Muscat Open Golf returns

One of the oldest running amateur events in Oman and the GCC region returns this weekend (February 23-24) for its Golden Anniversary event.

Now in its 50th year, Muscat Open has always attracted top amateur golfers from Oman, including Oman National team players as well as members from other GCC nations, who will all be vying for the title of Muscat Open Champion.

The continued support of Petroleum Development Oman and sponsors ensure that Muscat Open continues to be a huge success.

The ongoing development and improvement of Ras al Hamra golf course, coupled with some rule and layout changes suggests this year’s event looks set to be one of the most challenging to date.

Alongside the Muscat Ladies and Junior Open, this year will also see the launch of the new ‘Muscat Open Legends’ where golfers, ex-champions and captains are invited to compete.

Jas Dhanju, tournament president, said “This weekend will truly be a golden one. The Muscat Open continues to attract the best golfers in the country.”

Sarco sponsors special students for Muscat Marathon



Al Seeb Technical Establishment (Sarco) LLC in association with G Shock, official timekeeper of the Muscat Marathon, sponsored 63 students from the Care and Special Needs section of Indian School Muscat for the 1km Kids Run at the recently concluded Muscat Marathon.

Running Group Acers and Pacers played a huge role in coordinating the event. Students from diverse nationalities were accompanied by their parents and teachers for the kids race. The main objective of the participation was to provide inclusion for the children at par with all other participants.



Filipino music icons coming to Dubai

The Fridge Entertainment has announced that two of the Philippine’s biggest music icons will be coming for a special concert at Coca-Cola Arena on April 14.

Philippine Rock Icon, Bamboo and Popstar Royalty, Sarah Geronimo bring their sold-out tour to Dubai for one night only. This electrifying, one-of-a-kind collaboration is sure to light up the Arena stage, a press release said.

Returning to the UAE after her performance at the Pope’s historic Papal Mass, pop star Sarah Geronimo brings her incredible voice and scintillating stage presence to the city. Sarah is joined by award-winning rock star, Bamboo, in one of the most highly anticipated concert collaborations of the year.

The epic musical experience features hits from both stars as well as numerous duets and surprise numbers as the two Filipino legends share the spotlight. Fans of the stars can expect high energy numbers, soul-soothing songs, and exceptional harmonies in this exclusive performance.

(Tickets start from AED149 and are on sale now at coca-cola-arena.com.)

Muscat Parents Council reviews work undertaken for current period

The Muscat Parents Council held a meeting at Al Zahra Basic Education School in Muscat to discuss the Council’s work for the current period. The meeting was chaired by Ali bin Saeed al Saeedi, Wali of Muscat Wilayat.

The meeting discussed the support issue for schools in order to maintain, restore, and take care of their facilities, in addition



to the wilayat’s school events and programmes, and to determine the needs of schools for interactive television devices, a press release said.

The plan of the council’s Educational Committee was also reviewed, while a discussion of the situation of schools in terms of grades and student preparation was also held, besides a plan to

honour meritorious students and teachers.

The Parents Council is also interested in strengthening connections between the parents’ councils in Muscat schools, search topics that are relevant to students, and discuss the best solutions and practices that support the optimal flow of the educational process for students.

‘Head and Neck’ surgeries training concludes

The 14th training course on head and neck tumour surgeries, organised by the Ear, Nose and Throat Department at Al Nahda Hospital, concluded on Tuesday under the patronage of H E Dr Ahmed Salem al Mandhari, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Health for Planning and Health Regulation along with the presence of Dr Rashid al Alawi, director general of Khoula Hospital and Dr Ammar al Kashmiri, director of Al Nahdah Hospital.

The training course brought



together 45 participants including physicians, nurses, experts and professors in the field of head and neck surgeries. Among the attendees were Prof Eugene Myers from the University of

Pittsburgh, who has authored many books and periodicals considered as a basic global reference in oncology surgery, as well as Prof Prathamesh Pai, a press release said.

Dr Salma Mohammed al Shaibani, senior consultant in Head and Neck Oncology Surgery, and head of the Organising Committee of the course, explained that Prof Myers had made multiple visits to the ENT Department over the past few years, and played a significant role in the advancement of tumour surgery in the department. She also mentioned that Prof Myers had conducted the first accreditation for the ENT specialty in the Omani Medical Specialties Board.



American Muslims continue battle against FBI watchlist

Istanbul, Turkey - The Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), the largest Muslim civil liberties organisation in the United States, has raised its voice against the negative impact of the FBI's 'terror watchlist' on the country's Muslim community.

CAIR National Deputy Executive Director Edward Ahmed Mitchell told Anadolu that this surveillance system significantly hampers the daily lives of Muslims across various facets of society.

American Muslims 'might be subjected to extra security when they are applying for a job, when they are trying to open a bank account, when they're getting on a plane. They might have to jump through extra hoops to accomplish any of the things that other Americans can do very easily without having to deal with suspicion', he said.

Mitchell highlighted the origins of the watchlist, tracing it back to the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States, wherein the FBI initiated a covert monitoring mechanism targeting Muslims in the country. He added that the list contains the names of individuals deemed suspicious by the government, even though they haven't been charged with any crimes.

'Horrible' consequences
The watchlist 'has led to some



American Muslims are subjected to extra security when they are applying for a job, when they are trying to open a bank account, when they're getting on a plane

EDWARD AHMED MITCHELL

pretty horrible things', Mitchell said, citing instances where innocent American Muslims encountered severe disruptions, including intrusive questioning about their religious practices like 'How many times a day do you pray?' and 'What Imam do you like?'

"It's resulted in one case in an American being repeatedly pulled over while driving by local police who saw his name on a

list and they approached him with guns out, endangering his life simply because he's wrongly on this watch list," he said.

He also recalled that the issue garnered renewed attention in January 2023, when a Swiss hacker exposed the watchlist online, revealing cases of mistaken identities, including children erroneously included due to name similarities.

"Children who could not have

committed any crime. (But) because their name matches up with someone else's name, they end up on the list. We also know from a leak of the watch list that over 95 per cent of the names on the list are names that are typically associated with Muslims. Those make up the overwhelming majority of names on this watch list."

Mitchell also pointed out that such profiling not only endangers individual liberties but also perpetuates racism and discrimination within society.

"Last year, we received about 5,000 complaints nationwide related to discrimination and other issues. That was actually a 23 per cent decrease compared to the year before. But

that's still a large number, of 5,000 Americans, at the very least experiencing a problem, potentially because they are Muslim. That number is far too high."

Fight against the watchlist

In response to these challenges, CAIR has embarked on a legal crusade against the FBI terror watchlist, aiming to safeguard the civil rights of Muslims in the country, according to Mitchell.

He affirmed their commitment to pursuing justice for those unfairly targeted, highlighting ongoing litigation, including a crucial case currently before the US Supreme Court.

Mitchell also cautioned against the government's attempts to dismiss lawsuits by removing individuals from the watchlist before legal proceedings are completed.

The government avoids responsibility for unlawfully taken decisions by doing that, he said.

Despite these obstacles and regardless of the outcome, CAIR remains steadfast in its pursuit of justice through continued advocacy and legal action, he said.

"We of course plan to continue fighting the watch list everywhere we can in courts of law," Mitchell said, signalling CAIR's unwavering commitment to upholding the rights in various courts and the dignity of Muslim Americans in the face of systemic discrimination.

Anadolu Agency



Thousands of trainee doctors resign in S Korea

Seoul, South Korea - Hitting patient care, thousands of trainee medics on Tuesday resigned from duty in South Korea to protest the government's move to increase the number of medical student seats.

However, President Yoon Suk Yeol called on the protesting doctors to 'not hold people's lives and health hostage'.

Some 6,415 trainee doctors at 100 hospitals have submitted their resignations while around 1,600 of them suspended their work, the Seoul-based Yonhap News reported.

South Korea has some 13,000 trainee doctors in South Korea while the government ordered 831 trainee doctors to return to work. "Trainee doctors who are key players in the medical field and medical school students who are key players in future medicine should not take collective action by taking the people's lives and health hostage," said the president.

Yoon said some 'surgeries for cancer patients have already been postponed' due to the

strike. The country's Vice Health Minister Park Min-soo Park said the resignations by doctors 'led to a disruption in medical services, such as the cancellation of surgeries'.

Protesting doctors claim that the government 'lacks transparency' and that the move to increase the number of medical students will 'compromise' the quality of medical education and services.

The government, however, said the increase of 2,000 seats is 'necessary' to address a shortage of doctors, especially in rural areas and crucial specialties.

Currently, South Korea's annual enrolment for medical seats is 3,058 seats.

Last Friday, the country's Health Ministry banned large-scale resignations and issued action against doctors' collective resignations.

Also, to manage the patient rush due to the fallout from resignations, government-run hospitals in Seoul decided to extend normal operating hours.

Anadolu Agency

WHO calls to accelerate tobacco and e-cigarette control measures

New Delhi, India - The World Health Organization on Tuesday called on countries in the South-east Asia Region to intensify efforts to control the use of tobacco and e-cigarettes, according to an official statement.

It noted that despite the steep decline over the years, tobacco consumption in the region continues to be the highest globally, and vaping is on the rise.

"The region still has the highest number of people using tobacco, which puts them at risk of life-threatening diseases such as cancer, respiratory and heart disease. Urgent measures are also needed to control e-cigarettes, which have not been proven to be effective for smoking cessation. We must do all we can to control tobacco and e-cigarette use to protect health and save lives," said Saima Wazed, Regional Director, WHO South-East Asia.

