

IRAN VISIT TO PROPEL TIES

Our Correspondent
Muscat

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik will head to Iran today, beginning a new chapter in bilateral ties between the Sultanate of Oman and the Islamic Republic.

Over the past 50 years, the two countries have shared deep-rooted historical relations that have been further strengthened through joint cooperation.

During his visit, His Majesty the Sultan will meet President Dr Ebrahim Raisi to discuss various regional and international issues of mutual interest. These discussions aim to foster an exchange of views and enhance cooperation between the two nations at both political and economic levels.

His Majesty's official visit reaffirms the advanced relations between Oman and Iran built on a foundation of mutual respect and good neighbourliness.

The two countries are actively seeking to maximise ties, particularly economic diversification and investment opportunities. Notably, trade exchange between Oman and Iran grew 27.9 per cent in the last two years, totalling RO320.8mn at the end of 2022.

Jamal Razaghi, head of Iranian-Omani Business Council, is hopeful of His Majesty the Sultan's historic visit paving the way for increased economic, commercial, scientific and medical cooperation between the two nations. He said that Iran is keen to raise the volume of trade exchange with Oman to US\$5bn. "This goal is within reach as the opportunities of trade exchange between Iran and Oman are huge. Iran does not look at the sultanate as only an economic market, but also as a strategic and vital partner."

According to Raed bin Mohammed al Shehhi, a business-



(File photo)



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JAMAL RAZAGHI

man from Musandam, the visit will boost potential for cooperation and project development.

The community and businessmen in Musandam eagerly

anticipate commencement of ferry services between Port of Khasab and Iran's Hormozgan governorate, Shehhi added.

"These services, once opera-



tional, will facilitate the movement of travellers and tourists, followed by activation of sea lines for the transportation of goods under the Ashgabat

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RAED AL SHEHHI

Agreement. Such developments are expected to significantly increase the volume of trade and investment exchange between the two countries."

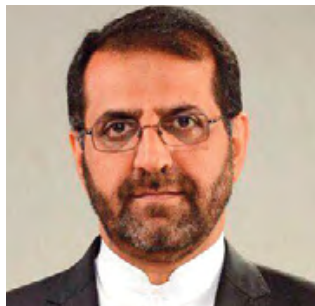
'Oman-Iran relations set for new heights'

Our Correspondent
Muscat

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik's visit to Tehran and his meeting with the supreme leadership of Iran will foster an unprecedented level of partnership and cooperation between the two nations, Ali Najafi Khoshroudi, Ambassador of Iran to Oman, has stated.

Highlighting the historical and distinguished relations between Oman and Iran, the ambassador emphasised the ongoing coordination and consultation on various regional and international issues. "Additionally, both countries engage in fruitful discussions on economic and political matters that serve the best interests of their respective peoples."

Khoshroudi praised the concerted efforts made to enhance air and sea connectivity between Oman and Iran. "These improvements are expected to have a significant impact on boosting trade and economic exchange between



Ali Najafi Khoshroudi

Tehran and Muscat."

The ambassador also acknowledged the positive effects of exempting citizens of both nations of travel visa requirements. "This policy has not only facilitated tourism but also led to an increase in the number of daily flights connecting Iran and Oman, further enhancing trade relations."

He reiterated that Oman has a special place in Iran's foreign policy, as the Islamic Republic's supreme leadership always lauds the sultanate's balanced and influential role in the region and globally.

Recent data released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information shows Oman's total exports to Iran in 2022 amounted to RO207.4mn. Key exports from Oman to Iran include machinery, heat treatment equipment, methacrylate products, diesel engine lubricants, optical tools, medical examination equipment, and electrical equipment.

Conversely, the total imports from Iran in 2022 amounted to RO113.4mn, comprising livestock, semi-finished iron and steel products, petroleum tar, fruits and shrimp.

The trade balance between Oman and Iran has favoured the sultanate in recent years, reaching RO53.3mn in 2021 and RO 94mn in 2022, as per available data.

The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion reported that by the end of 2022, there were over 1,800 companies with Iranian investments in Oman, contributing a total of RO196.6mn. These statistics highlight Iran's prominence as the third-ranked country in terms of commercial registrations in Oman, with 4,496 registrations at the end of 2022.

Sultanate mediates exchange of detainees between Iran, Belgium

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman has mediated an exchange of detainees between Iran and Belgium reaching an amicable solution in a 'positive spirit', the Foreign Ministry stated on Friday.

In a statement, the Foreign Ministry said that the exchange was done 'in compliance with the directives of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to fulfil the requests of the Iranian and Belgian governments to assist in resolving the issue of detained citizens in both countries'.

It further added, 'The Omani efforts have resulted in an agree-

King Philippe thanks His Majesty

Muscat - His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik received a phone call from King Philippe Léopold Louis Marie of Belgium on Saturday who expressed his gratitude and appreciation for the efforts exerted by the sultanate in mediating the release of Belgian detainees from Iran.

They also reviewed the strong bilateral relations between the two friendly countries, and ways of enhancing and develop these in all fields.

ment between the two sides for a mutual exchange deal.'

The individuals who were released were transported from Tehran and Brussels to Muscat on Friday in preparation of their

return to their respective countries.

'The Sultanate of Oman appreciates the positive high-level spirit that prevailed during the discussions in Muscat between

the Iranian and Belgian sides, and their commitment to resolve this humanitarian issue.'

Appreciating Oman's role, Dr Hossein Amir Abdollahian, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Iran, spoke to Sayyid Badr al Busaidi, Foreign Minister, on phone late on Friday thanking the sultanate for mediating a settlement between Iran and Belgium.

Jasem Mohamed al Budaiwi, Secretary-General of GCC, praised Oman's role in settling the issue, stressing the role of long-standing Omani diplomacy in resolving outstanding regional and international issues.

See also Page 09

WHO approves Oman's IPC strategy

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Member states at the 76th World Health Assembly (WHA) taking place in Geneva, Switzerland, from May 21 to 30, have ratified a draft global strategy on infection prevention and control (IPC) submitted by the sultanate to the World Health Organization.

Member states and WHO praised the efforts of Oman in seeking and working on this im-

portant global strategy, emphasising its importance especially in light of the gaps and shortcomings that the world witnessed while handling the COVID-19 pandemic and earlier epidemics.

The 75th World Health Assembly (WHA75) in May 2022 unanimously adopted a resolution calling for the development of a global strategy on IPC. The resolution was proposed by the sultanate with co-sponsorship of Bosnia and Herzegovina,

Botswana, Colombia, Jordan, Kenya, Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, Norway, Philippines, Qatar, United Arab Emirates, United States of America and Vanuatu.

In accordance with a resolution of WHA75, the draft global strategy was made available for the consideration of the Executive Board at its 152nd meeting. Following consultations with member states, the draft was updated on May 20, 2023.

Continued on Page 03



'Music transforms the inner being'

Tender Announcement



The Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Mada'ayn) announces the following Tender:

Tender Number	Tender Name	Last date of buying	Date of submission	Type of work	Register Degree	Fee (R.O)
6/2023/PEIE /HQ-6	Consultancy Services for Assessment of the Current Situation and Requirements for Sewage Treatment Plant (STP) in Knowledge Oasis Muscat (KOM), Sultanate of Oman.	11-06-2023	06-07-2023	Consultancy	First	50
7/2023/PEIE /HQ-7	Consultancy Services for Detailed Design and Construction Supervision for Industrial Complex (Plug and Play) in Nizwa Industrial City.	11-06-2023	06-07-2023	Consultancy	First	50

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

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

2. eTendering System Inquiry: All correspondence pertaining to the eTendering System technical support must be directed to the following helpdesk email address and phone number: etenderhd@mtcit.gov.om and +968 24402200 Note: Bid Submission will be online only.

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

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

@madaynoman

madayn.om



Omantel has penned multiple signings and MoU’s with government and large corporates portfolio at COMEX 2023



MoU - ETCO

OMANTEL OFFERS THE LATEST TECHNOLOGY SOLUTIONS AND INNOVATIVE SERVICES FOR TECHNOLOGY.

Muscat - Omantel, the leading provider of integrated telecommunication services in the Sultanate of Oman, has signed memoranda of understanding and contracts with several government and private institutions as part of its participation in COMEX 2023 in its 32nd edition. This is aimed at offering a range of various digital solutions and technological advancements to these establishments, enhancing their digital transformation efforts, and leveraging from the services and solutions offered by Omantel in digitization and information technology.

Omantel has signed MoU's with, H.E Sheikh Hilal bin Said Al Hajri, Governor Al Dakhiliyah Governorate, Mohammed Al Naseeb, Chief Operating Officer at Oman LNG, Abdul Aziz Jaafar, Chief Executive Officer at ETCO, Anson Kim, Chief Executive Officer at Hutchison Sohar ports, Abdullah Al Badi, Chief Executive Officer at Tadoom, in addition to Cook Wang, Senior Vice President at Hytera on the side-lines of the 32nd edition of COMEX Oman.

The signings come as part of the company's strategy to support institutions in both the public and private sectors in their aspirations and directions towards digital transformation. The main aim is to utilize the available modern technological advancements, such as artificial intelligence, the Internet of Things, smart cities, and other innovative technologies and solutions provided by Omantel.

In pursuit of achieving this direction and the goals of the digital transformation journey, Omantel has signed an MoU with Ad Dakhiliyah Governorate, which includes cooperation in the field of telecommunications and ex-



Signing agreement - Oman International Container Terminal - Port of Khasab



Signing agreement - Tadoom

change of expertise in various sectors. This includes supporting and implementing the digital transformation program in the governorate, in addition to a recently assigned contract for upgrading the infrastructure, which was awarded to Omantel. Furthermore, Omantel has signed an agreement with Oman International Container Terminal for the 1st of its kind, real time solution by implementing 5G enabled Smart Surveillance system in Port of Khasab.

Moreover, Omantel has signed an MoU with Oman LNG Company, aiming to accelerate the digital transformation process dedicated to the oil and gas sector. These solutions are unique and of great importance. Furthermore, Omantel has also signed an MoU with the emerging global technology company ETCO, enabling Omantel to keep pace with the new global trend in using satellite imagery and analytics. This po-

sitions Omantel among the pioneering companies and first movers in the GCC region that implement this technology.

The fifth signed agreement was with Tadoom, to expand the state-of-the-art IoT (Internet of things) network system through LoRaWAN, that enables large scale IoT rollouts and serves as a robust communication infrastructure. This is to support smart city projects in the different areas across Sultanate of Oman. Concluding the signings ceremonies in COMEX, Omantel has signed an MoU to sign with Hytera communications, to provide the push-to-talk service. The service includes facilitating immediate communication between employees, by sending audio, video, or multi-media messages.

Speaking of the agreements, Omantel CEO Talal Al Mamari said: "Omantel has been a major driving force behind the digital transformation of some of the biggest institutions in the



MoU - Al Dakhiliyah Governorate



MoU - Oman LNG

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TALAL AL MAMARI, OMANTEL CEO

Sultanate of Oman. It is only fitting that more of the government key agencies and private sector companies engaged in the sustainable development of Oman turn to us to achieve rapid digital transformation. These agreements reflect the growing confidence of the institutions in relying on Omantel for their digital transformation and connectivity needs."

"Signing these key contracts at COMEX is significant as this event supports Oman's Vision 2040 that encourages a transition to a knowledge-rich, ICT-friendly economy and society. It also drives home the point that Omantel leaves no stone unturned to offer government agencies and private sector companies best-of-breed technologies to achieve full digital transformation." Al Mamari added.

H.E Sheikh Hilal bin Said Al Hajri, Governor of Al Dakhiliyah Governorate said: "As a Governorate that is working

hard to preserve its rich historical, archaeological, and trading importance, Al Dakhiliyah is delighted to engage Omantel as our partner in our digital transformation, which covers many aspects including the full revamp of IP telephony. Omantel has proved to be a master in enabling organisations to achieve digital transformation goals in record time, by harnessing best-of-breed technologies."

Oman LNG COO Mohammad Al Naseeb said: "We have strong confidence in Omantel's competence in enabling digital transformation. This five-year contract comes on the heels of our existing contracts with Omantel that embrace Anti-flare CCTV's, drones, and 5G based ICT solutions. As a company producing and selling Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) and its by-product, Natural Gas Liquids, Oman LNG looks forward to leveraging Omantel's cutting-edge solutions to

help us transform our processes through digitalisation."

In his turn, Mr. Anacin Kum, CEO of Oman International Container Terminal, "to ensure the safety and security of cargo, tourists, and port users at Port of Khasab, the installation of security surveillance system became a top priority. In collaboration with Omantel and Huawei, we are now set to deploy the system with 5G connectivity in the Port of Khasab which formed key part of the ISPS compliance. This pioneering endeavor marks the first commercial deployment of 5G surveillance in the Port Management in the Sultanate of Oman. We are confident that we can proactively address security concerns and improve efficiency for all stakeholders"

CEO of ETCO Abdul Aziz Jaafar said: "ETCO has been blazing a new trail in the field of space science and technology. We are very excited to sign this contract with Omantel to boost our space imagery analysis program. We are confident that Omantel's proven expertise will help us move to the next level as we pursue our mission of developing and operating world-class space-related technologies to make a positive impact in Omani and international science communities."

Abdullah Al-Badi, Chief Executive Officer of Tadoom said: "We are proud to carrying on the achievement of bringing the paradigm shift in transforming the IoT industry in the Sultanate of Oman and expand the network to cater to 1 million plus end notes. Our focus on best service delivery and customer centric solutions will make all the IoT users reap the benefits of the technology".

Omantel is the Sultanate's first and leading integrated telecommunications services provider, enabling the digital society to flourish, allowing new ways of doing business and delivering a world of information, news, and entertainment. While striving to ensure an optimum customer satisfaction, Omantel plays a key social role to provide the required support and assistant to all sectors amongst the Omani society.



CPA launches e-guide on prohibited goods

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Consumer Protection Authority (CPA) launched an electronic guide on Thursday to spread awareness of the danger of using or keeping prohibited goods among both consumers and service providers.

An official at CPA affirmed the authority's commitment to creating a secure consumer market, free from hazardous products that could jeopardise health, safety, and overall well-being.

"The authority remains vigilant in monitoring market activities and takes necessary actions to regulate the sale, circulation, and purchase of various commodities."

In its pursuit of consumer safety, the authority has banned several goods after conducting thorough market research. Testing of samples collected from markets confirmed their harmful effects on health.

Prohibited goods and prohibited substances fall under different categories.

The newly launched online guide seeks to enhance suppliers' understanding of prohibited goods, the corresponding regulations, and the penalties for non-compliance

"Prohibited goods are those banned due to defects or violations of approved specifications and standards, while prohibited substances are those prohibited from circulation due to specific provisions in other laws, such as narcotic substances, counterfeit currencies, and certain breeds of ferocious animals," the official explained.



The newly launched online guide seeks to enhance suppliers' understanding of prohibited goods, the corresponding regulations, and the penalties for non-compliance.

"It aims to familiarise consumers with prohibited items, highlighting their potential dangers and encouraging them to fulfill their national duty by reporting any associated practices."

These efforts are instrumental in creating a stable and secure marketplace for all stakeholders, the official added.

On prohibited goods, the official said, they comprise a wide range of industrial, agricultural, animal, and processed products, including raw materials, components, and semi-finished goods.

"Although the definition of prohibited goods is vast, the Consumer Protection Law describes them as products with defects or those failing to meet the specified standards relating to their primary elements, materials, and components."

The reason for banning goods, the official said involves violations of approved specifications and standards, potential

harm to human health, and violations of Islamic customs, traditions, and values.

The official emphasised that individuals, who violate the provisions of the Consumer Protection Law and its executive regulations, may face imprisonment for a maximum period of one year, coupled with an administrative fine not exceeding RO2,000.

WHO approves global strategy on IPC

Continued from Page 01

The resolution included 13 calls to member states to improve IPC at the national, sub-national and facility levels, in line with WHO-recommended core components for IPC programmes.