According to the statement, tobacco use in the WHO South-East Asia Region decreased from

68.9 per cent in 2000 to around 43.7 per cent in 2022, an estimated 411mn people in the region still consume tobacco, as per the latest trends released this year.

The region has 280mn smokeless tobacco users, nearly 77 per cent of the global smoke-

WHO noted that tobacco consumption in the region continues to be the highest globally, and vaping is on the rise

less tobacco users, and around 11mn adolescent tobacco users in the age group of 13-15 years, accounting for nearly 30 per cent of the global total.

The use of e-cigarettes, particularly among young people, is increasing in many countries, with

co-use of e-cigarettes and conventional cigarettes being common. Thailand, which has been tracking e-cigarette use, reported a steep rise in e-cigarette use among school-aged children of 13 to 15 years, from 3.3 per cent in 2015 to 17.6 per cent in 2022.

WHO is committed to support policies aimed at countering the tobacco and e-cigarette industries' interference for safeguarding the health of the over two billion people in the Region, the Regional Director said.

While DPR Korea, India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Timor-Leste have banned e-cigarettes, Maldives regulates e-cigarettes as tobacco products, according to an official statement. Tobacco use among men declined from 68.9 per cent in 2000 to 43.7 per cent in 2022, and among women from 33.5 per cent in 2000 to 9.4 per cent in 2022, the steepest decline among all WHO regions.

ANI

TALLEST MEETS SHORTEST



World's tallest living man Sultan Kosen, who is 251cm (8 ft 2.82) meets Jyoti Amge, the shortest woman in the world, with a height of 62.8 centimetres in Irvine, California, United States on Monday (Anadolu Agency)

Australia to spend over \$7bn to double size of its naval fleet

Canberra, Australia - Amid an armed race in Asia-Pacific, Australia on Tuesday announced its plan to double the size of its fleet of major warships and modernise its navy with further spending of over US\$7bn.

In a statement, the Defence Ministry said the country will get 26 major surface combatant ships, including three Hobart class air warfare destroyers with upgraded air defence and strike capabilities.

"Navy's future fleet will be integral to ensure the safety and security of our sea lines of communication and maritime trade, through operations in our imme-



diate region. This fleet will constitute the largest number of surface combatants since World War II," it said.

The Australian navy will also

get six Hunter class frigates, 11 new general purpose frigates, and six new Large Optionally Crewed Surface Vessels under the new plan. "Our strategic circum-

stances require a larger and more lethal surface combatant fleet, complemented by a conventionally armed, nuclear-powered submarine fleet," said the ministry.

Commenting on the new plan, Deputy Prime Minister and Defence Minister Richard Marles said his country's modern society and economy rely on access to the high sea trade routes for their imports and exports.

"The enhanced lethality surface combatant fleet will ensure the Navy is optimised for operations in our current and future environment, underpinned by the meticulous assessment conducted by the Independent Analysis Team," said Marles.

To implement the new plan, the government will spend US\$7.3bn over the next decade for accelerated delivery of the

navy's future surface combatant fleet and to expand Australia's shipbuilding industry.

The latest announcement came after Canberra announced a major restructuring of its military to make it more prepared for combat in the region in September last year.

Earlier, the Australian government also commissioned an 'independent review' of its intelligence agencies to check the spy agencies' ability to serve the country.

In July last year, Australia signed an over US\$664.5mn agreement with Germany to build Boxer Heavy Weapon Car-

riers for Berlin. On September 15, 2021, Australia, the US, and UK announced the formation of AUKUS, a trilateral security treaty for the Indo-Pacific region. It is primarily intended for China, which is becoming more assertive in the region.

In March last year, former Australian Prime Minister Paul Keating slammed Anthony Albanese's government for a tripartite deal with Washington and London and claimed that the approach behind the AUKUS deal was to have the US supply nuclear submarines for deep and joint operations against China.

Anadolu Agency

Kremlin rejects EU demand for investigation into Navalny’s death

Moscow, Russia - Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov rejected on Tuesday top EU diplomat Josep Borrell’s demand to hold an international investigation into the death of Russian opposition politician Alexey Navalny.

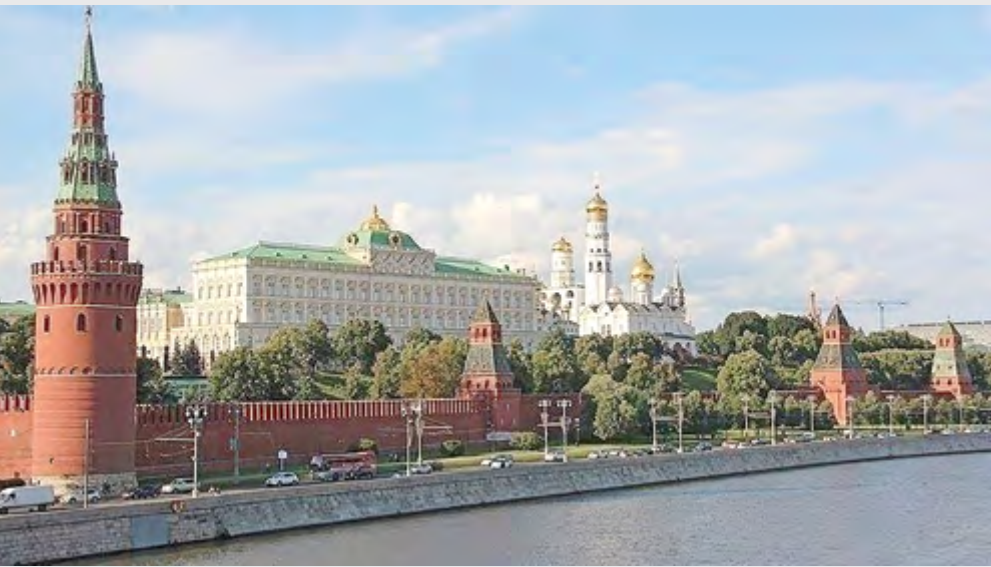
Speaking at a press briefing in Moscow, Peskov stressed that Russia generally considers unacceptable the language of demands, and ‘even more so from Mr Borrell’.

Following a meeting of the EU foreign ministers on Monday, Borrell said Russia ‘must allow an independent and transparent international investigation’ into the circumstances of Navalny’s ‘sudden death’.

About the address of Navalny’s widow Yulia Navalnaya published on social media, Peskov said her accusations were ‘unsubstantiated and groundless’.

“We leave this without comment. Of course, these are absolutely unfounded, boorish accusations. ... But considering that Yulia Navalnaya was widowed literally days ago, I leave it without comment,” he said.

The Russian penitentiary service announced on Friday that



the 47-year-old opposition figure died in a prison colony while serving a 19-year sentence for extremism.

It added in a statement that Navalny lost consciousness after a walk in the Arctic Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous District, where the colony is located.

Russian authorities conducted several inspections to determine the facts surrounding his death.

Navalny was arrested in January 2021 upon returning to Moscow after being treated for poisoning in a Berlin hospital.

Western countries and Navalny himself blamed Russia for the poisoning, a claim the Kremlin denies.

In August 2021, he was sentenced to 19 years in prison for extremism and other crimes. He was already serving an 11-year and five-month sentence for fraud.

Meanwhile, Peskov said he had no information about reports claiming former Russian pilot Maxim Kuzminov who hijacked last year a military Mi-8 helicopter and gave it to Ukraine was shot to death in Spain.

Anadolu Agency



Houthis warn to respond to European ‘idiocy’ in Red Sea

Sanaa, Yemen - The Yemeni Houthi group on Tuesday threatened to respond to any attempt to protect the Israeli ships in the Red Sea, following an EU announcement of a naval mission to protect vessels in the Red Sea.

“We say to the Europeans, don’t play with fire, you don’t need to back the US in protecting the occupying entity (in reference to protecting Israeli ships),” said Mohammed Ali Al-Houthi, a member of the Houthis Supreme Political Council, in a statement.

“Any idiocy you commit will affect your ships and navigation (in the Red Sea), you are warned,” Al-Houthi also said.

“Your presence increases the militarisation of the Red Sea, ... and will affect the chain of food supplies to the markets in your countries,” he added.

On Monday, the EU formally launched a naval mission, under the name Mission Aspidos, to protect commercial vessels in the Red Sea from attacks by the Houthis.

The Houthis have been targeting cargo ships in the Red Sea owned or operated by Israeli companies or transporting goods to and from Israel in solidarity with Gaza, which has been under an Israeli onslaught since October 7.

Anadolu Agency

Negotiations for Gaza cease-fire, hostage swap are ongoing: Qatar

The death toll from Israel’s offensive on the Gaza Strip has jumped to 29,195 since October 7

Gaza, Palestine - Qatar said on Tuesday that negotiations for a Gaza cease-fire and hostage swap between Hamas and Israel are ongoing.

“Qatar continues its role and efforts and communications are still ongoing between all parties,” Foreign Ministry spokesman Majed Al-Ansari told reporters.

He said the humanitarian conditions are taking a central stage in the ongoing talks for a hostage-prisoner swap deal between Hamas and Israel.

On Monday, Qatar accused Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of prolonging the war in the Gaza Strip.

Hamas is believed to be holding more than 130 Israeli hostages following its October 7 cross-border attack into Israel.