It also requested the Director-General to develop a global strategy on IPC (GSIPC), a global action plan, and a monitoring framework in consultation with member states and regional economic integration organisations.

The draft GSIPC was country- and stakeholder-driven, with focus on IPC in any setting where healthcare is delivered across the continuum of the health system.

Furthermore, the guiding principles underpinning the draft GSIPC included a people-centred approach that emphasised health workers' protection and patient safety and compassion, while also highlighting the central role of IPC in combating antimicrobial resistance and in outbreak preparedness, readiness and response.

OHRC leads team for training programme in The Hague

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Oman Human Rights Commission (OHRC) and a number of civil society organisations took part in a five-day introductory training programme on human rights in The Hague, a city on the North Sea coast of the western Netherlands, in collaboration with the Embassy of the Netherlands in Oman.

Through this programme, human right experts shared the experience of the Netherlands both at the national and international levels.

The participants exchanged experiences with the experts from the Netherlands Institute for Human Rights and learnt about the best practices of national institutions in the host country through collaborations with civil society organisations.

Participants also had the opportunity to understand the mechanism for integrating human rights concepts into the functioning of law enforcement agencies. The programme opened a window for the experts from the two countries to identify future areas of cooperation and knowledge exchange projects between organisations in the Netherlands and OHRC in relation to rights of children, and juvenile prison inmates through field visits.



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This programme falls within the OHRC's ongoing efforts to strengthen its external role and benefit from the experiences of friendly countries in developing its work and responsibilities in society, in addition to strengthening partnerships with community institutions in assuming responsibility and promoting joint action.

The participants of the programme included members of different committees and government employees, besides the representatives from the Omani Journalists Association, the General Federation of Oman Workers, the Children First Association, and the Association of Children with Disabilities.

TENDER NOTICE



The Internal Tender Committee of Emdad Logistics Company SAOC., hereby announces the following Tenders:

Tender No.	Description	Last Date of receiving Specifications	Date of Submission	Suppliers	Tender Fee OMR (Inclusive of VAT 5%)	Place of Submission
ITC/E/003/2023	Supply of Diesel and Jet A1 Aviation Fuel, on need Basis.Duqm	04th June 2023	19th June 2023	Only Specialized Companies	55/- OMR Non Refundable	Emdad Logistics Company, 3rd floor
ITC/E/005/2023	A- Purchase of Modified Shipping Containers Urban Complex - 80 TEU's (20ft or 40ft) B- Annual Maintenance for 03 years of the Modified Shipping Containers Urban Complex	07th June 2023	19th June 2023	Only Specialized Companies	250/- OMR Non Refundable	Emdad Logistics Company, 3rd floor
RFQ/003/2023	Supply of Workshop Tools and tackles	01st June 2023	8th June 2023	Only Specialized Companies	Free	Emdad Logistics Company, 3rd floor

Taking into consideration the following:

All specialized companies that wish to participate in the tender must deposit the tender amount into the bank account of the Company (details of the bank account are set out hereunder) and submit the original payment receipt of the tender along with a copy of the Commercial Registration Certificate and the contact details of the authorized individual (business card) to the address presented below:

From 07:00 - 15:30 (Sunday – Thursday).

Payment Information:

Bank Transfer:

Account Name	Emdad Logistics Co SAOC
Account Number	018020025780
Bank Name	Sohar International Bank SAOG
Branch	Al Khoudh Branch
Bank ID Code	BSHROMRUXXX

Complete Tender documents should be submitted in sealed envelope with red wax with tender number and title and addressed to the "Chairman of Internal Tender Committee". The envelope should not make any reference to the bidder details.

All applicants are required to submit the Tender in the Tender box in the main office of Port of Duqm Company at or before 02:00 PM on the assigned date for submission of the Tender. Tenders submitted after the above-mentioned date and time shall not be considered.

- The company is not obliged to accept the lowest offer or any other offer without any justifiable reasons.
- The company reserve the right to issue the order either in part or full for the quoted items without any justifiable reasons.
- The company reserve the right to reject the tenders not complying with the tender documentation requirement. For any clarification, please contact us through procurement@portofduqm.om

Emdad Logistics Company S.A.O.C.

PO Box: 2409, PC: 111, Sultanate of Oman,
Almashreq Building, 18 November Street, N. Azaiba
T: +968 25468666



Announcement

The Egyptian School Muscat announces a new contract for a janitorial company for the new school year 2023 - 2024 under these conditions :

- 1- Maximum age 35
- 2- Workers should be healthy fit
- 3- Capability of working under pressure and fulfilling all the cleaning tasks and other jobs needed in time.
- 4- 4 males and 5 females are required

Applications should be submitted to egymuscat@yahoo.com
Contracting should indicate supplying workers only OR workers plus Detergents.
Applications should be sent within two weeks from the dated announcement.



Advertisement

School canteen for rent

Egyptian School Muscat announces availability of its canteen for rent the academic year 2022-2023 according to the conditions and regulations mentioned in the tender book. interested parties can avail the tender book from the Egyptian School in Al Ansab in maximum two weeks from the date of this advertisement. A copy of commercial registration papers should be attached. Tel 24202221

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- Affordable
- Experienced doctors
- Al khuwair

Our Services

- ✓ Bleeding gums
- ✓ Fixed Teeth
- ✓ Whitening Teeth
- ✓ Braces
- ✓ Teeth Cleaning
- ✓ Bad Breath
- ✓ OPG X-Ray
- ✓ Root Canal

Approved Insurance:

National Life, Mednet, Metlife, AXA, NAS, OQIC
Saico, NextCare, Vipul Better Care, Greenline & More

Oases within city bring relief to outdoor workers, commuters

Our Correspondent
Muscat

As the scorching sun of summer takes hold of the city, a few generous residents have made arrangements to provide drinking water for passersby, offering much-needed relief from the blistering heat. These mini 'oases' in the middle of road provide a refreshing respite for blue-colour workers and daily commuters.

Rashid Khan, a construction worker from Hamriya who paints houses on contract basis, says he can't be thankful enough to these generous citizens.

"This year, I've worked in a few homes and shops in an area which is far away from super-markets or even mosques. Luckily, there's a big house with three taps nearby, providing cold and clean water. It's a genuine relief."

Most of these public taps installed by kind citizens are connected to coolers kept inside



(Muscat Daily)

their homes. Advanced controls allow for precise adjustment of water temperature. While some people use the water for drinking, many others fill plastic bottles to splash their faces and soothe their eyes from the burning sensation caused by the scorching

sun.

Talking about the purpose of these taps, one villa owner shared an emotional reason. He installed the taps following his late mother's wishes. She used to feed birds and provide water to anyone, regardless of religion or

nationality. "That was her great message to all of us. Standing and feeding people was challenging for her, so she instructed me and my brothers to instal water taps. Early summer, we make it a point to clean the tanks, water basins and taps. Although

water is available year-round, we dispense cold water for three months during summer."

These houses with public drinking provision are mostly owned by citizens, and the number of taps range from one to five. Such homes can be found in all parts of the city, including Muscat, Amerat, Seeb, Mawaleh and Hamriya.

In this act of kindness, the affluent residents of these homes offer relief to those enduring the summer heat, showing compassion and humanity to those in challenging circumstances.

For Nurul Alam, who works in Ghubra, it takes nearly 20 minutes to reach home for lunch. The intense afternoon heat drains his energy. "Water taps in the homes of the wealthy offer much more than just drinking water," he said. "They are a source of sadaqah (charitable giving). In the afternoon heat or after a hard day's work, a sip of cold water is always a welcome relief."



(Supplied photo)

Muscat airport introduces eduroam, secure Wi-Fi service for researchers

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, in collaboration with Oman Airports, launched eduroam, a secure global educational roaming service at Muscat International Airport, on Thursday.

This groundbreaking initiative makes Muscat International Airport the first airport in the Middle East to offer a reliable wireless Internet connection specifically designed for students and academics.

researchers and academics affiliated with official research networks. "The service is currently available in 36 locations across Oman, including universities, colleges and key strategic areas."

Ayman bin Ahmed al Hosani, CEO of Oman Airports, said that Muscat International Airport is witnessing an increasing number of passengers following the COVID-19 pandemic. He acknowledged that travellers often spend hours during layovers and need to complete various tasks, including scientific and academic.

eduroam is an internationally recognised Wi-Fi Internet access roaming service tailored for users in the research, higher education, and further education sectors. Since its launch in Europe in 2003, eduroam has gained popularity throughout the research and education community and is now available in 74 territories worldwide.

eduroam allows students, researchers and staff of participating institutions to obtain Internet connectivity across campus and when visiting other participating institutions quickly and easily without the need to find local login details.

Najah Mohammed al Rashidiya, Director General of Innovation Centre, informed that the service was developed by the global research community and is exclusively available to students,

"The eduroam service is a unique offering that enables authorised users to easily and securely connect to wireless Internet networks within institutions linked to the Oman Research and Education Network or OMREN. Muscat International Airport is among 36 international airports providing this exceptional service," Hosani said.

With the introduction of eduroam at Muscat International Airport, students, researchers and academics can now enjoy uninterrupted connectivity, ensuring that their academic pursuits and collaborations continue seamlessly, even while travelling. This landmark initiative showcases Oman's commitment to fostering innovation and facilitating knowledge exchange within the higher education and research communities.

Ministry of Interior launches new service for shura vote

Our Correspondent
Muscat

In a move towards promoting transparency and enhancing digital practices, the Ministry of Interior has introduced a new electronic public service called 'My Page' as part of the Intikhab app and Majlis A'Shura's election website - elections.om

The service aims to support candidates participating in the upcoming elections to the tenth term of the shura by providing them a platform to promote their electoral manifesto and campaigns.

The 'My Page' service will allow candidates to post their



(Supplied photo)

personal information and share photos and videos in compliance with approved electoral campaign regulations. This feature allows voters to access the list of candidates, stay updated on their activities, interact with them, and comments on their content.

Highlighting the significance of

new service, H E Dr Ali Amer al Shadhani, Undersecretary of Communications in the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology and Chairman of the Technical Committee for the Majlis A'Shura elections, said, "It enhances transparency, while allowing vot-

ers to familiarise themselves with the candidates. Additionally, this development elevates Oman's position in e-government ratings, showcasing progress in digital governance."

According to Ahmed bin Abdullah al Ma'amari, Director of the Ministry of Interior's Electoral Register Project, the ministry is committed to facilitating the participation of candidates and voters in the shura elections. "My Page enables candidates to better engage with voters during the electoral campaign, while enabling voters to connect with and learn about their candidates."

The launch event was attended by key officials including

HE Khalid Hilal al Busaidi, Undersecretary of Ministry of Interior and Chairman of the Main Committee of the elections, Sheikh al Mokhtar Abdullah al Harthy, Deputy Chairman of Supreme Court and Head of the Elections Supreme Committee, Sayyid Khalifa al Murdas al Busaidi, Secretary-General of Ministry of Interior, and H E Mohammed Said al Balushi, Undersecretary of Ministry of Information and Chairman of the Media Committee of the elections.

The launch of the service coincided with the Ministry of Interior's participation in COMEX 2023 held at Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre.



Pact inked for dialysis services, ER in Mirbat Hospital

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Health signed an agreement on Thursday to finance development of an accident and emergency room (ER) and provide dialysis services at Mirbat Hospital in Dhofar.

Supported by Petroleum Development Oman, Sembcorp Salalah Company, Salalah Mills Company, Muscat Overseas

Company and Bank Muscat, the project spans an area of 600sqm and costs around RO410,000.

The agreement was signed by H E Fatma Mohammed al Ajmi, Undersecretary for Administrative, Financial Affairs and Planning in the Ministry of Health, and Hamdan Hamad al Junaibi, Governor of Mirbat, with representatives of the companies financing the project.

We are all aware of the drastic changes caused by the pandemic - halting social and professional lives, job losses, changes in living situations, and the untimely demise of loved ones. These unwelcome changes have wrought our existence with uncertainty. Yet, these are only some consequences of the pandemic. COVID-19 has shattered lives, disrupting countless aspects of it. Unstable well-being and the drawbacks of limited socialisation are two key examples of COVID-19's wider impact. COVID-19 has also hindered education. The education industry encountered remarkable obstacles. Considering the difficulties overcome, it is a feat that educational institutions swiftly adapted to teaching remotely.

As an international student, it was impossible to fathom completing an academic year from my home country. I was fortunate enough to arrive in Muscat prior to the travel ban. However, as I was studying abroad, I dealt with disruptions to my education. Like most students, I was unprepared for these hindrances. As my classes were conducted abroad, my initial challenge was adjusting to a different time zone. This caused more difficulties than anticipated as I needed to be awake at late hours to attend classes. To compensate for late hours, I had to sleep throughout the day. Privacy also became an issue. Privacy invasion presented itself when needing to switch on webcams for attendance. This re-



quirement muddled the distinction between personal and professional life, allowing strangers a glimpse into private spaces.

Remote learning also caused teaching challenges. Teachers attempted to address students' learning needs, but online classes could not compare to in-person classes. Face-to-face discussions and in-person attendance contribute to a fruitful learning environment. Moreover, online learning was particularly arduous for those studying courses requiring in-person participation (eg medicine). Most institutions struggled during the global shift to online teaching. Accordingly, teaching was briefly paused in numerous schools. This disruption (in conjunction with the un-

familiarity of online assessments) led to poor performance for many. Online assessments were an alien concept for students and teachers alike. The issue of unfamiliarity intensified the general anxiety regarding examinations. Numerous students did not fare as well as hoped due to this.

Being an international student, I lost access to my university's facilities (eg the library). Many required books and materials were unavailable because I was in a different country. Additionally, during examination periods I required a quiet study space. Finding silence in a full house proved challenging. Being unable to participate in societies and clubs was also disappointing. Joining

societies and clubs is pivotal. These activities expand one's horizons, encouraging non-traditional learning. These also cultivate diverse interests, promoting self-development. Losing access to such amenities was another shortcoming of online education. Finally, separation from peers added to the regrets of remote education. Socialisation is a significant aspect of the traditional school experience. Being unable to be amongst peers dulled the pleasures of student life.

Admittedly, some sacrifices mentioned are trivial compared to the ordeal other students endured. Those unable to return home confronted living alone for multiple months. Many international students faced lockdown in their student accommodation-

tion's constrained spaces. However, lockdown was graver for students who did not reside in communal accommodations.

Such students had minimal contact with the outside world due to complete isolation.

Year 2020's graduating classes also experienced the blow of accepting they could not celebrate graduating. The inability to commemorate special occasions eliminated the joy of reaching milestones. Similarly, the inability to bid farewell to teachers, classmates, and friends was another disappointing reality for 2020's graduates.

COVID-19 has been taxing to navigate. Its abruptness was trying for most. However, through its challenges, COVID-19 helped humanity build resilience. It taught valuable lessons due to the hardships it caused. Had life continued 'normally', these lessons would not have been learnt. As a student, COVID-19 interrupted various aspects of my life. However, it also taught me to adapt to unfamiliar circumstances. I am certain this skill will serve me in the future.

Due to COVID-19's consequences, we have persevered in the trials of adversity. We may collectively desire to return to 'normal', but we must acknowledge that we are headed towards a better 'normal'. Indeed, COVID-19 has altered the course of most lives. Post-pandemic life may be different, but perhaps it is for the best.

Mezoon Zakiuddin
Via email

Royal Hospital launches 3D printing service

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Represented by the National Heart Centre, The Royal Hospital launched a 3D printing service to serve paediatric heart surgery patients on Thursday. The service is the first of its kind in the sultanate.

Dr Alaa Hassan al Lawati, head of Cardiac Surgery Department of the National Heart Centre at Royal Hospi-

tal, told Oman News Agency that the introduction of the service is aimed at raising the level of diagnosis of heart diseases, especially complex ones that may require multi-stage plan.

The service will also help improve accuracy and safety of surgery for heart diseases, which constitute a significant percentage of the total number of patients in any society.

Omani banks set to benefit from improved conditions

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Omani banks' reasonable credit fundamentals and improved operating conditions will support lending growth and profitability in 2023, according to global credit rating agency Fitch Ratings.

In a new report released on Thursday, Fitch noted that Omani banks emerged from the Covid-19 pandemic with reasonable credit fundamentals which place the sector in a good position for improving profitability in 2023.

Fitch said that Oman's high oil revenues will continue to support economic activity and drive business generation for the sultanate's banks. The rating agency expects a credit growth of 4.0 per cent in 2023, underpinned by high oil prices, healthy economic growth, a low inflationary environment and positive employment prospects.

Fitch revised the outlook on Omani banks' operating environment factor score to 'positive' from 'stable' to reflect improved operating conditions, as well as the recent revision of the outlook on the sultanate's sovereign rating to 'positive' from 'stable'.

'Omani banks are highly exposed to the sovereign through lending to government and government-related entities (GREs), holdings of Omani government securities, and high reliance on government and GRE deposits. Exposure to the sovereign also considers banks' exposures to public-sector employees through their retail loan books,' Fitch said.

Fitch, however, noted that it continues to expect contingent asset quality risks for the Omani



Fitch Ratings expects a credit growth of 4.0 per cent in 2023 in Oman (Muscat Daily)

banks in 2023.

The rating agency said, 'These [risks] could arise from the high stock of restructured loans (11 per cent of sector loans at end-2022) and high exposure to vulnerable sectors, particularly real-estate and construction. However, banks' pre-impairment profitability provides them with reasonable buffers to absorb shocks through the income statement without hitting capital.'

Overall, Fitch believes any asset quality deterioration will be contained and manageable at banks' current rating levels.

Fitch said that the high energy prices of 2022 and 2023 have benefited Oman's economic prospects, supporting its external and domestic finances. The rating agency expects oil prices

to fall and to average US\$85 per barrel in 2023, which remains above Oman's fiscal break-even oil price for the year.

Another global rating agency, Moody's, recently upgraded the long-term local and foreign currency deposit ratings of seven Omani banks: Bank Muscat, HSBC Bank Oman, BankDhofar, National Bank of Oman, Sohar International Bank, Oman Arab Bank and Bank Nizwa. Moody's maintained a developing outlook on the long-term deposit ratings of HSBC Bank Oman and a positive outlook on the long-term deposit ratings of the other six Omani banks.

Moody's rating actions on the Omani banks followed the upgrade of the Government of Oman's issuer ratings to Ba2

from Ba3, and outlook maintained positive.

Total net profits of the banks listed on Muscat Stock Exchange grew by 26.2 per cent to RO118.5mn during the first quarter of 2023 compared to RO93.8mn in the same period of last year. The quarterly financial results announced by the banks on the Muscat Stock Exchange indicated an increase in the profits of all Omani banks.

Omani banks witnessed growth in most of their financial indicators in the first quarter of 2023. The stock market data indicated that the total assets of the eight banks listed on the Muscat Stock Exchange increased to RO37.6bn as of March 31, 2023 from RO36.1bn a year ago, recording a year-on-year increase of 4 per cent.

Oman Cement appoints Zhu Yaping as new CEO

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman Cement Company's board of directors approved the appointment of Zhu Yaping as the new chief executive officer of the company with immediate effect.

Yaping's appointment follows the retirement of Salim Abdullah al Hajri as the CEO of the company, Oman Cement said in a disclosure submitted to the Muscat Stock Exchange.

Yaping is a senior executive from Oman Cement's majority shareholder Huaxin Cement Company. In April 2023, China-based Huaxin Cement completed the acquisition of a majority 59.58 per cent stake in Oman Cement.

According to Oman Cement, Yaping is a highly experienced professional in the cement in-



dustry with more than 30 years of experience and a distinguished academic background. He holds a Master of Science in Control Theory and Engineering from China's Wuhan University of Technology, as well as a Bachelor of Science in Electrical Engineering from Nanjing Aeronautics Institute.

Oman Cement said, 'Yaping has been actively contributed to the cement industry and has held various management positions, including corporate maintenance manager and general

manager of Huaxin Maintenance Company. Yaping has a proven track record of increasing revenue, implementing standard maintenance systems, and driving operational excellence.'

Prior to his appointment as the CEO of Oman Cement, Yaping served as the head of cement industrial performance at Huaxin Cement, where he focused on building an industrial performance driving and supporting system, Oman Cement added.

Abu Dhabi tops agencies' GCC sovereign credit ratings

Dubai, UAE - The UAE capital Abu Dhabi is the highest-rated sovereign in the GCC region, according to the three major global credit rating agencies - Fitch Ratings, Moody's and S&P Global Ratings.

Arabian Gulf Business Insight (AGBI) published the findings by the three leading global rating agencies on the sovereign wealth funds (SWF) of the GCC countries.

All three ratings agencies use similar systems, although there are differences in the way their ratings are conveyed. In the Gulf, S&P is consistently more bearish and does not rate the United

Arab Emirates at all.

S&P rates Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Oman below its two peers, although it has positive outlooks for Bahrain and Oman. Fitch, meanwhile, is a notch more positive on Kuwait.

A sovereign credit rating is an assessment of a country's creditworthiness. It is applied to all bonds issued by a government. The ratings are important guides to institutional investors around the world who use them as benchmarks. Many pension funds, for example, are limited by their statutes to investing only in investment grade credits. A rating can move markets. The

outlooks attached to the ratings are also important because they indicate a likely re-rating.

AGBI reveals that Abu Dhabi ranks as the highest-rated sovereign across the three ratings agencies. Moody's says its Aa2 rating is underpinned by Abu Dhabi's strong balance sheet and its net creditor position. Similarly, Fitch's AA rating reflects Abu Dhabi's high GDP per capita and strong fiscal and external metrics.

Earlier this month, Moody's upgraded Saudi Arabia's outlook to positive on the back of broad-based structural reforms and investments in a range of diversification projects.

ECB vows to win inflation fight on 25th anniversary

Frankfurt, Germany - European Central Bank president Christine Lagarde pledged to reduce high inflation in the eurozone as the institution that safeguards the euro marked its 25th anniversary last week.

"For the ECB, our immediate and overriding priority is to bring inflation back down to our two per cent medium-term target in a timely manner," Lagarde told around 200 guests at an event to mark the occasion.

"And we will do so," she said, while warning that "there will be more challenges ahead which the ECB will need to address. We must continue to provide stability in a world that is anything but stable".

The ECB laid out a blue carpet for the birthday party at its imposing steel-and-glass tower in Frankfurt, Germany's financial capital.

The event featured renditions of music by French composer Claude Debussy and a mango-flavoured cake cut by Lagarde and two of her predecessors, Jean-Claude Trichet and Mario Draghi.

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz was also among the guests.

"Last year we have seen the highest inflation rates since the creation of the euro. The consequences are being felt by citizens all over Europe," Scholz said.

"It is good to know that when we are celebrating this special occasion here tonight, the ECB is



Christine Lagarde

actively fighting inflation."

Inflation in the eurozone surged to record highs over the past year as Russia's invasion of Ukraine drove up energy prices, and as the recovery from the Covid pandemic caused widespread supply chain woes.

The closely watched indicator stood at seven percent in April - down from a peak of 10.6 per cent in October but still well above the ECB's two-per cent target. The ECB came into being in 1998, a few months before the introduction of the euro the following year.

Since the single currency was established, the eurozone's GDP per capita has more than doubled and unemployment has fallen to record lows.

And despite recent highs, inflation has averaged 2.05 per cent over the ECB's quarter of a century in existence - not far off the central bank's target.

AFP

Biden 'hopeful' of imminent US debt deal

Washington, US - President Joe Biden said Friday that Democratic and Republican negotiators were on the verge of resolving a debt ceiling standoff, as the deadline for a potentially catastrophic US default was pushed back to June 5.

"It's very close and I'm optimistic," Biden told reporters at the White House. "I'm hopeful we'll know by tonight whether we're going to be able to have a deal."

Although there was no indication of an imminent public announcement, it was the strongest sign yet that the drama in Washington might end, allowing the government to borrow and avoid a default that would likely trigger a recession and send shockwaves through the global economy.

Earlier, Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said the dreaded X-date, when the government runs out of money unless it can borrow, will now be June 5, not June



US President Joe Biden speaks with reporters before departing from the White House on Marine One on Friday in Washington, DC (AFP)

1. Yellen, however, warned that the deadline extension does not change the urgency.

"Waiting until the last minute to suspend or increase the debt limit can cause serious harm to business and consumer confidence, raise short-term borrowing costs for taxpayers, and negatively impact the credit rating of the United States," she said in a letter to the Republican

leader of the House of Representatives, Speaker Kevin McCarthy.

According to unconfirmed US media reports, the deal taking shape would include an agreement to extend the government's borrowing authority for two years, meaning no repeat of the current drama before the 2024 presidential election.

Democrats, however, would have to offer concessions on Re-

publican demands for sweeping spending limits on social safety and other domestic programs.

McCarthy told reporters that negotiators had "made progress" but added: "Nothing is agreed to until it's all agreed to."

A sign of how difficult it may be to nail down a deal revolved around a Republican demand that those applying for benefits like food assistance work for them.

White House spokesman Andrew Bates asserted that Republicans were willing to put at risk "over eight million jobs unless they can take food out of the mouths of hungry Americans."

IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva cited new data that she said showed the "US economy has proven resilient," but urged a "speedy resolution" to avoid the first default in the country's history.

"We think of the US Treasury market as an anchor for the global financial system, and this

anchor needs to hold," she said.

Hostage-taking accusation

With the country getting a three-day Memorial Day holiday weekend, members of Congress were leaving Washington on a 10-day recess. Even Biden - to the consternation of some in his own party - headed to his Camp David retreat, then his home in Delaware.

Yet Wally Adeyemo, the deputy Treasury secretary, told CNN that both Biden and McCarthy were focused on avoiding catastrophe.

"The president decided, the speaker has said it, and we have to get something done before June," Adeyemo said. "The president is committed to making sure that we have good faith negotiations with the Republicans to reach a deal, because the alternative is catastrophic for all Americans."

AFP

US warned debt crisis could hit credit rating

Washington, US - Ratings agency Fitch put the United States on notice that its perfect credit rating could be jeopardised if the White House and Republican opposition fail to overcome their impasse on raising the nation's borrowing limit, a week before a key deadline.

Fitch placed the country's AAA-ranked credit on "rating watch negative" - a move it said "reflects increased political par-

tisanship that is hindering reaching a resolution to raise or suspend the debt limit" before June 1.

That is the "X-date" when the US Treasury Department says that - short of an agreement - the government will run out of money, triggering a default with likely devastating economic consequences for the United States and potentially worldwide.

"Fitch still expects a resolution to the debt limit before the X-date," Fitch said in a statement. "However, we believe risks have risen that the debt limit will not be raised or suspended before the X-date and consequently that the government could begin to miss payments on some of its obligations."

The Treasury stressed that Fitch's move should serve as a

wakeup call.

"Tonight's warning underscores the need for swift bipartisan action by Congress to raise or suspend the debt limit and avoid a manufactured crisis for our economy," Treasury spokesperson Lily Adams said in a statement.

And the White House urged Republicans to come to their senses.

"This is one more piece of ev-

idence that default is not an option and all responsible lawmakers understand that," it said in a statement. "It reinforces the need for Congress to quickly pass a reasonable, bipartisan agreement to prevent default."

Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen proposed to freeze government spending at current levels, something that she said would reduce the deficit by US\$1tn.

Maserati Grecale GT proven to be extraordinary

With its sleek design, powerful engine, and luxurious features, the Grecale GT, the Maserati Grecale GT has proven to be an extraordinary everyday SUV.

Setting a new standard in the luxury SUV segment, the vehicle embodies the perfect blend of sportiness and elegance, the company stated. Designed to deliver an exceptional driving experience, this SUV is a testament to Maserati's commitment to craftsmanship and performance, it added.

Equipped with a dynamic four-cylinder 300hp mild hybrid engine and developed at the renowned Maserati Innovation Lab in Modena, the Maserati Grecale GT showcases the brand's commitment to innovation and performance.

With its advanced suspension system and lightweight construction, which incorporates aluminium and carbon fibre, the Grecale GT takes driving exhilaration to new heights. Whether navigating sharp curves or cruising on straightaways, every twist and turn becomes a thrilling ad-



venture as the Grecale GT hugs the road with precision and confidence. Its superb handling and responsiveness allow drivers to truly experience the joy of com-

manding this exceptional SUV. The exterior design of the Grecale GT embodies the perfect fusion of athleticism and sophistication. From the front, its com-

manding presence is accentuated by the iconic Maserati grille, exuding confidence and power. The profile showcases a seamless interplay between sleek lines

and muscular contours, reflecting the vehicle's dynamic character. The rear features distinctive taillights, complementing the sporty aesthetics of the Grecale GT. Step inside the Grecale GT, and you'll be greeted by a meticulously crafted interior that exudes luxury and refinement. The cabin showcases a harmonious combination of high-quality materials, exquisite finishes, and attention to detail. The ergonomic seats provide unmatched comfort, enveloping occupants in a world of luxury. The GT badge is a mark of distinction, signifying the pinnacle of Maserati's performance-oriented SUV lineup.

In terms of technology, the Grecale GT boasts an array of innovative features. The Maserati intelligent assistant multimedia system, the latest infotainment options, and the advanced driver-assistance systems enhance the driving experience, providing convenience, connectivity, and safety. The optional heads-up display further elevates the driving dynamics, projecting essential information onto the windshield for easy access.

In conclusion, the Maserati Grecale GT is an SUV that delivers an exhilarating and sophisticated driving experience. Its bold exterior design, luxurious interior comfort, advanced technology, and superior driving performance make it a standout in its class. Maserati has once again set a new standard for excellence, creating an SUV that embodies the essence of Italian craftsmanship and automotive passion. The Grecale GT is a testament to Maserati's commitment to delivering thrilling and refined vehicles that captivate the most discerning drivers.



ISF organises annual science fiesta

The Indian Science Forum's annual science fiesta brought together hundreds of students from various Indian schools located in different parts of Oman to compete for a rolling trophy.

The forum functioning under the Indian Social Club organised the Science Fiesta 2023 under the theme 'India's Space Journey: Moon, Mars and Beyond'.

Indian School al Ghubrah walked away with the rolling trophy this year, a press release said.

On the first day of the event, students participated in various competitions such as debates for juniors and seniors, on the spot projects, photography contest,

digital symposium and a science exhibition conducted by the forum.

"The two day annual science fiesta has thrown light to the amazing student talents in Oman," said ISF coordinator Dr J Retnakumar. "I was so delighted to see the excitement, enthusiasm, optimism and participative spirit of students that was ably supported by parents, teachers, and principals of respective Indian schools in Oman. We shall conduct more competitions in the days ahead," he added.

H E Amit Narang, Indian Ambassador to Oman, found the exhibition of scientific projects by

the students impressive.

The exhibition was held at the Innovation Centre at National University for Science and Technology.

On behalf of the forum, Dr Retnakumar presented the ISF APJ Abdul Kalam Award to Padma Shri award winner Dr Mylswamy Annadurai.

Dr Annadurai, a former director of India's space agency ISRO - is popularly known as the Moon Man of India. He had planned from scratch and successfully executed internationally reputed projects like Chandrayaan-1 and Mangalyaan.

In his keynote address, Dr

Annadurai said he was surprised by the award but he said it goes on to prove that when you do your work well the society will appreciate the achievement and looked forward to the students achieving them in the future.

"I was impressed how well the students were prepared for any question on their projects. I asked one of the students why there was no school complex in his space colony in Moon and Mars. He took a few seconds and bounced back, 'By then we would be using android for education. The students have arrived,'" said Dr Annadurai.