Meanwhile, the death toll from Israel’s offensive on the Gaza Strip has jumped to 29,195 since October 7, the Palestinian Health Ministry said on Tuesday.

The Gaza-based Health Ministry made the statement as the Israeli onslaught enters its 137th day.

Another 69,170 people have been injured so far.

In the past 24 hours, the Israeli army atrocities across the Gaza Strip left 103 people dead and 142 others injured.

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

Israel has pounded the Gaza Strip since a cross-border attack by Palestinian group Hamas in October, in which nearly 1,200 Israelis are believed to have been killed.



In the past 24 hours, the Israeli army atrocities across the Gaza Strip left 103 people dead and 142 others injured (Anadolu Agency)

About 85 per cent of Gazans have been displaced by the Israeli onslaught, while all of them are food insecure, according to the UN. Hundreds of thousands of people are living without shelter, and less than half of aid trucks are entering the territory than before the start of the conflict.

Qatar continues its role and efforts and communications are still ongoing between all parties

MAJED AL-ANSARI

Israel stands accused of genocide at the International Court of Justice. An interim ruling in January ordered Tel Aviv to stop genocidal acts and take measures to guarantee that humanitarian assistance is provided to

civilians in Gaza.

WHO leads two life-saving missions

The World Health Organization said on Tuesday that it led two life-saving missions to transfer 32 critical patients, including two children, from Nasser Medical

Complex in southern Gaza on February 18-19.

“The high-risk missions were conducted in close partnership with the Palestine Red Crescent Society (PRCS) and the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs,” WHO spokesperson Tarik Jasarevic said at a UN Press conference.

“They were carried out under very difficult conditions.”

He said four PRCS ambulances ensured the safe transportation of the patients, who underwent medical assessment and triage under the coordination of the hospital director.

“Patients were moved to the European Gaza Hospital in Khan Younis, Al-Aqsa hospital in Gaza’s middle area, and the International Medical Corps, UAE, and Indonesia field hospitals in Rafah,” said Jasarevic.

“Nasser Hospital has no electricity or running water, and medical waste and garbage are creating a breeding ground for

disease.”

‘Indescribable destruction’

At Nasser Hospital, WHO staff said the destruction around the hospital was ‘indescribable’.

The area was surrounded by burnt and destroyed buildings and heavy layers of debris, with no stretch of intact road.

“The dismantling and degradation of the Nasser Medical Complex is a massive blow to Gaza’s health system,” said WHO’s Jasarevic.

“Facilities in the south are already operating well beyond maximum capacity and can barely receive more patients.”

The hospital staff requested the transfer of patients after the facility became non-functional

following a military raid on February 14, after a week-long siege.

According to the WHO spokesperson, weak patients were transferred amid an active conflict near the aid convoy.

“Road conditions hindered the swift movement of ambulances, placing patients’ health at further risk,” said Jasarevic.

“Patients transferred during the missions included three suffering from paralysis - two of them with tracheostomy - and several others with external fixators for severe orthopaedic injuries.” Two of the paralyzed patients required continuous manual ventilation throughout the journey due to the lack of portable ventilators.

Anadolu Agency

Brazil plunges into diplomatic crisis with Israel after Lula recalls envoy

Bogota, Colombia - Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva recalled his country’s ambassador to Israel on Monday, hours after Israeli Foreign Minister Israel Katz declared Lula persona non grata in the country as tensions between the two countries continued to mount.

Foreign Minister Mauro Vieira called the Brazilian ambassador in Tel Aviv, Frederico Meyer, back to the country for consultations and he is leaving for Brazil

on Tuesday, said a statement from the country’s Foreign Ministry.

On Monday, Israel said Lula is not welcome in the country until he takes back comments he made comparing Israel’s war on Gaza to the Holocaust.

“We will not forget nor forgive,” said Katz, who chose a symbolic venue for the reprimand - the Holocaust Museum in Jerusalem, Yad Vashem.

“It is a serious antisemitic at-



Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva

tack. In my name and in the name of the citizens of Israel, convey this to President Lula, who is persona non grata in Israel until he backs down,” he added.

Katz’s statements came after the Brazilian head of state on Sunday compared the war on Gaza with Adolf Hitler’s campaign to exterminate the Jewish people during the 1930s and 1940s.

“What’s happening in the Gaza Strip with the Palestinian

people hasn’t happened at any other moment in history. Actually, it has happened: when Hitler decided to kill the Jews,” Lula told reporters in the Ethiopian capital of Addis Ababa, where he was attending an African Union summit.

“What’s happening in the Gaza Strip isn’t a war, it’s a genocide. It is not a war of soldiers against soldiers. It is a war between a very prepared army and women and children,” he added.

Brazil’s Foreign Ministry also said in a statement that it would summon Israel’s ambassador to Brazil, Daniel Zonshine, for a meeting in Rio de Janeiro. Lula has condemned the October 7 attack by the Palestinian group Hamas on Israel as a ‘terrorist’ act but has also criticised Israel’s attacks on Gaza, which have killed nearly 29,000 people, according to Palestinian authorities.

Anadolu Agency

INDIA

SC declares AAP's Kuldeep Kumar winner of Chandigarh Mayor poll, quashes result

New Delhi - In a major development, the Supreme Court on Tuesday declared Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) Councillor Kuldeep Kumar as the winner of the Chandigarh Mayoral polls.

A bench of Chief Justice of India D Y Chandrachud and Justices J B Pardiwala and Manoj Misra quashed the decision by returning officer Anil Masih declaring BJP candidate Manoj Kumar Sonkar as Chandigarh Mayor on January 30.

The order of the apex court came as it found that the returning officer had deliberately defaced eight ballots that were cast in favour of Kuldeep Kumar so as to make them invalid.

The apex court on Tuesday physically examined the ballot papers and found that they are not defaced. It directed that Kuldeep Kumar be declared as mayor with 20 votes (12 votes which he received and eight which were for him). "We direct that the election result by the returning officer is quashed. The petitioner is declared to be the winner of the Chandigarh mayoral polls," the bench said.

ANI

Farmers' Delhi march to resume today

Farmers had rejected Centre's proposal to procure five crops on MSP for five years

New Delhi - Ahead of the farmers' 'Delhi Chalo' march scheduled on February 21, farmers leader Sarwan Singh Pandher said the Centre should allow them to hold their march on Wednesday.

"The intention of the government is very clear that they will not let us enter Delhi at any cost... If you don't want to find a solution through discussion with farmers then we should be allowed to march towards Delhi," he said.

"When we moved towards Delhi, shelling happened. Bullets were also used on the tyres of the tractors. Haryana DGP has said that police are not using tear gas on farmers. We demand punishment for those using it then. Wrong statements are also being given... The situation in Haryana is like that of Kashmir. We will march towards Delhi on February 21.

"The government has given us a proposal so that we backtrack from our original demands. The government will be responsible for whatever happens now," said Sarwan Singh.

Though the Centre made a proposal to purchase crops at minimum support price (MSP), farmers rejected it on Monday evening, saying that the proposal had nothing for them.

Addressing a press conference, another leader Jagjit Singh Dallewal said the forums re-



Farmers raise slogans during their ongoing 'Delhi Chalo' protest, in Patiala on Tuesday (ANI)

jected the proposal.

"After an analysis at the forums, it was found that there is nothing in the government's proposal. Our government imports palm oil worth Rs 1.75 crore from outside, which also causes health issues for general public. If this money is given to the farmers of the country to

grow oil seed crops and MSP is announced, then that money can be used here. This proposal is not in favour of farmers. We reject it," he said.

"If the government is not giving legal guarantee of MSP, it means that the farmers of the country will continue to be looted. This is not acceptable,"

he added.

After the fourth round of talks, Sarwan Singh, who is also the general secretary of Punjab Kisan Mazdoor Sangharsh Committee asserted that the farmers will continue to move forward with the 'Delhi Chalo' march on February 21 adding that the discussion will also be

held on the proposal put forth by the government on MSP.

Now, the farmers will continue their 'Dilli Chalo' march on February 21. Earlier on Monday, Jagjit Singh Dallewal said that they had had a detailed discussion on farmers' demands during the fourth round of talks with the government.

"The government has given us a proposal, which guarantees MSP on pulses, maize and cotton, which will be supervised and managed by two government agencies," he said after the meeting between protesting farmer unions and Union Ministers in Chandigarh.

ANI

President Murmu interacts with Andaman tribal people

Port Blair, Andaman and Nicobar Islands - President Droupadi Murmu on Tuesday interacted with members of local tribal communities and visited stalls set up by them at Campbell Bay in Nicobar.

The President is on a five-day visit to the archipelago from Monday, and also visited 'Swantantraya Jyot', an eternal flame kept there as a tribute to thousands of freedom fighters who suffered incarceration.

Earlier in the day, the president visited Indira Point, the southernmost tip of the country, where she met the tri-service troops and interacted with them.

Indira Point, the southernmost point of India's territory, is located in the Nicobar district. It is named after former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. It was formerly known as Pygmalion Point and Parsons Point.

The president, earlier in the day, also attended a civic re-



President Droupadi Murmu interacts with members of local tribal communities at Campbell Bay in Nicobar on Tuesday (ANI)

ception hosted in her honour by the Andaman and Nicobar administrations at the Dr B R Ambedkar Institute of Technology.

Speaking on the occasion, the president said that the Andaman and Nicobar Islands are very important from a strategic point of view. These Islands have special geographical importance in connecting India with the countries of South and South-East Asia. There-

fore, the Andaman and Nicobar Islands are a core component of India's Act East Policy.