ISWK students, teacher visit India's premier science centre

Shashwat Singh of Class IX-C and Parth Devaprasad Nayak of Class VII- D from the Indian School Al Wadi Al Kabir (ISWK) were taken on an educational tour to the Aryabhata Research Institute of Observational Sciences (ARIES), located in Nainital, in the northern Indian state Uttarakhand.

In January, both the students had enrolled for the National Astronomy Challenge, organised by STEM and SPACE. And both the students secured Global Rank 1 in the exam. For this achievement, both of them were felicitated at the Indian Habitat Centre in India's capital New Delhi.

Apart from the felicitation, they also got the chance to interact with various scientists and professors of Delhi University, a release from the school said.

The next day, the students were taken on a long road trip to the Aryabhata Research Institute of Observational Sciences (ARIES) in Nainital - the city of lakes. The students got the opportunity to meet various astronomers and also to observe the Asia's largest Optical Tele-



scope located at Devasthal, 60km from Nainital.

"This was the first time when students were given the opportunity to visit the Devasthal campus of ARIES. Though the weather was slightly unfavourable, which hampered the observation process; it was a hands-on experience of using a telescope. Overall, it was a truly

exciting and memorable journey for the students," the school stated.

"We feel honoured to get this rare opportunity to visit the ARIES observatory which allowed us to gain a lot of knowledge and experience related to observational astronomy," said Shashwat, Parth and the teacher-in-charge Shruti Mukundan.



ahlibank rewards top performers in retail banking for Q1 achievements

As a follow-up to the recent announcement of its first quarter financial results, ahlibank hosted a retail meeting to share details of its exceptional performance in the market, apprise its stakeholders and beneficiaries of proposed plans, and reward top achievers in the retail banking team.

With an impressive performance during the first three months of 2023, ahlibank has well demonstrated its strategic

role in driving Oman's economic growth. Its well-honed policies and directives have helped it to substantially boost its total assets, customer deposits, and operating income with significant contributions from retail banking.

Shedding the spotlight on the impressive figures and the factors that helped augment this growth, Muneer al Balushi, AGM - head of Retail Distribution, ahlibank, said, "This achievement is thanks

to the efforts put in by every team member. The expertise and experience of our professional bankers, and the team under them, helped shore up our financial status. As a Bank, we believe innovation is the key to progress, and we have proven over the years that the right planning and flawless execution are the premises for better prospects.

"I would also like to take this opportunity to congratulate our

top performers, who have stood by the Bank as strong pillars, working steadfastly to ensure all round success and prosperity. Your resilience and agility to adapt to the changing global business environment have worked as leverage in our growth trajectory," he added.

The meeting also brought to the fore some of the salient features of ahlibank's retail operations, which has grown in

strength and size to deliver multifaceted financial solutions, which are tailored to individual needs. With a customer-centric approach to business, it has established its ability to meet customer needs with personalised support of relationship managers.

And with 'ahliconnect', which is a 24/7 service centre aimed at enhancing customers' banking experience, is another venture in

this direction. It continues to expand its operations and network to ensure easy and convenient banking services throughout its branches.

The meeting progressed with interactive discussions with representatives of teams from product, marketing, branch support, branch transformation, customer management, customer experience, e-channels, and operations. Customer feedback and the

measures and ways to ensure customer delight were deliberated, and the need to continue innovating and developing products to meet the evolving customer needs was underscored.

The meeting concluded with a formal ceremony to honour the top achievers of the retail banking team for their contribution to the growth of the bank's portfolio and their commitment to achieving its vision.

Sayyid Theyazin attends ABA Oman International School graduation ceremony

ABA Oman International School celebrated the Class of 2023 graduation under the auspices of H H Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham bin Tarik al Said. This highly anticipated event commemorated the achievements and academic journey of ABA's 34th cohort of graduates, marking a significant milestone in their lives.

H H Sayyid Theyazin presented the coveted International Baccalaureate Diploma to the graduates, who have demonstrated remarkable dedication and perseverance throughout their educational journey.

ABA Board Chair, Bikram Monga, complimented the graduates on successfully completing the rigorous IB programme. Monga exhorted the graduates to take Oman's diversity to the world. "You depart as Ambassadors of this wonderful country to the world. Your actions, your growth, your impact on the world should resonate both the education you gained and what Oman and ABA have moulded you to become."

Addressing the cohort, Craig Williamson, ABA Head of School encouraged the graduates to build upon this accomplishment and leverage their talents and abilities for the greater good. Williamson said, "success is not a limited resource; it multiplies



when we ensure that everyone has what they need to thrive."

Sharing words of wisdom and encouragement with the graduating class, high school principal and assistant head of school Simon Walker said, "Graduation is not only a celebration of the achievements of the graduating class, it is also recognition of the support and commitment given by families and teachers. The Class of 2023 has 27 different nationalities represented and we encourage every student to go out into the world and make a

positive difference as Global Citizens. We are honoured that this day has been made even more memorable and historical by the presence of His Highness Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said."

The Class of 2023 was commended for their exceptional performances throughout the year. The valedictorians Noorah Husband and Ayaan Nadamal stated, "These years at ABA were some of the most crucial stepping stones in our academic journey. They have provided us with a solid foundation and prepared us

for the challenges that lie ahead."

Anja Van Der Merwe was the recipient of the International Understanding Award for furthering the cause of internationalism in the community and beyond, while the High School Philippa Leggate Award for Citizenship was presented to Sarah Altaee for her valuable contribution to the ABA community.

Other notable awards, including The Duke of Edinburgh International Award - Gold was presented to Alix Dupont, Maelle Storder, Sam Anthony, Georgia

Isles and Ben Storer. Georgia Isles also received the Individual Sports Athlete of the Year award, while Daniel Helou and Gabriella Cooper received the overall Athlete of the Year awards for their exceptional performance during MESAC and other sports events.

Guy Essex, Assistant High School Principal said, "We are confident that this cohort of future leaders and innovators will continue to inspire, empower and uphold The ABA Way, as they explore ways to make a positive impact in the world."

Through the coordinated efforts and guidance of University Counsellor, Jinane Traboulsi Helou, and IB Diploma Coordinator, Samantha Cole, ABA graduates have been accepted into leading universities around the world, illustrating the value globally of the gold standard IB qualification. Stanford University, GeorgiaTech, Georgetown University, University of Pennsylvania, UCL, Imperial College London, University of Toronto, Waterloo University, McGill University, University of Melbourne,

Trinity College Dublin, Ecole Polytechnique Paris and the University of Groningen, are some of the prestigious universities where ABA graduates will be taking their educational journey forward in various fields of study such as Neuroscience, Biomedical Engineering, International Business, Finance, Law, Computer Science, Psychology, and Architecture, to name a few.

ABA Oman International School is the leading, not-for-profit, IB Continuum School in Muscat, Oman.

OMPay participates in Seamless Middle East event

OMPay, Oman's emerging mobile payment solutions provider, participated in Seamless Middle East 2023 for a collaboration with Thunes, a cross-border payment infrastructure platform, to enable international payments solutions.

This integration will lead to building a better payment experience for OMPay's users and merchants, where they will be able to send cross-border payments to 20 countries globally, instantly. This event was held on May 23-24 at the Dubai World Trade Center.

For the past 23 years, Seamless Middle East 2023 has been a meeting place for industry professionals across various sectors such as banking, retail, e-commerce, fintech, and IT-enabled services. The two-day conference attracted thousands of tech leaders, investors, innovators, startups and over 500 international speakers who share groundbreaking ideas, latest



market trends, and cutting-edge technologies.

"OMPay is a smart payment solution provider and this collaboration with Thunes will expand our reach and enable our customers to make payments to top-20 destinations around the world - from India and Bangladesh, to Kenya and Tanzania, and beyond," said OMPay CEO Abdulaziz al Rawahi.

"Oman is witnessing a remarkable surge in the adoption of digital payments and the demand

for innovative payment solutions is very high. As a company with extensive experience in partnering with mobile wallets and delivering exceptional mobile-first experiences, Thunes is happy to enable a transparent and frictionless payment experience for OMPay users. We are excited to see how this partnership develops and are happy to support OMPay's ambitions to become Oman's leading digital wallet," said Simon Nelson, senior vice president for MENA, Thunes.

'Bank Muscat's corporate branches serving govt, corporate institutions'

Bank Muscat, the leading financial service provider in Oman, is consistently demonstrating its success in achieving new milestones by providing corporate banking services through its dedicated corporate banking branches at CBD, Al Nahdha Towers, Sohar and Salalah.

The locations of these branches were chosen carefully so that they are close to business hubs, industrial areas and free zones. Bank Muscat's branches are characterized by spacious and comfortable design and layout. The corporate branches are manned by well qualified and experienced Omani cadres and provide financial and advisory services which contribute to the development of business for these institutions and companies.

The corporate branches of Bank Muscat offers a comprehensive suite of services that caters to the diverse needs of corporate and government institutions. These services encom-



pass a wide spectrum of banking solutions including account opening, account management, remittance transactions, cash services including bulk cash, trade finance and specialised advisory services. The specialized teams in Bank Muscat's corporate branches possess extensive expertise and are well versed in the intricacies of corporate and government transactions, ensuring prompt service with attention to detail. Bank Muscat's corporate branches are unwavering in their commitment to deliver an

unparalleled customer experience and empower businesses at every stage.

The bank's corporate and institutional banking has achieved many positive results through the various services provided in branches, including those related to opening of new accounts, providing digital solutions, processing financial transactions in addition to global trade services. The bank is especially proud that it has played a key role in the successes recorded in a variety of sectors such as oil and gas, en-

ergy, water, mining, land transport, seaports, airports, integrated tourism projects, real estate development, telecommunications, and the development of free zones and other industrial projects.

Over the past years, Bank Muscat has enjoyed close relations with many institutions and companies as it offers a wide range of banking products and services, including loans for project financing, debt financing through direct loans and syndicated loans.

It also offers corporate loans and capital financing to expand the project as well as bid bonds, performance bonds, advance payment bonds, financial bonds, and performance guarantee bonds. The bank also provides letter of credit services for the purchase of equipment and machinery, standby letters of credit, and other services and products provided to the various corporate sector.

Bank Nizwa CEO speaks on sustainable future

Bank Nizwa's CEO, Khalid al Kayed, recently participated in the MENA BFSI Leaders Conclave 2023, held at the Dusit Thani in Dubai.

The highly anticipated event brought together top executives and influential individuals from the MENA region's banking, financial services and insurance industries (BFSI). The event aimed to address solutions and challenges related to building a more inclusive, sustainable and collaborative world.

As part of the panel discussion titled 'Embracing the demand to elevate and set apart for a more inclusive, sustainable and collaborative world', Kayed shared his insights on various topics.

He spoke on the evolving role of financial services in the economy and society, leading the way to foresee challenges, macro



trends that matter and their impact in a post-COVID-19 world, the significance of developing and implementing strategies that address regulatory reforms, technological complexity, competitive dynamics and shift towards a higher bottom line, refocusing on resilience for a competitive advantage in a radically uncertain

world, and embracing Fintech through innovative solutions, said a press release.

The CEO's participation in the panel discussion demonstrated his expertise and commitment to driving positive change in the BFSI sector.

Speaking on the significance of the event, Kayed said, "As a participant in the MENA BFSI Leaders

Conclave 2023, I am proud to have been part of a significant dialogue that will undoubtedly shape the future of the BFSI sector in the MENA region. The event's emphasis on embracing the demand for inclusivity, sustainability and collaboration was particularly enlightening."

Malabar Gold & Diamonds organises 'Artistry Show' to lure jewellery lovers

Malabar Gold & Diamonds, the sixth largest jewellery retailer globally with an extensive retail network of over 315 showrooms has launched the latest edition of the Artistry Show - a branded jewellery exhibition, which began at Malabar Gold & Diamonds showroom at West Gate Mall in Ruwi on Thursday.

The Artistry Show, which will continue till June 3, presents jewellery lovers with an opportunity to witness the finest in jewellery craftsmanship from the brand in addition to a superior shopping experience.

From Malabar Gold & Diamonds' exclusive brands such as Mine, Era, Viraa, Ethnix, Precia and Divine, the designs which

are featured in the Artistry Show have been handpicked from all over the world, offering a highly exclusive visual treat for the connoisseurs of fine art.

"Artistry is an amassment of the finest jewellery that Malabar Gold & Diamonds has to offer. Each piece is a work of art and is sure to excite jewellery lovers who prefer exclusivity in their adornments," said Najeeb K, regional head - Oman, Malabar Gold & Diamonds.

"The jewellery showcased in the exhibition is available across gold, diamond and precious gems, ensuring that there is something to cater to the varying preferences of our immense customer base. I urge all jewellery lovers to visit our showroom in Ruwi, which is the

largest jewellery store in Oman and witness the spectacle that we have prepared."

As an added incentive, Malabar Gold & Diamonds is also offering free gold coins on diamond and precious gem jewellery purchases. Customers are eligible for 1gm gold coin on diamond and precious gem jewellery purchase worth RO500 and 1/2 gm gold coins for purchase worth RO300.

Spread across 4000sqft, the showroom of Malabar Gold & Diamonds in West Gate Mall, Ruwi, offers a magnificent shopping area, displaying thousands of exquisite jewellery from over 20 countries. The showroom also features a luxurious customer lounge and valet parking facility.

UN backs Sudan envoy as army seeks to bolster ranks

New York, US - United Nations chief Antonio Guterres said he was ‘shocked’ by a letter from Sudanese army chief Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, reportedly requesting the replacement of special envoy Volker Perthes amid a brutal war with paramilitaries.

Guterres ‘is proud of the work done by Volker Perthes and reaffirms his full confidence in his Special Representative’, a statement from UN spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said late on Friday. “The Secretary-Gen-

eral is shocked by the letter he received from General Al-Burhan,” currently at war with his former deputy Mohamed Hamdan Daglo, who commands the powerful paramilitary Rapid Support Forces.

The rival forces are currently in the fifth day of a one-week ceasefire brokered by the US and Saudi Arabia, during which they have repeatedly accused each other of truce violations.

Neither the army nor the UN have released official copies of Burhan’s letter, which reportedly



Vendors sells petrol to vehicles in Khartoum on Saturday, five days into a one-week ceasefire (AFP)

requested the dismissal of Perthes as Guterres’ envoy to Sudan.

It is the latest in a series of moves by Burhan, who last week officially sacked Daglo as his deputy in the ruling sovereign council, pooled hardline military supporters into his inner circle and is now seeking to reinforce army ranks.

Sudan’s defence ministry on Friday called on ‘army pensioners...as well as all those capable of bearing arms’ to head to their nearest military command unit and ‘arm themselves in order to protect themselves’, their families and their neighbours.

A statement later in the day walked back the call to just army ‘reservists’ and ‘pensioners’.

Perthes and the UN mission in Sudan have been the target of several protests by thousands of military and Islamist supporters who have repeatedly accused Perthes of ‘foreign intervention’ and demanded his dismissal.

Similar protests have taken place in the eastern city of Port Sudan since the war started on April 15.

The fighting across Sudan has killed more than 1,800 people, according to the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project.

The United Nations says more than a million people have been displaced within Sudan, in addition to 300,000 who have fled to neighbouring countries.

Perthes is currently in New York, where he briefed the Security Council on the situation in Sudan earlier this week.

AFP



Residents hang from the back of a pick-up truck while transporting their belongings as they reach a police checkpoint outside Mangu, near Jos in the Plateau State in Nigeria, on May 20, after fleeing unrest in central Nigeria (AFP)

After mass killings, thousands in need of aid in central Nigeria

Jos, Nigeria - Calls for aid increased on Friday for thousands of people displaced by violence that erupted two weeks ago in central Nigeria’s Plateau State, killing at least 170 according to a local official.

Police gave a lower death toll of 87 and said the situation was calm, in response to reports that tensions remained high after the initial attack on May 15.

The crisis is just one of the many security challenges facing President-elect Bola Tinubu who takes the helm of Africa’s most populous nation on Monday.

It remains unclear what triggered the attacks in Plateau’s Mangu district, but tit-for-tat killings between herders and farmers often spiral into village raids by heavily armed gangs.