The president said that the natural beauty of Andaman and Nicobar Islands attracts people from across the world. She noted that several steps are being taken to further encourage tourism in the union territory. "A new terminal for Veer Savarkar Airport has also been built."

ANI

Sultanpur court grants bail to Rahul Gandhi in 2018 defamation case

Sultanpur, Uttar Pradesh - Congress leader Rahul Gandhi was granted bail on Tuesday in a defamation case dating back to August 2018.

The District Civil Court in Sultanpur had issued a summons to him 36 hours earlier to appear before it on a defamation case filed by a BJP leader in August 2018.

"This morning Rahul Gandhi will be at the District Civil Court in Sultanpur that had issued a summons to him 36 hours earlier to appear before it on a defamation case filed by a BJP leader in August 2018. Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra will not be derailed. Rahul Gandhi will not be silenced. The Indian National Congress will not be intimidated," he said in a post on 'X'.

The Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra entered its 38th day on Tuesday. The yatra will start from Fursantganj in Amethi district and will move towards Raebareli and Lucknow today.

"Today is the 38th day. We



Congress leader Rahul Gandhi addresses the supporters while leading the party's Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra, in Pratapgarh on Monday (ANI)

have paused the yatra this morning. At 2pm, we will start again from Fursatganj. There will be a public rally in Raebareli. After that, we will move towards

Lucknow," he told ANI.

The case was filed alleging that the Congress leader had used derogatory remarks against Union Home Minister

The case was filed alleging that the Congress leader made derogatory remarks against Union Home Minister Amit Shah in 2018

Amit Shah in a Bengaluru conference. The complaint was filed by the then BJP District Vice President, Vijay Mishra.

Santosh Kumar Pandey, lawyer appeared for Vijay Mishra said that Rahul Gandhi can be given a maximum punishment of two years if sufficient evidence found against him.

The 'Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra', succeeded by the party's 'Bharat Jodo Yatra', aims to cover 6,700km through 15 states, with Lok Sabha polls around the corner.

ANI

No consensus between PML-N and PPP on government formation

Islamabad, Pakistan - No agreement has been reached in the latest round of talks between the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) and the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) regarding the formation of a new government, hinting at the potential prolongation of negotiations until the constitutional deadline of February 29 for the first National Assembly session, reported Dawn.

As talks for the incoming coalition government continue, primarily due to the PPP's apparent reluctance, insiders revealed to Dawn that the party is facing pressure from various quarters, including within its ranks, to join

the government. Another round of discussions is scheduled for Tuesday.

Following the February 8 polls, the PTI-backed independent candidates emerged as the largest bloc in the National Assembly with 93 seats, followed by the PML-N with 75 seats, while the PPP secured 54 seats. The PTI has stated its refusal to form alliances with both the PML-N and the PPP.

With a total of 336 seats in consideration (including reserved seats), a minimum of 169 seats is required to establish the new government and coalition-building efforts are underway, as



per Dawn.

"Still eight to nine days are left in convening the session of the National Assembly," PPP leader Qamar Zaman Kaira said while talking on a private TV programme. "The election of the prime minister will take place on March 2 or 3 so the two sides have ample time to reach a logical conclusion," he added.

Kaira said it was never a part of the agenda of the meeting that PPP would join the government in the Centre. "So far the PPP is sticking to its stance that it will not ask the PML-N for ministries," he added. "We sat only to streamline our mutual issues

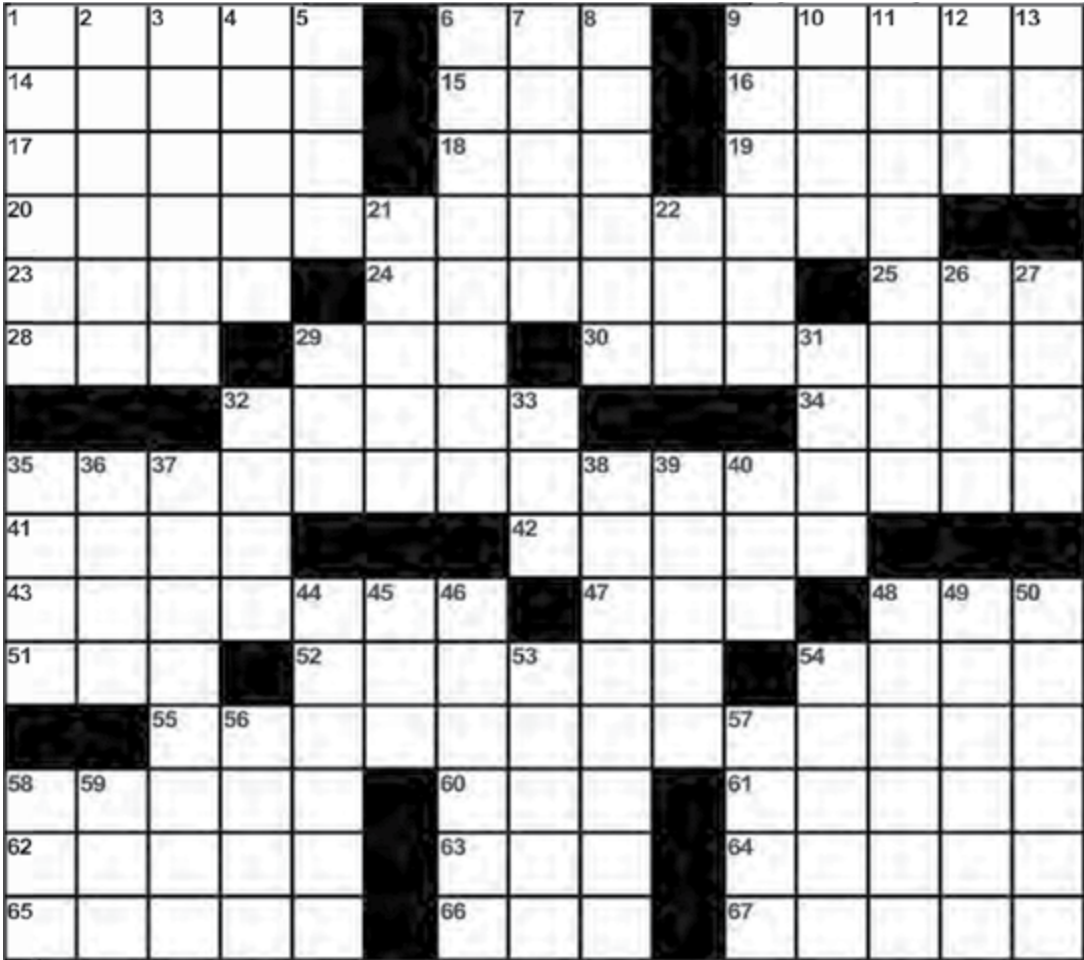
so that no deadlock will take place once the future government starts its function," the PPP leader said.

Sources told Dawn that some PPP leaders were supporting the idea of sharing the upcoming government with the PML-N and getting some federal ministries in return.

However, PPP Chairman Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari is said to be opposed to the idea of power-sharing with the PML-N, and it is believed that he only agreed to support the PML-N to complete its numbers for the formation of the government.

ANI

DAILY CROSSWORD



ACROSS

- 1) Cutting comments
- 6) Impressive degree, briefly
- 9) Monthly bill, for many
- 14) "Nixon In China," for one
- 15) Bit of deception
- 16) Barbecuer's cover-up
- 17) Type of battery
- 18) Priestly garb
- 19) Butcher's stock in trade
- 20) Tough chances for outfielders
- 23) "If all _ fails ..."
- 24) Expulsion from office
- 25) Rocks in a bar
- 28) Comment from Homer Simpson
- 29) "When We Were Kings" hero
- 30) Finish a Big Gulp
- 32) Absurd
- 34) Assistant
- 35) Like an equivocal sword?
- 41) Shrek, e.g.
- 42) "Summer of '69" singer Adams
- 43) Forcefully urgent

- 47) Performed
- 48) "Dear" man
- 51) Prepare to fire
- 52) A B vitamin
- 54) _ fide
- 55) Butcher's tool
- 58) Sedate
- 60) Actress Lupino
- 61) Hawaiian island
- 62) Multitude or throng
- 63) Elevator unit
- 64) Words of agreement on Sundays
- 65) Toadies' chorus
- 66) Cunning
- 67) Bed on board

DOWN

- 1) Ordered around
- 2) Early NASA program
- 3) Hotdog topper, sometimes
- 4) Knee steadier
- 5) Dress in India
- 6) Tormenting incessantly
- 7) Some things to climb
- 8) Accounting minuses
- 9) Smartphone feature
- 10) Impressionist
- 11) South American capital city

- 12) He had a salty wife
- 13) Annapolis grad's rank, briefly
- 21) Baseball legend Ryan
- 22) Still in its original packaging
- 26) "Buffalo" Bill
- 27) Some farm females
- 29) Singer DiFranco
- 31) Bowling green?
- 32) Anything on a list
- 33) Emulate a tide
- 35)_Cola
- 36) Certain Jamaican fruit
- 37) Some British transports
- 38) Everyday
- 39) Pulling even with
- 40) Possessed
- 44) Places of residence
- 45) Barely beat
- 46) Talking points
- 48) Oklahoma athlete
- 49) Chant
- 50) Debonair
- 53) Kind of wave
- 54) Hold responsible
- 56) Take cover
- 57) Divulge a secret
- 58) Not outgoing
- 59) Little piggy

NOTE PAD



YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE



ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

People who like to share their private life issues with the rest of the world are extremely tedious to you, especially right now. You like to help others as much as the next person, but there are more important things that you'd rather pay attention to than who's going through heartbreak or who's cheating on whom. So ignore the gossip as much as you can today. Airing dirty laundry might titillate some folks, but it is only going to annoy you today.



LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

Tension is running high right now, and you're going to have to put extra effort into not flying off the handle when someone says something that sounds rude to you. Give people the benefit of the doubt, especially the newer people in your world. They might not know the rules, and it's really not up to you to teach them. This person will learn the lessons they need to learn eventually, and it's best for you to walk away from any drama that they create. You don't need it.



SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

Have you been losing things lately, like your confidence and your self-esteem? Have no fear. These things are about to be restored when you fix a problem and everyone benefits. As soon as you see something askew, you should speak up and voice your concerns to the group. It will be very obvious very quickly that you are right on the money. You will feel confident once again, and your popularity will increase to boot. Having doubts about yourself is natural, but it's only temporary.



TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

Sometimes a mystery is something you can live with, but today, if you have trouble understanding why things are happening the way they are, you need to try to get to the bottom of it as quickly as you can or else you'll get so frustrated that you won't be much fun to be around. It's a good thing that you will have the clarity you need to start seeing some patterns emerge, and this discovery will be the key to figuring everything out.



VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

You have to remember that just because you're moving at a rapid pace doesn't necessarily mean that you are getting a lot done. You've got to learn the difference between being busy and being productive. Your legs may be moving, but aren't you just jogging in place? Slow down today. Regain your bearings. You need to examine the situation and plot your course using strategy and cold logic. Running willy-nilly all around won't help you make any progress.



CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

Doors are opening and opportunities are arising, and all you need to do is be more alert to make the most of them. Take advantage of any green lights you're given today. Creative thinking has always been your specialty, and today you can use it to make things happen. It is a great day to spend time in your community, fixing things that need to be fixed. Getting involved has never felt so good, and it has never been more valuable for you personal happiness.



GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

You were confident everyone would love your idea for a group outing, so how come no one seems as excited as you are? If your social invitation isn't being greeted with all the enthusiasm you'd hoped for, just wait it out. Your friends have an awful lot going on in their lives right now. Their time isn't quite their own, and they just aren't ready to commit. You can't take this personally. Instead, ask them for an idea of a better date that would fit into their lives.



LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

Are you in the midst of a tug-of-war for power today? If so, it might be wisest for you to let go of your end of the virtual rope and walk way. Being so embroiled in this battle is forcing you to lose sight of other, more important aspects of your life. You can't get distracted by one thing at the expense of everything else. You can achieve balance, so figure out today what really needs your attention and what doesn't. Put people higher on your priority list.



AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

Some friends or coworkers could be in a bickering mood today, but keeping the peace is not your job, so do not take it on. If you decide to be compassionate and try to make everyone stop fighting, they might turn on you. Resist your urge to step in and make these people come to an agreement. This is something you are not a part of, so stay out of it. Let them work their problems out on their own. For all you know, this could be the way they enjoy communicating with each other!



CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

There's an appropriate time for excessive, over-the-top behavior, but today is definitely not it! Try on a more demure demeanor and see how it fits. It might be a lot more comfortable than you think. You need to fade into the background, get back in tune with others, and find out what they want to do today. Being more passive with your coworkers shouldn't make you nervous. It's not a sign of weakness; it's a sign that you know how to be a good team player.



SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

A work-related event could offer you an opportunity to expand your connections, so be ready to mingle. You've got to build a network before you can work that network! Whether you're looking to add more names to your career search or just a few more digits to your contact list, remember to follow up. Let people know you remember them and they're important to you. It's all about showing them the persona you want to project. It's okay to be a little shameless every now and then.



PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

Try to hold back on sharing all of your emotions today. You don't have to share every little thought you have with every person you meet in order to make connections with people. Let your feelings sit inside your heart for a while. Mull them over. This process of thinking before you speak is something you think you already do, but to what extent? Your tendency to blurt things out has caused you some embarrassment, and that needs to be changed, don't you think?



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

1. The cochlea is part of which part of the body?

- A. Ear
- B. Eye
- C. Nose
- D. Throat

2. Which cricket team was accused of being the subject of rigging the result of an international cricket game against England at Lords in August 2010?

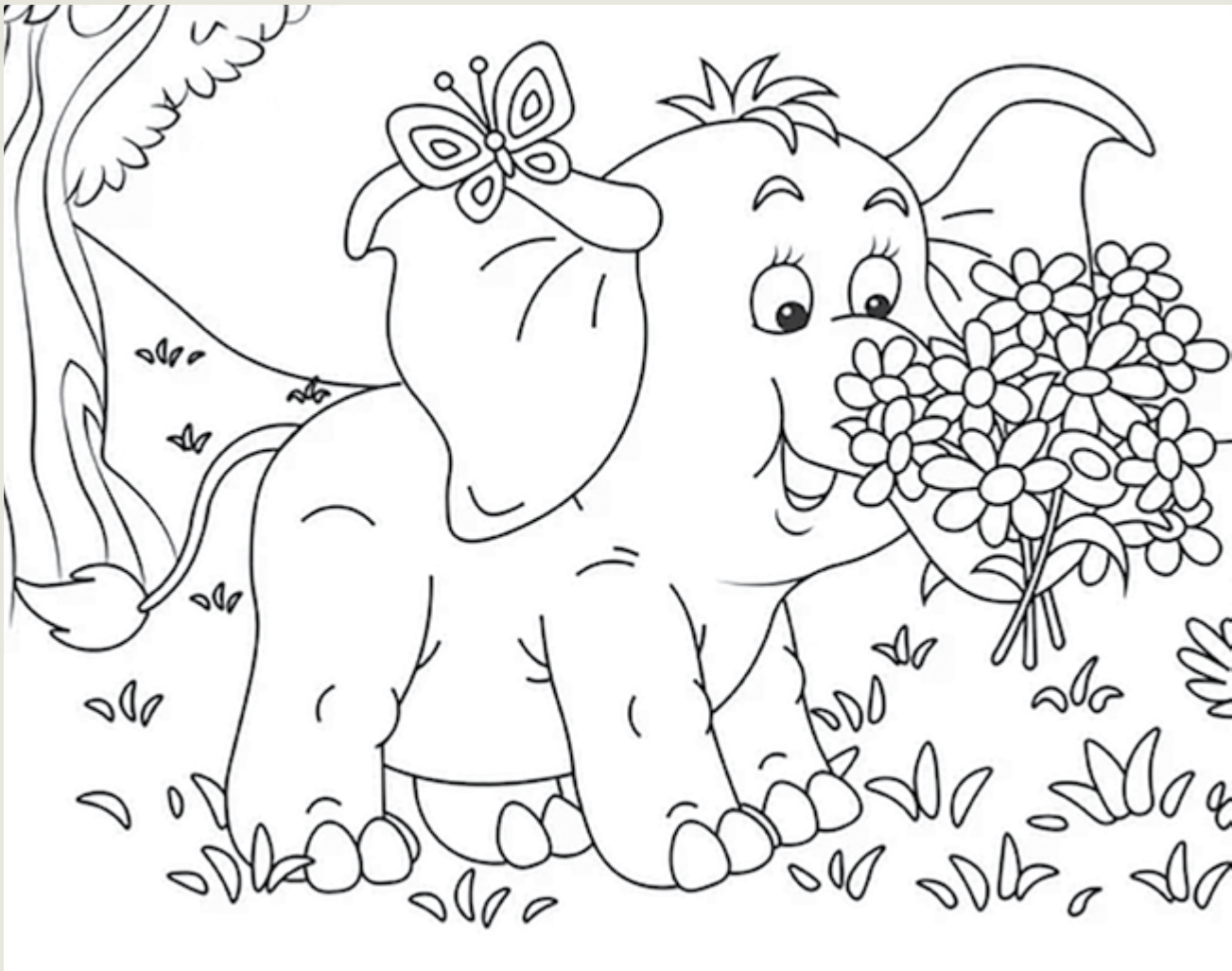
- A. Sri Lanka
- B. Bangladesh
- C. India
- D. Pakistan

3. Where is the Afar Triple Junction?

- A. Central southern Asia
- B. Birmingham, UK
- C. On the African coast of the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden
- D. The North Island of New Zealand

Answers: 1.A 2.D 3.C

KIDS COLOURING



BOGGLER

V	K	A	B
S	O	R	S
V	E	R	O
Y	I	T	O

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

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

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

'LET JAISWAL PLAY'

India's new star has shown incredible and effortless range in his batting

Rajkot, India - A belief pervades many cultures that showering someone with praise summons the evil eye.

Rohit Sharma seemed to be in the grip of just such a belief on Sunday evening, when he was asked about Yashasvi Jaiswal's run-scoring feats in this series against England. He was asked first at the presentation ceremony in Rajkot.

"I've spoken a lot about him," he said. "I'm sure people outside the changing room have also been talking about him. I want to be calm about him, not talk a lot about him."

He was asked again at his post-match press conference.

"I won't say anything on Jaiswal. Everyone is talking about him. Let him play. He is playing well, it's good for us and he is in good form. I am not going to say much more than that. Itna bas hai abhi ke liye [this is enough for now]."