The National Emergency Management Agency said last

Affected people, especially women and children, are traumatised and have immediate humanitarian needs such as food, water and sanitation kits

MATTHIAS SCHMALE

week that more than 3,600 people were displaced, over 720 houses partially or completely destroyed and at least 216 people had been injured.

On Friday, the Nigerian Red Cross said that at least 1,000 households have fled from their villages.

Yohanna Danladi, local Red Cross representative in Plateau State, said that some areas ‘have not received any support from the government so far, they are just helped by relatives’.

After a visit to the area, the

UN chief in Nigeria Matthias Schmale said that ‘affected people and especially women and children are both traumatised and have immediate humanitarian needs such as food, water and dignity/sanitation kits’.

“While hoping the violence will now end quickly, I urge the concerned authorities to move swiftly to address immediate needs,” Schmale told AFP in an email.

Since the initial attack, ‘almost every day, we still record dead bodies’, Mangu district chairman

Daput Minister Daniel told AFP.

“I cannot give you specific numbers because they increase on daily basis,” he said, adding that as of Thursday ‘the number was above 170’.

Speaking to AFP on Friday, police spokesman Alfred Alabo could not confirm that death toll.

Peter Lagai and Lydia John Hirse were among those who survived and are now sheltering at a school with others.

When the attackers stormed his village of Kubat, Lagai said he ran into hiding.

“We suddenly heard gunshots... we were so worried,” he told AFP, adding that his brother Matthew was shot. “He died instantly. Some of us sustained injuries, the house was burnt down.”

AFP

US says issued nearly 30,000 visas for Cubans this year

Havana, Cuba - The United States has issued nearly 30,000 visas to Cuban nationals since January under new entry rules aimed at braking illegal migration, deputy ambassador to Havana Benjamin Ziff told AFP on Friday.

Last year, some 300,000 Cubans made their way illegally to the United States.

In January, the US embassy in Havana resumed the issuing of visas for Cubans, four years after the mission was closed amid a series of mysterious ‘sonic attacks’ on diplomatic staff.

Ziff would not say how many Cubans have applied for visas to date.

But he said the issuing of tourism and business visas remained on hold for now.

“I have less than a third of the staff that I had five or six years ago in the consulate section. Until I have a full staff, I can’t do a full service,” Ziff said.

“The Cuban government is not allowing us to get houses for our incoming consuls so we can’t have more staff for consulate operations. And not allowing us to import materials to repair the embassy.

“It is actually more a logistical obstacle more than a policy obstacle,” the envoy said.



People queue at the US embassy in Havana, on Friday (AFP)

I have less than a third of the staff that I had five or six years ago in the consulate section. Until I have a full staff, I can’t do a full service

BENJAMIN ZIFF

Former US president Donald Trump had put an end to a policy of openness towards Cuba initiated by his predecessor Barack Obama.

When Joe Biden took office in

early 2021, he promised to review US policy toward Cuba. But his policies hardened following anti-government protests on the island in July 2021 and a subsequent crackdown on dissent.

Washington and Havana last year resumed talks on migration issues amid a steep rise in the number of Cubans fleeing the island in deep economic crisis.

Ziff said the number of illegal migrants making their way to Florida from Cuba has dropped in the last five months, from ‘dozens a day’ to ‘dozens a week’.

And he denied repeated accusations from Havana that US sanctions were responsible for the migratory flight.

AFP



Japan Ground Self-Defense Force (JGSDF) battle tanks fire ammunition during a live fire exercise at East Fuji Maneuver Area in Gotemba on Saturday (AFP)

WHO backs farmers to grow food instead of tobacco, especially in Africa

Geneva, Switzerland - The World Health Organization said on Friday it was helping a growing number of farmers turn away from tobacco to help strengthen food security, particularly in Africa.

Ahead of World No Tobacco Day on Wednesday, the WHO said it had teamed up with other United Nations agencies to support farmers wishing to convert from growing tobacco to growing food.

The scheme’s pilot in Kenya has proved successful and now

the UN wants to export it to other countries and continents.

“A record of 349mn people face acute food insecurity and that is up from 135mn in 2019,” Ruediger Krech, the WHO’s director for health promotion, told reporters in Geneva.

“Then we have 124 countries which grow tobacco as a cash crop, covering an estimated 3.2mn hectares of land. Approximately 200,000 hectares of land are cleared every year for tobacco crop growing.”

Beyond its effects on the



WHO’s director for health promotion Ruediger Krech

health of smokers and farmers, tobacco growing poses a problem for food security, according to the WHO.

The UN health agency is concerned that tobacco companies are gaining an increasing foothold in Africa, with a rise of nearly 20 per cent in tobacco plantations across the continent since 2005.

“It is often said that tobacco farming would be so important for economic growth. This is a myth that we urgently need to dispel,” said Krech.

He said it only accounts for more than one per cent of gross domestic product in five countries: Malawi, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Tanzania and North Macedonia.

“So the profits go to the global tobacco companies.”

Dependency ‘trap’

The WHO accuses the tobacco industry of trapping farmers in a ‘cycle of dependency’, giving them little control over product prices and quality.

“They’re trapped. They need

to repay the debt before they can discontinue the work for big tobacco,” said Krech.

Three UN agencies - the WHO, the Food and Agriculture Organization and the World Food Programme - have set up a credit programme to help farmers pay off their tobacco industry debts and change their crop.

The scheme was launched in Migori county in southwest Kenya, where 2,040 farmers have been helped in the first year.

AFP

Belgian aid worker held in Iran returns home

Olivier Vandecasteele was freed in a prisoner exchange

Brussels, Belgium - Belgian aid worker Olivier Vandecasteele, who was detained for almost 15 months in Iran, landed in Belgium late on Friday, according to images broadcast on television, after being freed in a prisoner exchange.

The 42-year-old Belgian was greeted by his parents, sister and other family members on the tarmac of the Melsbroek military base near Brussels following his release on Friday.

The military plane bringing him back from Oman landed shortly after 9:30pm (1930 GMT), according to the images shown on RTL-TVI channel.

Earlier on Friday, Iran freed Vandecasteele in a prisoner exchange for an Iranian diplomat convicted of terrorism.

Iran announced that the freed Iranian is diplomat Assadollah Assadi, who was jailed in Belgium over a 2018 plot to bomb an Iranian opposition rally outside Paris.

Iran's Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian tweeted that Assadi, 'the innocent diplomat of our country... is now on his way back to his homeland and will soon enter our beloved Iran'. Both Belgium and Iran thanked Oman for its role in securing the release.

Belgium has always insisted that Vandecasteele was innocent and his trial rigged.

'We do not abandon anyone'

He was sentenced in January to 40 years in prison and 74 lashes for 'espionage', Tehran's judiciary said at the time.

"Olivier spent 455 days in prison in Tehran in unbearable conditions. Innocent," Belgium's Prime Minister Alexander De Croo said, following news of his release.

"For me, the choice has always been clear. Olivier's life has always come first. It's a responsibility that I take upon myself, that I accept. In Belgium, we do not abandon anyone," he added, without mentioning the prisoner swap.

Last year, Belgium and Iran signed a treaty to enable prisoner swaps.

Wearing a dark suit and trainers, visibly slimmed down but smiling, Vandecasteele emerged from the plane and was hugged at length by his waiting relatives.



Freed Belgian aid worker Olivier Vandecasteele embraces family members at Melsbroek military airport north of Brussels, on Friday (AFP)

For me, the choice has always been clear. Olivier's life has always come first. It's a responsibility that I take upon myself, that I accept.

ALEXANDER DE CROO

He was not expected to make any immediate public statements.

'Fostering climate of impunity'

Critics of the pact have alleged that the prisoner swap deal would only encourage Tehran to take Belgians hostage for use as

bargaining chips to seek the return of agents like Assadi arrested for terror offences in the West.

An exiled Iranian opposition group, the National Council of Resistance in Iran (NCRI), which was the target of the 2018 bomb plot, challenged the treaty in Belgium's constitutional court.

The NCRI reacted furiously to Belgium's decision on Assadi and claimed it violated the court's order that the intended victims of the bomb plot should be consulted before any prisoner exchange took place under the treaty. "The release of the terrorist... is a shameful ransom to terrorism and hostage-taking," the group said.

Amnesty International also said the return of Assadi would foster a climate of impunity.

But De Croo's government said that, to win Vandecasteele's release, they opted for another route: invoking a constitutional clause stipulating that the government, acting under the authority of the king, is in charge of international relations.

That meant that for 'the Iranian opposition... we didn't warn them beforehand', one government official said.

Belgian officials denied that any ransom was paid.

Assadi was an Iranian diplomat based in Vienna, who was arrested after passing explosives to a Belgian-based Iranian couple who were supposed to travel to France to bomb an NCRI rally. He was arrested in Germany as he tried to return to Austria and extradited to Belgium where he did not enjoy diplomatic immunity.

AFP

Ambitious Europe-Mideast road and rail project unveiled in Iraq

Baghdad, Iraq - Iraq on Saturday presented an ambitious plan to turn itself into a regional transportation hub by developing its road and rail infrastructure, linking Europe with the Gulf and other Middle East countries.

Once completed, the US\$17bn project known as the 'Route of Development' would span the length of the country, stretching 1,200km (745 miles) from the northern border with Turkey to the Gulf in the south.

Iraqi Prime Minister Mohamed Shia al-Sudani announced the project during a conference with transport ministry representatives from Iran, Jordan, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria and the United Arab Emirates.

"We see this project as a pillar of a sustainable non-oil economy, a link that serves Iraq's neighbours and the region, and a



Iraqi Prime Minister Mohamed Shia al-Sudani attending a meeting with transport ministry representatives in Baghdad on Saturday (AFP)

contribution to economic integration efforts," Sudani said.

While further discussions are required, any country that wishes 'will be able to carry out part of the project', the Iraqi parliament's transport committee said, adding that the project could be completed in 'three to five years'.

War-ravaged and beset by

rampant corruption, oil-rich Iraq suffers from dilapidated infrastructure. Its roads are in terrible condition and those connecting the capital Baghdad to the north cross areas where Islamic State group remnants continue to carry out sporadic attacks.

AFP

Tunisian guards arrest suspected IS militant

Tunis, Tunisia - Tunisia's national guard on Friday announced the arrest of a suspected Islamic State group member in possession of explosives who was planning 'four simultaneous terrorist operations' in the country.

The suspect was arrested in Tunisia's second city of Sfax on its eastern coast and was believed to have been planning the operations 'in coordination with other persons outside Tunisia', national guard spokesman Houcem Eddine Jebabli told AFP.

He appeared before the counterterrorism court which remanded him in custody, Jebabli said, adding he was 'a follower' of IS, without providing further details.

Tunisia has bolstered security measures since a May 9 attack on a synagogue on the resort island of Djerba killed five people during an annual Jewish pilgrimage.

AFP

Al-Shabaab strikes African Union army base in Somalia

Mogadishu, Somalia - Al-Shabaab fighters raided an African Union military base housing Ugandan troops in Somalia on Friday, triggering a fierce gun battle.

It was not immediately known if there were any casualties in the attack, which was claimed by the Al-Qaeda-linked militant group.

A car laden with explosives was driven into the base in Bulo Marer, 120km (75 miles) southwest of the capital Mogadishu, leading to a gunfight, local residents and a Somali military commander told AFP.

Pro-government forces backed by the AU force known as ATMIS launched an offensive last August against Al-Shabaab, which has been waging an insurgency in the fragile Horn of Africa nation for more than 15 years.

ATMIS said the Bulo Marer

camp came under attack at 5am by Al-Shabaab militants 'using Vehicle Borne Improvised Explosive Devices (VBIEDs) and suicide bombers'. "Reinforcements from ATMIS' Aviation Unit and allies managed to destroy weapons in possession of the withdrawing Al-Shabaab militants," it said in a statement.

The attack targeted Ugandan soldiers stationed in Somalia as part of ATMIS, Uganda Peoples' Defence Forces spokesman Felix Kulayigye said in a statement, adding that the military was 'cross checking' details.

The 20,000-strong ATMIS force has a more offensive remit than its predecessor known as AMISOM. The force is drawn from Uganda, Burundi, Djibouti, Ethiopia and Kenya.

AFP

Erdogan is 'family' in Turkey's conservative heartland Bayburt

Bayburt, Turkey - Old Fiat cars and yellow tulips dot the eastern Turkish town of Bayburt, the heart of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's ultra-loyal conservative base that is ready to extend his two-decade rule to 2028.

Betraying a serene calm hanging over the picturesque province of the same name, Bayburt voters roared into life for Erdogan in the first round of Turkey's presidential election on May 14.

Almost 80 per cent of the electors there plumped for Erdogan, his highest vote share in a single province, helping him win 49.5 per cent of the national ballot and become a strong favourite in Sunday's runoff vote.

"Getting to know the heart of Bayburt is getting to know Turkey," said Orhan Ates, a newly elected MP for Erdogan's ruling Islamic-rooted AKP party in the parallel parliamentary vote.

"Are you ready to re-elect our president?" he asks passers-by, greeting men holding Islamic



Men sit outside a traditional Turkish tea house at Bayburt city centre, north-east Turkey, on May 23 (AFP)

prayer beads with a knowing nod.

A 47-year-old eye doctor, Ates holds impromptu appointments with patients in the street, issuing a prescription on a crumpled piece of paper to one man wearing worn-out shoes.

"I started as a shoe shiner, I became a medicine professor. People see themselves in me, like

we see ourselves in Erdogan," whose family originates from neighbouring Rize province, Ates told AFP. Erdogan 'talks to everyone, not just to the elites', he said.

'Big family'

"We're a big family here and Erdogan is a part of it. He's as solid as our castle," said provincial AKP

official Haci Ali Polat, referring to a centuries-old fortress towering over the town. Residents who spoke to AFP said they stayed faithful to Erdogan because he repelled attacks by foreign powers, just as Bayburt fought Russian invaders in the 19th century.

"We are nationalist and conservative and we love Erdogan," enthused Bedirhan Bayen, a 26-year-old university graduate speaking from his father's shop.

"What people want is a strong leader," he said, admitting he would have liked a 'new face' but judging secular opposition leader Kemal Kilicdaroglu as 'weak'.

Muhammed Emre Teymur works in the construction industry - a sector that enjoyed an unprecedented boom under Erdogan - and refuses to see Turkey's raging economic crisis as a reason to abandon the president. "Erdogan has produced his own ships, his own weapons, his own planes," he said.

AFP

INDIA

Seven CMs skip Niti Aayog meeting

Prime Minister Narendra Modi chaired the 8th governing council meeting of Niti Aayog on Saturday

New Delhi - Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday chaired the eighth governing council meeting of the Niti Aayog.

Themed on 'Viksit Bharat @2047: Role of Team India', the meeting was held at the new Convention Centre in the national capital's Pragati Maidan. As the chairman of NITI Aayog, Modi presided over the meeting, which deliberated on issues related to health, skill development, women empowerment and infrastructure development, 'with an aim to make India a developed nation by 2047'.

Chief Ministers of several States participated in the council meeting that was attended by Home Minister Amit Shah, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman and Defence Minister Rajnath Singh

Chhattisgarh CM Bhupesh Baghel, Andhra Pradesh CM Jagan Mohan Reddy, Jharkhand CM Hemant Soren, Arunachal Pradesh CM Pema Khandu, Maharashtra CM Eknath Shinde were seen at the meeting. "Eight prominent themes will



Union ministers, Lieutenant Governors and CMs of different States attend the 8th Governing Council meeting of Niti Aayog chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, at the new Convention Centre of Pragati Maidan in New Delhi on Saturday (ANI)

be discussed during the day-long meeting including (i) Viksit Bharat@2047, (ii) Thrust on MSMEs, (iii) Infrastructure and Investments, (iv) Minimising Compliances, (v) Women Em-

powerment, (vi) Health and Nutrition, (vii) Skill Development, and (viii) Gati Shakti for area development and social infrastructure," the NITI Aayog stated ahead of the meeting.