At these moments Rohit seemed not so much the captain of a cricket team as the anxious parent of a gifted child fretting about the inadvertent curse of excessive praise. You could imagine him nailing a string of chillies and lime to India's dressing-room



Yashasvi Jaiswal

doorframe, and getting a member of the coaching staff to circle Jaiswal's head three times clockwise and three times anticlockwise with a fistful of rock salt.

You could empathise with Rohit, because Jaiswal is that kind of player. So good, so early in his career, that it seems wrong to talk about him. Let the boy be. Let him get on with it. Just watch and enjoy, no?

This feeling - no doubt shared by many others apart from Rohit - is perhaps also a product of the names Jaiswal's recent achievements have twinned him with, Don Bradman and Vinod Kambl:

a career so productive that no one will ever be expected to

You could empathise with Rohit, because Jaiswal is that kind of player. So good, so early in his career, that it seems wrong to talk about him. Let the boy be. Let him get on with it. Just watch and enjoy, no?

match it, and a sad and curiously truncated career of whys and what-ifs. Kambl, of course, is a Mumbai left-hander who came from humble beginnings and brought to Test cricket both a precocious appetite for runs and a love for hitting sixes.

Bradman and Kambl. A bright start, then, is just a start.

But what a start Jaiswal has had. He has played seven Tests now, and scored 861 runs at an average of 71.75. He's already made three hundreds, each of them big, each bigger than the previous one - 171, 209, 214* -

and each different to the other too.

The debut effort in Dominica was remarkable for how unremarkable it appeared on the surface. On a slow Dominica pitch where India's batters struggled for timing though not for survival against a limited West Indies attack, he batted time, with only as much fluency as the conditions would allow, and checked off one milestone after another, each appearing more inevitable than the last one. It was an innings you might have expected from Virat Kohli - who, to put the conditions in perspective, took 80 balls to hit his first boundary - but perhaps not from a 21-year-old debutant.

Then, over the last two weeks, he's made two double-hundreds: one that held together a first innings that could have otherwise fallen apart - he made just under 53% of India's total of 396 - and one that set the tone for a jubilant third-innings surge.

Perhaps nothing illustrates how different these two double-hundreds were than the methods he adopted against England's fast bowlers in both innings. In Visakhapatnam, he faced 67 balls from James Anderson and scored 17 runs. In Rajkot, he faced 39 balls from Anderson and Mark Wood and scored 61. In strike-rate terms, he went from 25.37 in one innings to 156.41 in the other.

The shots Jaiswal unleashed on the fourth day in Rajkot were always present in his kitbag: the falling scoop, the bent-knee slap over the massed off-side field, the club down the ground off the good-length ball.

ESPNcricinfo



Jonny Bairstow

England coach McCullum backs struggling Bairstow

Rajkot, India - England's Jonny Bairstow has come in for criticism after scoring just 102 runs in three matches in India but coach Brendon McCullum said it was important to show faith in the batter and that he has no plans to drop him for the fourth test in Ranchi.

Bairstow's highest score in the series so far was 37, posted in the opener in Hyderabad. He scored four runs in England's

434-run thrashing in the third test in Rajkot and was trapped lbw for a duck in his first innings, making him the player with the most ducks against India in test cricket with eight.

The 34-year-old's struggles with the bat prompted former England captain Alastair Cook to say he should be dropped from the side but McCullum is keen on helping him rediscover his form.

Asked if Bairstow would make

his 99th test appearance in Ranchi this week, McCullum told reporters: "I haven't even seen the wicket. But I'd anticipate Jonny would be playing, yes."

McCullum acknowledged that Bairstow had underperformed during the series but said he deserved some time to get back on track. "I'm not blind but he's done so well for us and he's had such an impactful career," McCullum said.

Fritz defends Delray Beach Open title

Florida, US - Taylor Fritz won an inclement weather-delayed final on Monday at the Delray Beach Open, defeating fellow American Tommy Paul to successfully defend his title in Florida.

No. 1 seed Fritz beat No. 3 Paul 6-2, 6-3 to become the second player in tournament history to go back-to-back, joining Jason Stoltenberg (1996-97). Fritz has won six consecutive finals matches dating back to the start of the 2022 season.

Fritz converted three of five break-point opportunities and saved all seven break points he faced. He lost just one set over the course of eight matches during his title runs in 2023 and 2024.

Paul had momentum after winning the Dallas Open the previous week.

Zhang wins in Doha

China's Zhizhen Zhang made quick work of No. 7 seed Lorenzo Musetti of Italy, winning 6-2, 6-0 in 61 minutes to advance out of the Round of 32 in Doha.

Zhang, ranked No. 48 in the world, recorded seven aces and won 76.7 percent of first-serve points (23 of 30), to 41.4 percent (12 of 29) for Musetti, ranked



Taylor Fritz

Australia's Alexei Popyrin outlasted Jordan's Abdullah Shelbayh 3-6, 6-3, 6-4; Hungary's Marton Fucsovics beat Spain's Roberto Bautista Agut 6-1, 6-3; Russia's Pavel Kotov beat Italy's Lorenzo Sonego 6-2, 7-5

26th. Zhang converted six of nine break-point opportunities, saved three of four break points and had more winners, 19-10.

In other matches featuring unseeded players, Australia's Alexei Popyrin outlasted Jordan's Abdullah Shelbayh 3-6, 6-3, 6-4; Hungary's Marton Fucsovics cruised past Spain's Roberto Bautista Agut 6-1, 6-3; Russia's Pavel Kotov downed Italy's Lorenzo Sonego 6-2, 7-5; and Hungary's Fabian Marozsan edged qualifier Vit Kopriwa of Czech Republic 7-5, 7-6 (6).

Munar cruises

Spain's Jaume Munar converted five of nine break points to cruise to a 6-3, 6-1 upset of No. 8 seed Sebastian Ofner of Austria in first-round action in Rio de Janeiro.

Meanwhile, No. 2 seed Cameron Norrie of Great Britain, fourth-seeded Argentine Francisco Cerundolo and Serbian sixth seed Laslo Djere were able to fend off lesser opponents. Norrie downed Bolivia's Hugo Dellien 6-3, 6-2, Cerundolo ousted countryman Francisco Comesana 6-1, 1-6, 6-2 and Djere beat Spaniard Bernabe Zapata Miralles 6-3, 6-1.

Vekic stuns Sabalenka; Rybakina advances as Azarenka retires

Dubai, UAE - Donna Vekic improved her strong record against Aryna Sabalenka in the second round of the Dubai Duty Free Tennis Championships, coming from a set and a break down to defeat the No.2 seed 6-7(5), 6-3, 6-0 in 2 hours and 22 minutes.

No.3 seed Elena Rybakina avoided the upset, however. A champion two weeks ago in Abu Dhabi and the runner-up in

Doha last week, Rybakina dropped the first set to Victoria Azarenka. But the two-time Dubai champion was in increasingly visible discomfort as the match progressed, and Rybakina advanced 4-6, 6-2 retired after Azarenka was forced to pull the plug.

Vekic's win is her sixth in eight encounters with Sabalenka dating back to 2016, including victories at the Tokyo Olympic

Games in 2021 and the 2022 San Diego quarterfinals.

It was the eighth Top 5 win of the Croat's career, and first since she upset Elena Rybakina in the 2023 Berlin second round; her only previous defeat of a player ranked No.2 or higher was over Petra Kvitova in the 2019 St. Petersburg quarterfinals.

Sabalenka was making her first appearance since success-

fully defending her Australian Open crown last month, and after coming through a tight first set held a point for a double-break lead in the second set.

However, the rest of the match saw her outhit by an increasingly dominant Vekic, who landed 14 aces and rattled through 12 of the last 13 games of the match.

Vekic will next face Sorana Cirstea, who defeated No.13

seed Veronika Kudermetova 6-1, 6-4. Vekic, who has reached two Grand Slam quarterfinals in her career to date, will be bidding to reach the last eight of a WTA 1000 tournament for the first time.

Also in the bottom half of the draw, Wimbledon champion and No.7 seed Marketa Vondrousova came through 6-1, 5-7, 6-2 over Peyton Stearns -- her third win over the American in



Donna Vekic

REALITY CHECK



Pep Guardiola (R) with Calvin Phillips

Guardiola says sorry to Phillips for comments about weight

Manchester, England - Manchester City manager Pep Guardiola has apologised to Calvin Phillips for saying the midfielder was overweight when he returned from the 2022 World Cup.

Guardiola had told reporters that Phillips was not in the right condition to go through training sessions after returning from Qatar, where he was used for only 40 minutes in England's campaign. Phillips endured a wretched time at City making only six starts in 18 months, and the 28-year-old joined West Ham United on loan last month.

After making the switch to West Ham, the midfielder said his confidence had taken a "big knock" by Guardiola's comments.

"Yeah, I'm sorry," Guardiola told reporters on Monday. "I apologise to him. I spoke to him before (making the comment). I never, ever don't speak to the team before I say something here, or the player in that case."



Athletic Bilbao's Inaki Williams celebrates after scoring against Girona on Monday

Berenguer and Williams on target as Bilbao beat title challengers Girona

Bilbao, Spain - Alex Berenguer scored twice as Athletic Bilbao brought high-flying Girona back down to earth with a 3-2 victory on Monday, a result that provided a reality check to the Catalans' lofty LaLiga title ambitions.

Girona, the season's early pacesetters, were unbeaten in 15 successive league games until their 4-0 thrashing by Real Madrid nine days ago. However, having won only one of their last five games in all competitions, they are now in danger of being overtaken by the likes of Barcelona and Atletico Madrid.

After suffering their second consecutive league loss, Girona remain second in the standings with 56 points, but only two points ahead third-placed Barca and five ahead of Atletico. They trail leaders Real Madrid by six points. Fifth-placed Athletic moved up to 49 points, two points adrift of Atletico.

Athletic dominated proceedings from the start and outplayed a rather subdued Girona.

Berenguer intercepted a pass from rival Aleix Garcia to score and give Athletic the lead in the second minute and Girona were lucky to go to the break only one goal down as the wasteful locals misfired several chances, including an absolute sitter from close-range by Inaki Williams in the seventh minute.

Athletic left the door open for Girona, and they hit back with a Viktor Tsyhankov tap in from a Ivan Martin cross that made it 1-1 in the 49th minute.

However, Berenguer put the locals back in front with another strike in the 56th minute and Williams extended their lead in similar fashion four minutes later.

Girona remain second in the standings with 56 points, but only two points ahead third-placed Barca

Williams almost scored a fourth after another blunder by the visitors five minutes later but keeper Paulo Gazzaniga managed to make a goalline save with the tip of his boot.

Eric Garcia put Girona back in the game, netting a close-range effort from a Aleix Garcia free kick but the hosts held on to secure their seventh consecutive win at home, a result that put them in the race for a top four finish and a place in next season's Champions League.

"It's not easy to beat Girona. It's something to be proud of," Williams told DAZN.

Everton move out of relegation zone after 1-1 draw with Crystal Palace

Liverpool, England - An Amadou Onana goal sealed Everton a 1-1 draw with Crystal Palace and lifted the Merseyside club out of the Premier League relegation zone on Monday, with the match watched from the stands by the London side's new manager Oliver Glasner.

Jordan Ayew had given Palace a second half lead just hours after manager Roy Hodgson stood down and their new boss Glasner was confirmed.

But Onana rose highest at a corner to head in an equaliser for Everton in a game low on quality, but which moves Sean Dyche's side out of the bottom three and above Luton Town into 17th place.

"We knew it was going to be difficult up here, but we fought hard to get what we could," Palace defender Joachim Andersen told Sky Sports.

Everton have 20 points from 25 games, the same as Luton having played a game more, while Palace are in 15th place, five points clear of the drop zone.

"In the last 20 minutes we



Everton's Amadou Onana scores against Crystal Palace on Monday

were maybe defending too deep. We can play better, but we did everything we could tonight, just a bit frustrating to lose a goal in the final 10 minutes.

"We just found out today about the new manager, we will have to see what he can bring to the table. It is really sad for Roy,

we wish him well."

Palace assistant manager Paddy McCarthy took charge in the dugout with Glasner in the stands, and the visitors put in an impressive shift with a press that made it uncomfortable for Everton all evening.

The home side did not have

the quality to create much in the way of clear-cut chances, bar from set-pieces, where they have been strong all season and from which they scored their goal.

It will be a point gained for the visitors but two dropped for Everton, who are now winless in their last eight Premier League

games.

"Fair play to Palace, they had a sharpness and an edge about them with their new manager watching. They scored a goal out of nothing but I thought we reacted well to that," Dyche said.

"We did a lot of good things in the second half and created chances, especially from set-pieces and got our goal." Palace have not scored from a corner all season but came close when Jean-Philippe Mateta's header was cleared off the line by Ashley Young.

They led on 66 minutes as Everton failed to deal with a long ball and Ayew fired a shot into the far corner of the net from the edge of the box.

Everton poured forward after that and while Palace held them at bay reasonably comfortably in open play, they always looked a danger from corners. When goalkeeper Sam Johnstone failed to reach McNeil's delivery, Onana headed in his third goal of the season in all competitions, and Everton's 10th from a set-piece this campaign.



Kylian Mbappe

PSG's Mbappe agrees to join Real Madrid in summer

Paris, France - Paris St-Germain striker Kylian Mbappe has agreed to join Real Madrid this summer.

The France captain, 25, has told PSG he intends to leave the club with his contract expiring in June. Mbappe has not signed a contract with Real yet, but the deal could be announced once it is no longer possible for the clubs to meet in this season's Champions League.

The World Cup winner is PSG's record goalscorer with 244 goals. Mbappe wanted his future sorted before March, so on 13 February, before training, he met PSG president Nasser al Khelaifi and told him he was leaving and joining Real.

After reports emerged last Thursday that he would leave, Mbappe was left out of the starting line-up for Saturday's match against Nantes, but came off the bench to score a penalty as PSG went 14 points clear at the top of Ligue 1. He is set to sign a five-year deal with Real, earning 15m euros (£12.8m) a season, plus a 150m euro (£128m) signing-on

bonus to be paid over five years, and he will keep a percentage of his image rights.

Real manager Carlo Ancelotti has already thought how he will use Mbappe in his team, with England midfielder Jude Bellingham playing a deeper role, Brazil-

Mbappe is set to sign a five-year deal with Real, earning 15m euros (£12.8m) a season, plus a 150m euro (£128m) signing-on bonus

ian Vinicius Jr playing on the left and Mbappe playing left of centre.

If Croatia midfielder Luka Modric leaves this summer, then Mbappe would inherit the number 10 shirt he wears for France.

PSG are 2-0 up against Real Sociedad after the first leg of their Champions League last-16 tie, while Real lead RB Leipzig 1-0.

Napoli sack Mazzarri, appoint Calzona as caretaker manager

Naples, Italy - Napoli have appointed Francesco Calzona as caretaker manager until the end of the season following the sacking of Walter Mazzarri, the Serie A club said on Monday.

Mazzarri became the second managerial casualty at the club this season following Rudi Garcia's sacking in November.

Napoli's Serie A title defence has fallen apart since Luciano Spalletti left the club after last season's Scudetto win, with the side languishing in ninth place in



Francesco Calzona

the standings.

"I thank Walter Mazzarri, a friend of the De Laurentiis family and Napoli, for supporting the team in a difficult moment," Napoli president Aurelio De Laurentiis said on his X account.

"He will remain in the hearts of the Neapolitans and our family. Welcome back to Francesco Calzona, who has already worked with us under both Sarri and Spalletti."

Calzona has previously served as assistant manager at Napoli

under Maurizio Sarri and Spalletti, and left the club in 2022 to take over as manager of Slovakia and helped them to qualify for Euro 2024.

The Slovak Football Association (SFZ) has given permission for Calzona's temporary return to Napoli.

Since Mazzarri took over from Garcia last November, things have gone from bad to worse in his second spell at the club, having previously managed there between 2009-2013.

‘We want to compete in every competition’

London, England - Arsenal captain Martin Odegaard has challenged his team-mates to compete for both the Champions League and Premier League during the run-in.

The Gunners are in a fight for the title and Saturday's 5-0 victory over Burnley made it five wins on the spin.

Arsenal have scored 21 goals during that run and they have looked revitalised since the mid-season winter break. Mikel Arteta's side return to Champions League action on Wednesday when they head to Porto for the first leg of their last-16 tie.

And asked if Arsenal have the squad to compete on two fronts, Odegaard said: "That's what we want to do, we want to compete in every competition we play in."

"Of course Champions League is a massive one, so we are excited for it."

"We just want to focus on ourselves each game, keep improving every game and we will see how it goes."

"We are in a good moment now. We have to use that mo-



Martin Odegaard

mentum, keep building on it and we will see."

Odegaard has been in fine form recently and was instrumental in Arsenal's win at Burnley, which moved them to within two points of leaders Liverpool.

The Norwegian scored the opener inside four minutes and set up Bukayo Saka for the second of his goals after the break.

Arsenal's attack came in for some criticism earlier in the season as they struggled in front of goal, but they scored five against Burnley after beating West Ham 6-0 and now have the best goal difference in the Premier League.

"I think that's what we were missing a little bit in the last few weeks before the break - we created so much but we didn't score the goals," said Odegaard.

"But within the last few games, we've been brilliant in front of goal. We get so many people in the box and so many situations around the box. So yeah, it's been brilliant."

"Last game was great performance and yeah we played really good again."



Andreas Brehme scores against Argentina in the 1990 World Cup final in Rome, Italy

Germany World Cup winner Brehme dies

Berlin, Germany - World Cup winner Andreas Brehme, whose late penalty in the 1990 final against Argentina in Italy handed Germany their third world title, has died at the age of 63, his family said.

The attacking full back and dead-ball specialist became an instant Germany great when his spot kick earned them a 1-0 victory over Diego Maradona's Argentina in the World Cup final in Rome.

Tributes and condolences poured in from clubs across the Bundesliga and Europe.

"A magnificent player, a great Inter fan. Ciao Andy, forever legend," former club Inter Milan said on social media.

Brehme also played for Bayern Munich and Real Zaragoza among others before retiring in 1998 following his return to Kaiserslautern and lifting the Bundesliga title with them. He also won the German league title with Bayern Munich while also lifting the Serie A trophy and a UEFA Cup with Inter.

"FCK mourns the passing of Andreas Brehme," Kaiserslautern said. "He wore the Red Devils' shirt for a total of 10 years and became German champion and German Cup winner with FCK."

"In 1990 he fired the German national team to the World Cup title with his penalty and became a football legend. The FCK family is in deep mourning and our thoughts are with Andi's family and friends."