"The meeting will see the participation of chief ministers/Lt Governors of all States and Union Territories, Union ministers as ex-officio members, and the vice chairman and

members of NITI Aayog", it stated.

As a preparatory prelude to the meeting, the second Chief Secretaries Conference was held in January 2023, where

these themes were extensively discussed.

"Wide-ranging stakeholder consultations and brainstorming sessions with subject experts, academia and practitioners were held prior to the conference in order to gain

sion, the meeting would provide a platform for strengthening Centre-State cooperation and forging partnerships for achieving the goal of Viksit Bharat @2047."

Seven chief ministers- Arvind Kejriwal of Delhi, Bhag-

Arvind Kejriwal of Delhi, Bhagwant Mann of Punjab, Mamata Banerjee of West Bengal, K Chandrashekar Rao of Telangana, Ashok Gehlot of Rajasthan, Nitish Kumar of Bihar and Pinarayi Vijayan of Kerala did not attend the meeting

well-rounded grassroots-level perspectives," it said.

The NITI Aayog further said: "This meeting is also being held in the backdrop of India's G20 Presidency. India's G20 motto 'One Earth, One Family, One Future' conveys its civilisational values and its vision of the role of each country in creating the future of our planet."

"In order to achieve this vi-

want Mann of Punjab, Mamata Banerjee of West Bengal, K Chandrashekar Rao of Telangana, Ashok Gehlot of Rajasthan, Nitish Kumar of Bihar and Pinarayi Vijayan of Kerala did not attend the meeting of the Niti Aayog. Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, who is on a visit to Japan and Singapore, was also not present at the meeting.

ANI

Terror conspiracy case: NIA raids multiple locations in Madhya Pradesh's Jabalpur

New Delhi - The National Investigation Agency (NIA) on Saturday conducted raids at 13 locations in Madhya Pradesh's Jabalpur in its ongoing probe into a terror conspiracy case.

The case is linked to the Bhopal terror funding, involving the proscribed organisation, Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen

Bangladesh (JMB). The raids are still underway at the premises of the suspects, based on specific inputs, said a source privy to the development.

NIA's multiple teams launched the raids early on Saturday in close coordination with the Madhya Pradesh Police.

The fresh raids were carried out just two days after the anti-terror agency on May 25 searched two locations in Uttar Pradesh in the Bhopal terror funding case involving JMB.

The raids then aimed to expose further links and conspiracies of the 10 already arrested,

accused and charge-sheeted in the case by NIA Court, Bhopal. Six of the accused are Bangladeshi nationals and are active JMB cadres.

They had entered India illegally, without any valid documents, and had acquired false and forged Indian identity documents with the help of their

sympathisers in India, according to the NIA.

Wednesday's searches at the premises of various suspects led to the seizure of several digital devices (mobile phones), SIM cards, bank pass-books and identity documents.

The documents, currently under examination, relate to

the transfer of funds by the accused.

NIA investigations have revealed that all the 10 accused were involved in influencing, radicalising and motivating vulnerable Indian Muslim youth to take up violence against the democratic system of governance in the country.

"They had been circulating incriminating literature, inflammatory videos and statements (Bayans,) and endorsing, justifying and glorifying the terrorist acts of the various banned organisations, including JMB, Al-Qaeda and the Taliban," said the NIA.

ANI

Karnataka cabinet expanded; Byregowda, H K Patil, Rajanna among 24 new ministers

Bengaluru, Karnataka - The Karnataka Cabinet was expanded on Saturday with new ministers taking the oath of office.

Among those who were sworn in by Governor Thawar Chand Gehlot were N Rajanna, Dinesh Gundu Rao, Sharanabasappa Darshanapur, Shiv-anand Patil, H K Patil, Krishna Byregowda, N Chaluvaryaswamy, K Venkatesh-take, Dr H C Mahadevappa, and Eshwar Khandre.

The Congress party on Friday released a list of 24 legislators who were to be sworn in as min-



Karnataka Governor Thawar Chand Gehlot with newly-sworn in ministers in Bengaluru on Saturday (ANI)

isters in the Chief Minister Siddaramaiah-led government on Saturday. With this, the Cabinet will reach its full strength of 34.

The new ministers took oath in the presence of Siddaramaiah

and his deputy D K Shivakumar.

Meanwhile, the supporters of Karnataka Congress leader Rudrappa Lamani staged a protest outside the Karnataka Pradesh Congress Committee

(KPCC) office demanding a ministerial post for the leader.

Siddaramaiah took oath as the chief minister on May 2, along with D K Shivakumar.

ANI



People walk along a street as rain falls in Kolkata on Friday (AFP)

Pakistan's rulers close ranks in crackdown on Khan

Islamabad, Pakistan - With military courts, intimidation of the press and mass arrests, Pakistan's rulers are seeking to destroy former prime minister Imran Khan's support ahead of elections, analysts say.

Khan's brief arrest earlier this month sparked days of street protests freighted with anger at the powerful army perceived to have orchestrated his downfall.

Islamabad has labelled the violence 'anti-state', justifying huge roundups and the revival of army courts to try civilians who targeted government and military buildings. Journalists, lawyers and activists in Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party report campaigns of intimidation and influence which they blame on the 'establishment', a euphemism for the military backing the civilian government.

"They want to make it clear to



Security personnel escort a vehicle carrying Imran Khan as he arrives to appear before an anti-terrorism court in Islamabad on May 23 (AFP)

Imran Khan that he can't fight with the establishment," said analyst Hasan Askari. "By exerting pressure in different ways, they are trying to put the politicians in their place."

Quashing opposition

Since Khan was ousted last year

in a parliamentary no-confidence vote, he has levelled unprecedented critique at the military - long-regarded as Pakistan's powerbrokers who analysts say backed his rise to power in 2018.

Pakistan's most popular politician has been tangled in dozens of legal cases he claims are fab-

ricated to quash the PTI and bar him from contesting elections due this autumn. In the days following the protests, more than a dozen of his senior leadership were repeatedly arrested and released on allegations of instigating the violence.

In press conferences after being freed, some of his closest aides condemned the violence and announced they were parting ways with Khan.

"They have put everyone in jail," Khan complained in an address. "If you say the magic words, 'We are no longer in PTI', then you will be released."

Thousands of rank-and-file supporters have also been rounded up under the anti-terrorism act.

In Khan's power base in the eastern city of Lahore, a grassroots PTI supporter said her son was arrested after protesting

peacefully.

"It was clear that he had been beaten and was visibly scared," the housewife told AFP on condition of anonymity.

"He hasn't set foot outside the house since then. He's received calls from unknown numbers warning him that he's being watched."

Amnesty International said 'overly broad and vague anti-terrorism provisions' are being used and 'a pall of fear hangs over Khan's supporters following the arbitrary arrests of many opposition leaders'.

"It is a familiar story. A political party, thinking it can take on the country's all-powerful establishment, crosses a red line and quickly finds itself losing a ruthless, one-sided war of attrition," said an editorial in the Dawn newspaper.

AFP

Man opened Asiana plane door 'to get off quickly'

Seoul, South Korea - A man who opened an emergency exit on an Asiana Airlines flight in mid-air felt 'suffocated' and wanted to get off quickly, South Korean police said on Saturday.

The plane was carrying nearly 200 passengers as it approached the runway on Friday at Daegu International Airport, about 240km (149 miles) southeast of Seoul, on a domestic flight.

When the plane was around 200 metres (650 feet) above ground, the man who police said was in his 30s without providing further details, opened the exit door.

The passenger was taken in by Daegu police for questioning and told officers he had

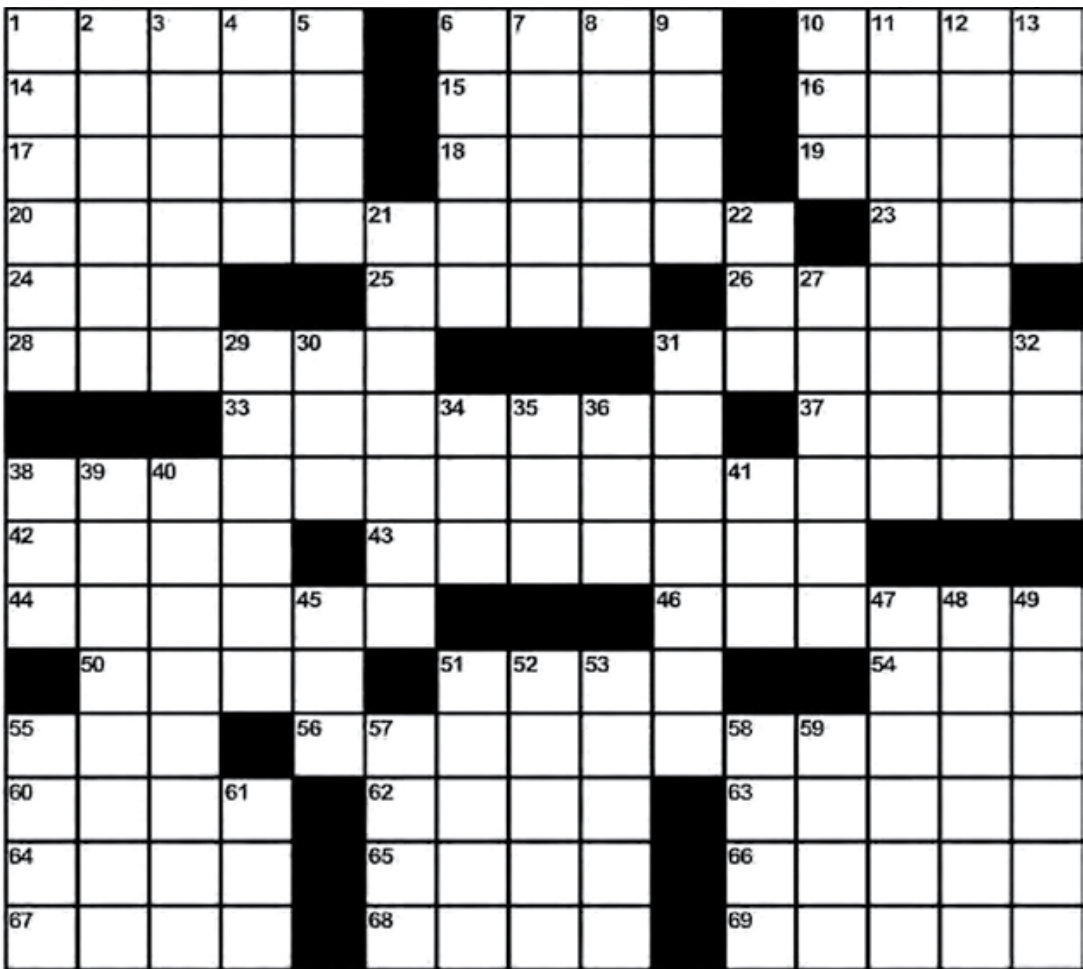
been 'under stress after losing a job recently'. "He felt the flight was taking longer than it should have been and felt suffocated inside the cabin," said a Daegu police detective. "He wanted out quickly".

The passenger faces up to 10 years in prison for violating aviation safety laws.

A video clip shot by a nearby passenger showed wind ripping through the open door, with fabric seat-backs and passengers' hair flapping wildly as some people shouted in surprise. Another video shared on social media showed passengers sitting in the emergency exit row next to an open door being buffeted by strong winds.

AFP

DAILY CROSSWORD



ACROSS

- 1) Respond to a stimulus
- 6) Spoiled child
- 10) "Ahem" alternative
- 14) Boredom
- 15) Bulgarian bucks
- 16) Nix from Nixon, once
- 17) Close call
- 18) "Your turn"
- 19) Rental on a golf course
- 20) Last of a quartet to sink a putt?
- 23) "Comprende?"
- 24) Altar avowal
- 25) Bad day for Caesar
- 26) Turkish honorific (var.)
- 28) Disney's Pete, for one
- 31) Auto highlights
- 33) Gasoline component
- 37) Snack with white filling
- 38) Tries to strengthen one's seabird?
- 42) "_ and the King of Siam"
- 43) Confiscate, as property
- 44) Computer screen lines
- 46) High and mighty

DOWN

- 1) Use FedEx again
- 2) Create, as a cryptogram
- 3) Digital precursor
- 4) Restore to health
- 5) Needing overtime
- 6) Red Cross supply
- 7) Musical show
- 8) Declares as true
- 9) Jam-filled pastry
- 10) Common pipe material, briefly
- 11) Beach

- 12) Decoration for a newlywed's car
- 13) Shopper's bag
- 21) Boxer, for one
- 22) "A likely story!"
- 27) Hidden cave
- 29) Smooth, in music
- 30) Ordinal-number suffix
- 31) Makes aware
- 32) Very long stretch
- 34) Balaam's mount
- 35) Big Apple initials.
- 36) "That's so cool!"
- 38) Disturber of the peace
- 39) Making possible
- 40) Expose to the sun
- 41) Amscrayed
- 45) Flow's companion
- 47) More than richly decorated
- 48) Perfonner on the road
- 49) All-too-agreeable fellows
- 51) Risk taker
- 52) Barely making (with "out")
- 53) Grocery shoppers' aids
- 55) Hip bones

- 57) Bar or bat mitzvah
- 58) Gangland guns

- 59) Overabundance
- 61) Towel holder

NOTE PAD



YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE



ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

Having lots of charm is nothing new for you, especially today when you will be bubbling over with thoughtful remarks and flattery that's just subdued enough to be convincing. All of this charm is bouncing back to you and helping you keep a positive attitude. You won't be sweating any of the small stuff. Flaky or annoying people won't be able to get you down. You'll just give them a smile and keep going on your merry way. It's a great day for negotiations.



LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

Everyone who thinks you're cool is going to let you know today! Accept compliments graciously, because there will be a ton of them. Whether it's complimenting you on your new look, that recent touchdown you made at work, or just the fact that you're a fantastic person, the people you encounter today are going to love giving you love. But try not to let it go to your head. Vanity is certainly nothing to be ashamed of, but it's something to indulge in with careful consideration.



SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

Are you still trying to persuade someone to agree with you? You can't obligate people to go along with something you want. Unless, of course, you show them that you're willing to do the same for them in return. This is a day for bargaining, so you'll need to get ready to give stuff up in order to get stuff in return. Need a loan? Work out an interest payment. Need someone's time? Cook them dinner, maybe a romantic one! Being in someone's debt doesn't have to be unpleasant.



TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

Cutting back on your shopping list of "must haves" is never a fun thing to do. It doesn't feel good to deprive yourself of things you really want! But you do need to restrict yourself right now. The more indulgent you are now, the more you'll regret it later. Something that could change your life is coming soon, but you'll need some cash in order to get in on it. You don't want to miss out on this big opportunity, so save up so that you can be ready.



VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

Quality time is more important than ever today, and you should be willing to do just about whatever it takes to experience it whenever you can, especially in terms of travel. Now might be the time to use up those frequent flyer miles you've been saving. Why not upgrade yourself to first class? You deserve it, so why not? After all those years of doing without and saving your pennies, today is a day to indulge a little and make yourself more comfortable.



CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

Instead of being annoyed by all of the eccentric energy that's abundant in your day, you are going to be inspired by it. Not knowing exactly what's going to happen next will spark your creativity and help you start a few new social endeavors you've been contemplating for so long. It might be time to join that club, check out that nightclub, or explore a new neighborhood that's supposed to be great for people watching. You've got the right attitude to discover something new.



GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

In a troubled relationship, your smallest efforts today can help you both overcome whatever big obstacles are standing in your way. It all starts with honesty. Say what you really feel and don't be afraid to be vulnerable with this person, whoever they are. Whether you're confessing something to a coworker, baring your heart to a partner, or confiding a deep, dark secret to a sibling, you can't hold anything back. If you're going to trust them, you've got to trust them all the way.



LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

A social opportunity will offer just what you've been looking for: new connections! Whether you're looking to add a few more names to your contact list or more contacts to your career search, you will find all the people you need at this swinging social event. Play it cool and don't let them know that you're counting on them to add some excitement to your life, because they're counting on you to add more excitement to theirs! You'll both win in this situation.



AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

The marriages and births in your family add special energy to those regular family get-togethers, and it's an awful lot of fun to spend time getting to know your group's newest members. But at an upcoming family event, you should spend less time with the new relatives and more time with the older relatives. There is great value in relationships like these. Enjoy the instant understanding and unconditional love that comes from someone who has known you all your life. It's something you should savor together.



CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

You've been telling everyone about the new projects you want to start, and everyone has been wonderfully supportive. But today they might start to get impatient. Where are all of these big ideas you were going to make into reality? It's time to get going and put your energy into fulfilling your promises. It's a great day to initiate things anyway, so take advantage of it. Put things in motion! If you don't do it today, you run the very real risk of getting a reputation for being flaky.



SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

The relationship you've been building with one of your newest friends is getting so intense that you're starting to look like twins joined at the hip! Before you lose all sense of your own identity, you need to step away from them for a while and remind people that you are your own person. There is no harm in being seen as closely aligned with this person, but you need to maintain some sense of your own individuality. Just slow things down. Why not cut back your socializing to once a week?



PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

Your growing feelings for someone are helping you overlook their imperfections, which is good. No one is perfect, and it's totally appropriate for you to focus on their good points. But be careful not to cross over that fine line into illusion. They are who they are, and while you care about them, you can't ignore that fact. There is no reason to worry, but you just have to understand that not everyone sees this person the way you do, and that's okay.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

01. Where are the Nicobar Islands?

- A. Mediterranean Sea
- B. Pacific Ocean
- C. Atlantic Ocean
- D. Indian Ocean

02. It was released as a video game in 1994, was restructured as a subscription-based MMORPG in 2004, and in February 2012 had more than 10 million subscribers. Which is it?

- A. Star Wars: the Old Republic
- B. Warcraft
- C. EVE Online
- D. Final Fantasy

03. What is the name for a natural satellite that orbits a planet?

- A. Moon
- B. Townshend
- C. Entwistle
- D. Daltry

Answers: 1. D 2. B 3. A

KIDS COLOURING



BOGGLER

F	T	A	E
F	Y	E	S
E	A	N	S
I	S	B	D

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

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

WORD BUILDER



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

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

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER

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

FOREGONE CONCLUSION

Haaland picks up Premier League player and young player prizes

London, United Kingdom - Erling Haaland became the first man to win both Premier League player and young player of the year awards in the same season on Saturday.

The 22-year-old has taken just 35 appearances to set a new Premier League record of 36 goals in a single season to help Manchester City retain the title.

"I am honoured to have become the first player to win both awards in the same season - thank you to everyone who voted for me," said Haaland in a City statement.

"It has been an incredible first season in the Premier League and lifting the trophy last weekend in front of our fans at the Etihad was a very special moment for me."

The Norwegian, who was also named the football writers' player of the year this week, has



Erling Haaland

These awards would not have been possible without my amazing teammates, the manager and all of the staff at the club who help me perform on the pitch

ERLING HAALAND

scored 52 goals in all competitions as City close in on a treble.

Pep Guardiola's men face Manchester United in the FA Cup final and Inter Milan in the Champions League final next month.

"These awards would not

have been possible without my amazing teammates, the manager and all of the staff at the club who help me perform on the pitch," added Haaland.

"Now we have two more finals to go and we want to finish the season strong."

Replacing Busquets is key to Barca success next season: Xavi

Barcelona, Spain - Barcelona coach Xavi Hernandez said Saturday it was key for his side to replace the departing Sergio Busquets if they want to compete for silverware next season.

The 34-year-old pivot is leaving at the end of the season after making over 700 appearances for the club, winning three Champions Leagues and nine La Liga titles.

"We have to find this piece, if we want to compete well next year, we have to find it," Xavi told reporters ahead of Busquets' final home game, on Sunday against Real Mallorca in La Liga.

"For me it's fundamental as a coach. Busquets has been fundamental for us, and very important in winning the Spanish Super Cup and La Liga this year.

"A player who has been so important for us, on and off the pitch, is leaving, so we have to find a very important player to replace Busquets.

"For me, it's the key to competing next year."

Barcelona have been linked with several players, including Real Sociedad midfielder Martin Zubimendi, but the Catalans are



Barcelona coach Xavi (L) with Sergio Busquets

still struggling financially and may be limited to cheaper options.

Along with Busquets, Jordi Alba is also leaving the club in the summer, and fans have sold out the clash with Mallorca to give them a warm farewell, as well as the stadium itself.

Sunday's match is the last to take place at Camp Nou before it

is rebuilt, with Barcelona set to play in the city's Olympic stadium in Montjuic next season.

"Tomorrow (we are) saying goodbye to Camp Nou, which is a lot of years of history, passion, emotions, great games, it will be an emotional day," continued Xavi.

"Add to that Busquets and Alba's goodbye, and it's extra

motivation for us to play a great game, to show our best, for fans to come to the stadium and have an excellent goodbye."

Xavi said his favourite Camp Nou memory was his own goodbye, in 2015, after the team won the treble, and that it would be sad to play at the stadium in its current guise for the last time.

AFP

Celtic sign off in style with Aberdeen thrashing

Glasgow, United Kingdom - Celtic bounced back from a three-game winless run to thrash Aberdeen 5-0 on Saturday on the day they lifted the Scottish Premiership trophy.

Kyogo Furuhashi and Oh Hyeon-gyu both scored twice as the Hoops warmed up for next weekend's Scottish Cup final, where they could complete a domestic treble against Inverness Caledonian Thistle.

Celtic boss Ange Postecoglou has been linked with the vacant managerial post at Tottenham and his side showed why the Australian is in demand.

Postecoglou has won four of the five trophies available during his time at Celtic Park.

The Scottish champions were more like their old selves after coming off the boil since sealing the title earlier this month.

"Champions again because of this incredible group of players," said Postecoglou. "We've got one more to go (in the cup final) because we never stop."

Furuhashi produced two predatory finishes in the space of five first half minutes to put Celtic in command.



Everton will be without Dominic Calvert-Lewin (R), but they can ensure survival with a victory Bournemouth at home

Everton, Leicester and Leeds at risk on Premier League's survival Sunday

London, United Kingdom - The battle for Premier League survival is the main event of Sunday's final day of the season as Everton, Leicester and Leeds face a nerve-wracking scrap to avoid relegation.

The two clubs who join already-relegated Southampton in the second tier will be pushed to the financial precipice, with sports business experts Deloitte estimating that a season of Premier League football is worth up to £170 million (\$210 million).

Everton can ill-afford that hit with the Toffees already seeking external investment just to be able to complete the club's new stadium.

They are the one side in full control of their own fate as victory at home to Bournemouth will extend their stay in the top flight to 70 years.

However, Sean Dyche's men have won just once in 10 games and will be without talismanic striker Dominic Calvert-Lewin to offer Leicester and Leeds hope.

"We want the players to focus on the game," said Dyche on Friday. "It's not as easy as it sounds but that's the idea: focus on what's going on the pitch and don't worry about all the noise.

"Don't worry about all the rumours, don't worry about anything that's going on off the pitch."

good to go down.

But the fairytale has turned into a nightmare this season as Rodgers bemoaned a lack of investment to refresh the squad before he was sacked in April. Dean Smith has been unable to mastermind a turnaround in fortunes with just one win in his seven games in charge.

"We have to win the game and not look at the Everton result until after the game," said Smith. "We have to do our job and see where it takes us."

Second bottom Leeds need a miracle to avoid the end of their three-season stay in the top-flight.

Victory over Tottenham at Elland Road will only be enough for Leeds boss Sam Allardyce to pull off another great escape if Everton lose

We have to win the game and not look at the Everton result until after the game

DEAN SMITH

Leicester's fall

If fourth bottom Everton fail to win, third bottom Leicester can survive by beating West Ham at home thanks to their superior goal difference.

Seven years ago, the Foxes were celebrating the most unlikely of title triumphs.

That kicked off a glorious era as they finished fifth in back-to-back seasons in 2019/20 and 2020/21 and won the FA Cup for the first time just two years ago under Brendan Rodgers.

Many believed a squad boasting the talents of James Maddison, Youri Tielemans and Harvey Barnes was too

and Leicester fail to win.

Should Everton manage even a draw, Leeds will need to beat Tottenham by three goals to surpass them on goal difference.

"I just hope that we're talking on a very positive nature on Monday morning and I have a hangover!" Allardyce said on the possibility he could remain at the club beyond his caretaker role till the end of the season.

Tottenham's result could have a bearing on the only other issue yet to be resolved - qualification for next season's Europa Conference League.

Aston Villa are in pole position and will secure a return to Europe for the first time in 13 years with victory over Brighton.

AFP

Ex-FIFA vice-president Reynald Temarii charged over 2022 World Cup vote

Paris, France - FIFA's disgraced former vice-president Reynald Temarii of Tahiti has been charged with corruption by French prosecutors probing Qatar's 2022 World Cup bid process.

The charge, the first to emerge from the years-long investigation, is for passive corruption and was confirmed by France's financial crimes prosecutors (PNF).

Temarii is a former president of the Oceania Football Confederation (OFC).

But he was forced out in 2010 after being implicated in a vote-selling scandal during an undercover newspaper sting before the controversial awarding to Qatar of last year's football showpiece.

Temarii was banned for a year by FIFA on November 17, 2010, ruling him out of the infamous December 2 vote at FIFA's headquarters in Zurich.

The OFC were entitled to organise someone to vote in his place, with the first of their votes designated for Australia then if



Reynald Temarii

Temarii was banned for a year by FIFA on November 17, 2010, ruling him out of the infamous December 2 vote

necessary to the United States, the favourites for the 2022 staging rights over Qatar.

But Temarii appealed his ban on the night of November 30, having initially accepted his suspension. His appeal, as per FIFA rules, deprived the OFC of a vote on December 2, with Qatar eventually winning the ballot over the USA 14-8.

The French investigation, set up in 2019, was particularly interested in a meeting at the Elysee Palace in Paris on November 23, 2010, just over a week before the vote, between then French President Nicolas Sarkozy, Qatari

prince Tamim ben Hamad al-Thani - who became Emir in 2013 - and UEFA president at the time Michel Platini who subsequently voted for Qatar.

Temarii was hit with a separate eight year ban in 2015 for receiving 300,000 euros to cover his legal expenses for his 2010 appeal from former FIFA executive member Mohamed bin Hammam, a key player in securing the World Cup for his home country, Qatar.

AFP

HISTORY BECKONS

Djokovic eyes record-breaking 23rd Grand Slam at French Open as Swiatek launches title defence

Paris, France - Novak Djokovic will bid for a record-breaking 23rd Grand Slam title at a French Open without his old rival Rafael Nadal for the first time since 2004, while Iga Swiatek attempts to become the first woman to defend the title in 16 years.

Serbian veteran Djokovic will not be the favourite for the title, though, after struggling with an elbow injury and failing to get past the quarter-finals in any of his three clay-court events so far this season.

Carlos Alcaraz won the Barcelona and Madrid Opens en route to taking over from Djokovic as world number one, while Daniil Medvedev is seeded second for Roland Garros after his maiden clay triumph in Rome.

But Djokovic will know this is a massive opportunity to break out of his tie with 14-time French Open winner Nadal at the top of the all-time list of most men's Slam singles titles.

The two-time champion has lost eight of his 10 French Open meetings with Nadal who is missing this year's edition due to a hip injury he suffered at the Australian Open.

Djokovic and Alcaraz are seeded to meet in the semi-finals after being placed in the same half of the draw.

"I felt bad when I hear that Rafa was not able to play here in Roland Garros," said Alcaraz on Friday.

"I always want to watch the



Novak Djokovic

When he (Rafael Nadal) announced that he's going to have his last season of his career, I felt part of me is leaving with him too, It made me think about my career and how long I'm going to play

NOVAK DJOKOVIC

best players in the world playing the tournaments."

The 36-year-old Djokovic may also have to get past Monte Carlo Masters champion Andrey Rublev in the quarters.

The other side of the draw appears wide open, with in-form Medvedev the highest seed de-

spite never having previously got past the quarter-finals on the Paris clay.

The Russian lost in the first round on each of his first four visits before making the quarters in 2021.

"I also don't want to put too much pressure on myself, in a

way," said Medvedev.

"But what happened in Rome was amazing, especially beating a lot of good players."

Danish youngster Holger Rune, who made a surprise run to last year's quarter-finals, could face Casper Ruud in the last eight in a rematch of a bad-tempered

meeting 12 months ago.

Ruud went on to be thrashed in the final by Nadal and also lost the US Open showpiece match to Alcaraz.

But the Norwegian world number four has struggled for form this year, only reaching the quarters in two of the 10 tournaments he has played.

Stefanos Tsitsipas, who lost the 2021 final to Djokovic after being two sets up, will be among the likely contenders but has not won a title yet this term - the longest he has had to wait for a trophy in a season since 2018.

New 'big three'?

The winner of the women's singles is expected to be one of the trio of reigning champion Swiatek, Australian Open winner Aryna Sabalenka and Elena Rybakina.

They have won the last four Grand Slam titles between them and at least one of them has featured in every WTA 1000 final this season.

Swiatek, who turns 22 during the tournament, will be the favourite as she chases a third Roland Garros triumph and a first successful women's title defence since Justine Henin won her third French Open in a row in 2007.

The Polish star retired from her Italian Open quarter-final against Rybakina with a thigh injury but trained at Roland Garros on Wednesday. "Luckily nothing serious happened, so I had couple of days off," she said Friday.

AFP



Elina Svitolina

Svitolina reaches first final as mum in Strasbourg

Strasbourg, France - Former world number three Elina Svitolina reached her first WTA final since becoming a mother last year, beating France's Clara Burel in three sets on Friday in Strasbourg.

The Ukrainian, who returned to action last month after more than a year away, came from behind to defeat Burel 4-6, 7-5, 6-3 and set up a title decider with Anna Blinkova of Russia.

Svitolina, the Strasbourg champion in 2020, was a set and 4-1 down before fighting back to make her first tour-level final since winning the last of her 16 career titles in Chicago two years ago.

She stepped back from tennis in March 2022, in a year which was traumatic for the 28-year-old because of the war in her native Ukraine.

Svitolina has dropped to 508th in the world but will play

All my prize money from this tournament is going to go to the kids of Ukraine

ELINA SVITOLINA

at the French Open, where she is a three-time quarter-finalist, using a protected ranking.

Blinkova is seeking her second title following a 6-2, 6-2 win over American Lauren Davis in the other semi-final in Strasbourg.

Svitolina also announced that she will be donating her winnings from this tournament in support of humanitarian aid for Ukrainian children.

"I would like to share this energy with Ukraine, with my homeland," she said.

Dimitrov to face Jarry in Geneva final

Geneva, Switzerland - Bulgaria's Grigor Dimitrov will face giantkiller Nicolas Jarry in the Geneva Open final on Saturday after the Chilean downed Alexander Zverev in the semis to spoil his French Open preparations. Dimitrov, the world number 33, overturned the odds in Friday's last four when he beat US second seed Taylor Fritz 3-6, 7-5, 7-6 (7/2) in a contest with the world number nine that lasted nearly three hours.

But Jarry, ranked 54, pulled off an upset of his own by beating Zverev 7-6 (7/3), 6-3.

It was a second straight scalp for Jarry, who knocked out top seed and world number four Casper Ruud, the 2021 and 2022 defending champion, in the quarter-finals on Thursday.

Zverev has reached the French Open semi-finals twice in a row but the German world number 27 will need to be on much better form next week in Paris if he is maintain that streak.