Brehme won 86 caps for

Brehme became an instant Germany football great when his spot kick earned them a 1-0 victory over Argentina

Bahrain appoint Croatian Talajic as coach

Manama, Bahrain - Bahrain have named Croatian Dragan Talajic as manager, the Bahrain Football Association said on Tuesday.

The 58-year-old former goalkeeper, who has managed several clubs in the Middle East, will arrive in Manama this week, the federation added, without giving any details of his contract.

Bahrain exited the Asian Cup in the last 16 with a 3-1 loss to Japan on January 31 and last week terminated the contract of Argentine head coach Juan Antonio Pizzi by mutual consent.

They are second in Group H of the Asian qualifiers for the 2026 World Cup on three points after two matches. They are three points behind leaders UAE who beat them 2-0 in November.

Bahrain visit Nepal in their next qualifying match on March 21 before the reverse fixture five days later.

Ligue 1 side Marseille fire Italian coach Gattuso after winless run of five matches

Marseille, France - Olympique de Marseille have fired manager Gennaro Gattuso after suffering a dip in form, the Ligue 1 club said on Tuesday, little more than four months following his appointment.

The 46-year-old Italian, who has previously coached Valencia, Napoli and AC Milan, was hired by Marseille as Marcelino's replacement in September last year. Marseille are ninth in the French top flight after a winless run of five matches, out of which they have lost two and drawn three.

"Olympique de Marseille announces the end of its collaboration with Gennaro Gattuso," Marseille said in a statement.

"Marseille would like to extend its special thanks to Gennaro and his entire staff for the



Gennaro Gattuso

Marseille next host Ukrainian side Shakhtar Donetsk in the Europa League knockout play-off second leg

unfailing commitment and professionalism they have shown on a daily basis, and wishes them all the best for the future."

Frenchman Jean-Louis Gasset is the leading candidate for the vacant managerial role, local media reports said.

Gasset, 70, most recently coached the Ivory Coast national team. He was sacked after a poor performance in the group stage of the Africa Cup of Nations, which they scraped through as the last lucky loser. Ivory Coast went on to win the tournament.

Marseille, on 30 points from 22 matches, next host Ukrainian side Shakhtar Donetsk in the Europa League knockout play-off second leg on Thursday, followed by another home game against 14th-placed Montpellier in Ligue 1 on Sunday.

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MEN'S ATTIRE



Choosing a men's suit can turn out to be quite tricky. It must go well with your personality as well as suit the occasion

Men in suits definitely stand out – suits signify elegance, etiquette and a whole lot of formal virtues that together scream that you care about your appearance and appeal. While jumping into a suit of your choice might seem as easy any other dressing up routine, doing it the right way is what makes all the difference in how you come across – neat and elegant or loud and brash.

Suit styles

Some may assume that as long as you can close the button, pulling it on comfortably, that's it. However, reality dictates that there is more than just wearing a suit. First, you surely don't want your suit to be extremely tight, it will make you unable to move around freely. On the other hand, oversized suits make you look baggy and unattractive.

A perfect men's suit acts as an armour. It can give you not just protection but a special kind of swag. Most men believe that they only need to have one or two suits at hand. But if you want to achieve that confident look and a respectable image, reality dictates that there is a suit for every occasion.

A suit is usually a big purchase for any man. It means that you have to be aware of many things when selecting the best suit for you before making the purchase.

Buying affordable suits is also something that needs to be considered. But keep in mind that having one high-quality suit is better than several mediocre ones.

Knowing the occasion can help determine what type of suit you need. Here are some other questions that a vendor will probably ask you when you start looking for a suit: Do you want a suit that comes with one, two, or three buttons? Are you interested in having a notch or peak lapel? What type of colour or fabric do you want on your suit? What about the length and the fit?

Choosing the fabric

If you are buying your first suit, you can play safe with wool since it can be worn at any time of the year. On the other hand, cotton suits are worn only during summer, spring, and fall. There are also other options, such as linen, and they are the ones that are best for summer. However, wool can give you real value for your money.

You can play safe by choosing a midnight blue colour or a few shades

darker than an average navy. It can beautifully transition for day and night use and may be matched with every shoe colour.

Buttons

Two-button suits are the most commonly available and best-looking suits. Every label operating these days plays with two-button suits, streamlining them to create a modern look. They are perfect for men with shorter torsos as they can lengthen the frame. There is also a one-button suit, but this style is not for everyone.

The right type of men's suit for you depends on various factors. It includes finding the right cut for your body type, addressing personal style, the occasion you're attending, and even the budget. Most body types prefer a slim-fit suit since it gives a modern touch to your silhouette.

Pants size

Depending on the type of men's suit you'll choose, these are the measures that need to be considered when matching the pants' size:

- **WAIST:** The most important measurement for matching your pants. It refers to the measurements surrounding the natural waistline.
- **INSEAM:** The length from the bottom intersection of the crotch to the bottom of the inside of one leg.
- **SIDE LENGTH:** The length from the waist down to the hem, measured on the outside of the leg.
- **RISE:** The length from the middle of the crotch seam, right between the legs up to the waist.
- **THIGH:** The measurement of leg width right below the crotch.

The right tie

One of the first things that will be noticed when you appear in a suit is the tie that goes with your suit. Choosing the right colour, texture, design, and type for your tie is as important as selecting the suit itself.

One needs to consider some tips: Plain shirt-printed tie, printed shirt-plain tie. Sleek ties appear more formal while broad ones make the look more breezy. Avoid floral and loud prints for sober/solemn occasions and don't wear dull and boring ties for fun events, like weddings/celebrations.

All in all, one can, indeed, customise this accessory to suit your very own style or make a personal statement.

(Courtesy: suitexpert.com)



Bradley Cooper Ryan Gosling



Dua Lipa



Florence Pugh

BAFTA AWARDS 2024

AT THE BAFTA 2024 ON SUNDAY, THE RED CARPET WELCOMED TELEVISION AND FILM STARS TO SOUTHBANK CENTRE'S ROYAL FESTIVAL HALL, DONNING OUTFITS MOSTLY IN RED AND WHITE, AND THE CUSTOMARY BLACK

RED & WHITE

At Southbank Centre's Royal Festival Hall, a venue located on the banks of the River Thames, the glitterati descended for the 77th British Academy Film Arts Awards (BAFTA) 2024 in outstanding style on February 18.

Before taking their places in the 2,700-seat theater to celebrate outstanding achievements on screens big and small, nominees, presenters, and guests hit the traditional red carpet to kick off the star-studded evening.

This year's group of nominees are no stranger to the awards-show circuit, with several being lauded for their red-carpet fashion over the past few weeks.

At the BAFTA Awards 2024 (which many consider an important precursor to the Academy Awards, which are scheduled for March 10), chic stars like Ayo Edebiri, Barry Keoghan, Bradley Cooper, Carey Mulligan, Cillian Murphy, Claire Foy, Colman Domingo, Da'Vine Joy Randolph, Dominic Sessa, Emily Blunt, Emma Stone, Greta Gerwig, Margot Robbie, Paul



Taylor Russell

Giamatti, Paul Mescal, Robert Downey Jr., Rosamund Pike, Ryan Gosling, and Sandra Hüller proved that this year's red carpet brimmed with all sorts of style.

Plus, with fashion-forward presenters like Andrew Scott, Bryce Dallas



Phoebe Dynevor



Andrew Scott



Naomi Campbell

Howard, Callum Turner, Cate Blanchett, Chiwetel Ejiofor, Daisy Edgar-Jones, Daryl McCormack, David Beckham, Deepika Padukone, Dua Lipa, Emma Corrin, Gillian Anderson, Himesh Patel, Idris Elba, Indira Varma, Keegan-Michael Key, Kingsley Ben-Adir, Lily Collins, M a r i s a

WINNERS

Best film: *Oppenheimer*

Leading actress: Emma Stone - *Poor Things*

Leading actor: Cillian Murphy - *Oppenheimer*

Supporting actress: Da'Vine Joy Randolph - *The Holdovers*

Supporting actor: Robert Downey Jr - *Oppenheimer*

Best director: *Oppenheimer* - Christopher Nolan

EE Bafta rising star award (voted by public): Mia McKenna-Bruce

Outstanding British film: *The Zone of Interest*

Film - non English: *The Zone of Interest*

Animated film: *The Boy and the Heron*

Documentary: *20 Days In Mariupol*

Original screenplay: *Anatomy of a Fall*

Adapted screenplay: *American Fiction*

Outstanding debut by a British writer, director or producer: *Earth Mama*

Original score: *Oppenheimer*

Make-up and hair: *Poor Things*

Costume design: *Poor Things*

Production design: *Poor Things*

Sound: *The Zone of Interest*

Cinematography: *Oppenheimer*

Editing: *Oppenheimer*

Casting: The Holdovers

Special visual effects: *Poor Things*

British short animation: *Crab Day*

British short film: *Jellyfish and Lobster*

Bafta Fellowship: Samantha Morton

Outstanding British contribution to cinema: June Givanni

TOPPERS

7 wins - *Oppenheimer*

5 - *Poor Things*

3 - *The Zone of Interest*

2 - *The Holdovers*

Abela, Rebecca Ferguson, and Taylor Russell in attendance, landing a spot on Vanity Fair's best-dressed list was all the more impressive.

The BAFTA Awards, which celebrate the best in film and television as determined by the British Academy of Film and Television Arts, often serve as an indicator of momentum and trends - not just on the red carpet, but also among voters for the Oscars next month.