Dimitrov, a former Wimbledon, Australian and US Open semi-finalist, said his contest



Grigor Dimitrov

with Fritz on the Parc des Eaux-Vives clay had been a "crazy match". "These past two days I've spent a lot of hours on the court. That's a great thing. I'm very pleased with the way I fought. Let's go out tomorrow again," he said. "The job isn't over. It's another step forward. I

don't take these matches lightly: I came this week with a purpose. I intend to finish it up till the end."

Dimitrov, 32, is into his first final since losing to Roger Federer in Rotterdam 2018. The last of his eight titles came when he won the ATP Finals on his debut in 2017.

Verstappen back on top in Monaco but demands more from Red Bull

Monaco, Principality of Monaco - Max Verstappen resumed normal service on Friday when he topped the times for Red Bull and then demanded more performance from his team ahead of Saturday's crucial qualifying session at the Monaco Grand Prix.

The defending double world champion struggled with his car in the opening practice, as he complained of "bottoming out" on his way to sixth, but he bounced back in the afternoon to go fastest ahead of Charles Leclerc's Ferrari.

"The second practice was

much better," said Verstappen, who leads team-mate Sergio Perez by 14 points in this year's title race. "The car felt much more competitive.

"Compared to Ferrari, we are still a bit short in terms of how the car behaves on the kerbs and over the bumps and that's something we have to work on for tomorrow because they are very close.

Verstappen was quickest in a best lap of one minute 12.462 seconds, 0.065 clear of the Monégasque local hero who is bidding for a third successive 'home' pole

position.

Carlos Sainz, who was fastest in the first session, was third in the second Ferrari, despite a late crash into the barriers in the Swimming Pool complex, ahead of Aston Martin's two-time champion Fernando Alonso, Lando Norris of McLaren and seven-time champion Lewis Hamilton of Mercedes.

Last year's winner Sergio Perez was seventh in the second Red Bull ahead of a resurgent Valtteri Bottas of Alfa Romeo and the two Alpines of French duo Pierre Gasly and Esteban Ocon.

The session was run in near-perfect conditions, a warm afternoon sun touching 27 degrees as it shone from a wide blue sky over the Mediterranean principality. The track temperature was 45 degrees.

Hamilton was very satisfied with his day's action. "I really enjoyed that," he said. "I had fun and enjoyed driving that car so I must say thank-you to everyone at the factory for all their hard work.

"I think we got a lot of data... It's not the place to ultimately test an upgrade, but the car was generally feeling good."



Red Bull Racing's Max Verstappen drives during the third practice session of the Monaco GP



TODAYS MATCH

FINAL

6 PM

CHENNAI SUPER KINGS

GUJARAT TITANS



Shubman Gill of Gujarat Titans celebrates after his century against Mumbai on Friday (AFP)

'Probably my best innings so far in the IPL'

Ahmedabad, India - Shubman Gill called his 129 on Friday his "best innings" in the Indian Premier League after he powered champions Gujarat Titans into the final with a 62-run thrashing of Mumbai Indians.

Gill's 60-ball knock -- his third ton in four IPL innings -- fired Gujarat to 233-3, a total they defended by bowling out five-time winners Mumbai for 171 in 18.2 overs in the final playoff which started late due to rain in Ahmedabad.

They will play Chennai Super Kings in the final on Sunday at the same venue.

Named man of the match, Gill said: "I think this was probably my best innings so far in the IPL."

Skipper Hardik Pandya praised his opener, saying: "Today's innings was one of the finest, he never looked rushed. It felt like someone was throwing balls and he was hitting. He will be a superstar in international and franchise cricket."

Gill hit 10 sixes and put on a

second-wicket stand of 138 with Sai Sudharsan, who made 43, to tear into the opposition attack at the world's biggest cricket stadium.

He became the leading batsman this season with 851 runs, surpassing Royal Challengers Bangalore skipper Faf du Plessis (730), before he reached his IPL best and the top score of this season. Fast bowler Mohit Sharma took five wickets for Gujarat, who won last year's crown in a fairy-tale debut season, after a valiant 61 by Suryakumar Yadav.

The 132,000-capacity stadium had over 75,000 fans in attendance to witness the home team triumph.

Opener Gill, who is tipped as the future of Indian batting, made the most of a reprieve on 30 when Tim David dropped him off England fast bowler Chris Jordan.

The 23-year-old Gill brought up his fifty in 32 balls and then exploded to smash sixes and reach his hundred in 49 balls, taking a bow amid a standing ovation.

PARTING SHOT

Dhoni faces red-hot Gill in IPL final

Ahmedabad, India - Barring a surprise, Chennai Super Kings skipper M.S. Dhoni will step out as a player for the last time when his side take on holders Gujarat Titans in the IPL final on Sunday.

The cricketing great is widely expected to retire -- he has only said he will decide on his future later this year -- and the spotlight will be on him with Chennai eyeing a record-equalling fifth title at the world's biggest cricket stadium in Ahmedabad.

Standing in Chennai's way will be Gujarat opener Shubman Gill, fresh from smashing a century -- his third in the IPL -- in the final playoff on Friday at the same venue. Gill's three IPL tons have all come in his last four innings, his latest a brutal 129 off 60 balls to demolish five-time winners Mumbai Indians.

Gujarat Skipper Hardik Pandya said the 23-year-old "will be a superstar in international and franchise cricket".

And former India batsman Sanjay Manjrekar, on the ESPN-cricinfo website, called Gill a "once in a generation player".

Gill leads this season's batting chart with 851 runs after surpass-



Chennai Super Kings captain MS Dhoni (L) shakes hands with Gujarat Titans' skipper Hardik Pandya

ing Bangalore skipper Faf du Plessis (730) in the final playoff and Gujarat will look to him for a starting flourish.

Gujarat have extended a fairy-tale journey which began with a title in their debut season last year, when Pandya raised the Cup in Ahmedabad in front of a record 101,566 fans at the 132,000-capacity stadium.

Dhoni's Chennai took second spot after the group stage behind table-toppers Gujarat but beat the defending champions in the first playoff earlier this week to bag a spot in the final.

The 41-year-old Dhoni is a master tactician dubbed "Captain Cool" for his calm under pressure.

"You see the wicket, you see conditions, and you keep adjusting the field," Dhoni said.

"I can be an annoying captain because I change the field every time. It can be annoying but I believe in my gut feel. That's why I keep telling the fielders to keep an eye on me."

His ability to run between the wickets has been hampered by a knee injury and he has usually batted at number eight this season, looking to hit a few sixes to finish off the innings. Called "Thala" - meaning "leader" in Tamil - the former India captain has attracted huge crowds across venues in what is believed to be his last playing season.

AFP

Mumbai coach Boucher laments injuries after exit

Ahmedabad, India - The loss of fast bowlers Jasprit Bumrah and Jofra Archer to injuries left a hole that was difficult to fill for Mumbai Indians, coach Mark Boucher said after his team's IPL exit.

The five-time winners went down to holders Gujarat Titans in the final playoff on Friday to bow out of the T20 competition

they last won in 2020.

On a batting-friendly pitch in Ahmedabad, Mumbai's bowlers were at the receiving end of Shubman Gill's 60-ball 129 which powered Gujarat to 233-3.

South African Boucher, in his first season with Mumbai, said the replacement players offered their best efforts but were still

If you are losing out on your quality players, it's going to leave a hole

MARK BOUCHER

not good enough for a place in the final.

"If you are losing out on your quality players, yes it's going to leave a hole," Boucher told reporters after his team's 62-run hammering.

"Not to put any blame on anyone, those things happen in sports, injuries happen in sports and you've got to deal with it."

The side, skippered by Rohit Sharma, were aware Bumrah

would miss the season as the yorker specialist underwent lower-back surgery in March and has been out of action since September last year.

But the team suffered a major blow when England's Archer, who was recovering from an elbow injury, left for home after playing just five matches.

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Relief for Australia as Green returns after retiring hurt in IPL

Ahmedabad, India - Australia appear to have avoided a significant injury concern after Cameron Green was able to resume his innings in the IPL Qualifier against Gujarat Titans having been forced to retire hurt from a blow on the arm.

Green left the field in the second over of Mumbai Indians' chase when he was struck just below his left elbow by Hardik Pandya from a delivery clocked at 146kph.

He was initially treated in the middle by the physio before retiring hurt but was not absent for long when he returned in the seventh over with his forearm taped up.

He did not appear impeded at the crease as he collected two sixes in a brisk 30 before falling to Josh Little in the 12th over at a vital moment in the chase.

Despite another superb display from Suryakumar Yadav, Mumbai eventually fell well short in their steep chase to bring an

end to their IPL which means Green will be able to head to the UK to link with the Test squad who left Australia on Friday.

The balance that Green brings to the Test side is vital for Australia and his absence was clearly felt in the final Test of last season against South Africa and the first two matches in India when he was recovering from a broken finger.

He will only have a short period of time to adjust his game from T20 mode, but coach Andrew McDonald said through the early stages of his career Green had shown how quickly he could learn and adapt.

"The challenge for Cam now is as he starts to become a three-format player is how he focuses [on] that, shifts between formats, and he's going to have another challenge in front of him going deep into the IPL finals to get ready for the World Test Championship match," McDonald told SEN Radio.

WALL ART

Yemen street artist chronicles war on battle-scarred walls

Yemeni artist Alaa Rubil uses the shell-pocked buildings of his hometown as canvas, painting images of death and despair to shine a light on the horrors and victims of war.

Not long after the start of the bloody conflict between Yemen's internationally recognised government and Huthi rebel forces, the southern port city of Aden, where Rubil lives, became the scene of brutal fighting.

For several months in 2015, artillery rained down on Aden, and Huthi rockets and mortars fired into densely populated areas killed dozens of civilians.

Rubil, now 30, has been painting murals since he was a teenager, but found his voice in

the aftermath of that violence.

"I saw that the government was not aware of the people who were displaced," he told AFP. "I wanted to communicate my message to the world by drawing people who lost their homes and families. By using the walls, I could reach the world."

Today, the rubble-strewn streets of Aden double as a semi-permanent exhibition of Rubil's work - and a testament to what the city's inhabitants have lived through.

Feel the people

On the wall of one shop in a particularly hard-hit area, he painted a large outline of a man's face, but obscured the eyes, nose and mouth with a cupped palm hold-



Yemeni street artist Alaa Rubil finishes one of his artworks painted on a wall in the southern port city of Aden

ing up three sticks of dynamite.

Across the street, on the interior wall of a bombed-out apartment building, a piece he calls 'Silent Suffering' depicts a skeleton playing a violin as peace signs float around its skull.

In another work, a girl in a red dress sits on the ground with her head resting in her left hand, next to a black crow perched on a missile. The image is based on the true story of a girl who lived in the area and lost her family in the fighting, Rubil said. "She thinks that war is a game. So, she is waiting for them."

Amr Abu Bakr Saeed, 42, who lives nearby, said, "When we pass through this place, we feel pain, we feel the people who were here. These paintings express the tragedies of the people whose homes were destroyed and who were displaced, and is proof of the war in Yemen."

No one cares

A little more than eight years ago, neighbouring Saudi Arabia mobilised a coalition to topple the Huthis, who had seized Yemen's capital, Sanaa, in 2014.

The war has killed hundreds of thousands of people either through combat or knock-on effects such as hunger and disease. Millions remain displaced, their homes and communities destroyed. A truce that went into effect in April 2022 has still significantly reduced fighting, raising hopes for a durable peace.

Mohammed al Jaber said, "I love the idea that this place could turn from a centre of destruction to a centre of peace," hoping that art could help the city rebuild.

But he acknowledged that many Aden residents were still waiting to see tangible progress. AFP

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HINDUSTANI MUSIC

‘Music transforms the inner being’

Dr Vandana Jyotirmayee, Hindustani classical singer and professor at University of Technology and Applied Sciences, enthralled the audience with Sufi renditions and Ghazals at a concert in Muscat last week



‘Dama dam mast Qalandar’ (Every breath for the ecstasy of Qalandar)...the mesmerising essence of this spiritual Sufi qawwali written in the honour of the most revered 12th century Sufi saint of Sindh, Lal Shahbaz Qalandar of Sehwan Sharif, filled the Jabrin Ballroom of hotel Intercontinental Muscat on May 19 as Dr Vandana Jyotirmayee, Hindustani classical singer, held an elite audience captive with her soulful renditions at a unique concert.

With many immortal renditions, from traditional classical to more soul-stirring ghazals, including the popular nazm – *Aapki yaad aati rahi raat bhar* (Thoughts about you haunted me all night long), Dr Vandana, who is a professor at University of Technology and Applied Sciences, enthralled the audience which comprised music lovers, high level dignitaries, faculty members and students of various educational institutions in Oman. She has been attached with the Ministry of Education in the sultanate for more than one and a half decades.

“Music is the language of the soul, that beyond doubt, heals us. Songs and soulful renditions transform emotions into tearful smiles,” says Dr Vandana, adding, “Music is one of the finest gifts by the Almighty to human beings. It has the power to elevate you to a meditative state, to submerge you in the

depth of varied emotions, and transform your inner being.”

Dr Vandana was accompanied on stage by India’s talented musicians - the world famous tabla player Shreedhara Sureshwara Chari, a disciple of Ustad Allarakha Khan Qureishi, and mandolin and guitar player Amar Sangam Das, a disciple of the grand maestro Pandit U Srinivas - called the ‘Mozart of Indian classical music’. On the keyboards was a local musician, Cherry Abraham, who teaches at Muscat’s popular Harmony Music Institute.

The evening of ghazals and Sufi songs was a classical treat for those who appreciate Hindustani classical music and the confidence and grace

CONCERT RENDITIONS

- Dama dam mast kalandar
- Chhaap tilak sab chheeni
- Tu maane ya na maane dildaara
- Ae ri sakhi moray piya ghar aaye
- (GHAZALS)
- Hangama hai kyon barpa
- Kabhi kaha na kisi se tere fasaane ko
- Humri atariya pe aao re
- Aapki yaad aati rahi raat bhar

Music is the language of the soul, that beyond doubt, heals us. Songs and soulful renditions transform emotions into tearful smiles

DR VANDANA JYOTIRMAYEE

with which Dr Vandana delivered every rendition kept the audience gripped and begging for more with several ‘once more’ requests.

Dr Vandana had completed her music training in the best Hindustani classical ‘gharanas’ (derived from the word ‘ghar’ or ‘house’ from where a particular style of music originated)

from age six. She has trained with the Gwalior gharana, Kirana gharana and Gaya gharana building up a sound repertoire of varied renditions over the past few decades.

At the event, Dr Vandana was felicitated by the chief guest, H E Amit Narang, Ambassador of India, who also honoured the accompanists on stage.

The overall mood was one of bliss as the accomplished singer’s music had the ability to transcend all other virtues and unleash a general feeling of well-being and tranquility.

About the healing power of music, Dr Vandana said, “It’s a respite from the daily mundane routine that music is. It’s power had been recognised by the famous Indian scientist J C Bose who experimented with plants and demonstrated how plants, that were exposed to soulful music, responded to it, and showed better growth than those that were not.”

“The swaras (notes) have a healing power and this power is godly. The seven notes of music are so powerful that these pervade the whole universe. Music has a magic, which is unique and inexplicable,” she asserted.

Dr Vandana, who has held concerts in many other countries, besides India, is the daughter of Dr Urmila Singh, a recipient of many awards, including one presented by the first prime minister of India, late Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru.

“As the heart yearns for more renditions from Dr Vandana, who enraptured us in her superb singing, I, too, recall the legendary English poet, William Wordsworth’s words - ‘The music in my heart I bore, long after it was heard no more’. Truly, this line from, Wordsworth ‘The Solitary Reaper’ captures the unforgettable impression left in our hearts by Dr Vandana,” said Amita Sanghavi, English



At the event, Dr Vandana was felicitated by the chief guest, H E Amit Narang, Ambassador of India

Language lecturer, Sultan Qaboos University, who was among the audience.

“Indeed, the memory of the overwhelming ecstasy felt on hearing her sing Sufi music transcended us to a sublime state where one heals as one feels unified with the divine,” she added.

(With inputs from Amita Sanghavi)

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