

CRIMINAL CASES SURGE

Our Correspondent
Muscat

In its annual press conference held on Monday, the Public Prosecution reported an increase in criminal cases in the sultanate in the year 2023. A total of 37,836 cases were registered, marking a 17.2% rise from the previous year. Notably, bounced cheques led the reported list of offences.

Nasr bin Khamis al Sawai, Public Prosecutor, highlighted the concerning uptick in financial misconduct, with cases of misuse of public funds and money laundering increasing from 154 in 2022 to 219 in 2023. Despite this, Oman maintains one of the lowest crime rates globally compared to countries of similar economic, geographic and social status, he added.

Collaborative efforts between Public Prosecution and the State Audit Institute ensure round-the-clock scrutiny of cases, facilitating timely evaluations, Sawai informed.

Detailing the breakdown of the total number of cases, Dr Ahmed bin Saeed al Shukaili, Assistant Public Prosecutor, said there were 35,777 cases of misdemeanour, 3,777 felonies and 282 other violations and complaints. Cases of misdemeanour accounted for 94.6% of the total, followed by 4.7% felonies.

Of the total registered, Public Prosecution adjudicated 96.9% cases.



Despite increase in cases, Oman maintains one of the lowest crime rates globally, when compared to countries of similar economic status

NASR AL SAWAI



(L) Nasr bin Khamis al Sawai, Public Prosecutor, and Dr Ahmed bin Saeed al Shukaili, Assistant Public Prosecutor, at a press meet on Monday

and fraud (3,202). Muscat governorate reported the highest number of cases (16,534), followed by North Batinah (5,913) and Dhofar (3,922).

The Public Prosecution Department in the Supreme Court received 812 appeals, which saw 100% completion rate. The court aligned with the Public Prosecution's stance in 87% of the appeals.

Royal Oman Police was the primary source of cases - 28,575

Estidamah explores reforms for economic growth, investments

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The National Programme for Fiscal Sustainability and Financial Sector Development - Estidamah - in collaboration with Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up Unit hosted a workshop on Monday marking a concerted effort to enhance the sultanate's legislative and legal framework, drawing on insights from the Oman-Britain Strategic Consultation Group.

The session's core objective was to evaluate the current legislative landscape in Oman in line with the sultanate's economic and technological evolution, with an eye on leveraging the UK's experiences in enhancing national laws. The ultimate aim is to create a dynamic business environment conducive to both local and international in-

vestments, a press release stated.

Workshop participants delved into the UK's legislative practices and Oman's law-making processes, tackling the existing challenges and proposing solutions to modernise the system.

Iman bint Rashid al Muqbali, Director of Law and Legislation Development Initiatives at Estidamah, underscored the programme's commitment to coordinating with various authorities throughout the legislation lifecycle, from planning and drafting to enactment and subsequent review.

The workshop addressed potential reforms, inspired by leading regional and global practices, to bolster financial sector services and attract foreign direct investments.

Continued on Page 03



Duqm Refinery set for key role in global energy market



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Motorists welcome repair works of pothole-ridden road in Ruwi

Our Correspondent
Muscat

In response to concerns raised by motorists, authorities have started work on a pothole-filled road in Ruwi behind Sultan Qaboos Mosque. The potholed road, which damaged cars of unalert drivers, is now being repaired by Muscat Municipality.

The potholes, often filled with sewage or water from a nearby wadi, posed a significant risk, especially at night. Urgent calls from residents of the neighbourhood for immediate action highlighted the severity of the situation.

Mohammad Khalfan, a local businessman, expressed relief at the commencement of repair works. "This has been an issue for many months. I'm glad to see the repairs underway. It was a danger zone, and I've witnessed many cars getting stuck," he said.

Sharing the relief, Muttrah resident Saleem al Balushi said, "These potholes were a hazard



for some time now."

He pointed out the significance of Ruwi as a commercial hub frequented by people from across Muscat, making these potholes deceptive and dangerous.

The potholes, particularly perilous at night, were a cause of concern for drivers and residents of the area. Robi Ullah, a delivery worker, is one among others who suffered losses due to the potholes on this road. His motorbike was damaged when he unsuspectingly rode over a water-filled pothole, and also injured his elbow as he lost balance and

fell. "Filled with water flowing from the nearby wadi and sewage, the potholes compromise road safety and also pose potential health risks to the community."

Despite the delayed response in beginning repair works, Ruwi resident Aslam Sheikh said, "We're relieved that the authorities have taken notice."

When contacted, Muscat Municipality said residents are encouraged to report civic problems by contacting the helpline number 1111 to ensure community concerns are registered and addressed in a timely manner.

Mahrouqi reviews progress at Oman Botanic Garden

Our Correspondent
Muscat

H E Salim al Mahrouqi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism, visited Oman Botanic Garden to review progress of work on the project on Sunday.

A statement issued by the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, said H E Mahrouqi visited the site to monitor progress of work, meet officials, discuss construction and appreciate efforts made by the project team.

The project will showcase all the native plant species of Oman in carefully created natural habitats, from bone-dry deserts to lush green monsoon forests.

The garden will also feature traditionally cultivated crops and the many ways people use plants in Oman. Located at the foothills of the Al Hajar mountains in Al Khoud, the site is one of only a handful of locations in the world where the ancient seabed is visi-



bile sitting 100m above sea level.

The ministry informed that 1,407 species of indigenous flora have been grown in environments simulating their natural habitat. 'The team has conducted about a thousand field trips since the beginning of the project.'

The project is the first of its kind in the region; no other botanical garden represents the entire flora of one country in habitat settings, presenting an

unprecedented opportunity for visitors to experience the natural vegetation of Oman while learning about agricultural heritage, cultural traditions and the legendary hospitality of the country.

The project will include cable cars, nurseries, a visitor centre, research centre, field study centre, habitat gardens, habitat pavilions, amenity areas, play areas and family zones in garden settings that are unique to Oman.

Khoula Hospital earns 'Baby-Friendly' accreditation from WHO, Unicef

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Khoula Hospital has been awarded the 'Baby-Friendly Hospital' accreditation by World Health Organization (WHO) and United Nations Children's Fund (Unicef). This recognition distinguishes Khoula Hospital as the first government facility in Oman to receive such international certification, underscoring its dedication to enhancing paediatric care.

The certificate was presented at a ceremony held under the patronage of H E Dr Saeed bin Hareb al Lamki, Undersecretary for Health in the Ministry of Health, on Monday in presence of Unicef representative to Oman Sumaira Chaudhry.

The recognition marks a significant stride towards nurturing a child-friendly healthcare environment in the sultanate.

On the occasion, Dr Rashid bin Mohammed al Alawi, Director



General of Khoula Hospital, reiterated its commitment to elevating the standard of healthcare for children and their families. He outlined the comprehensive efforts made over the past year to ensue children's rights and healthcare needs, leading to this commendable achievement.

The hospital has implemented several initiatives to secure the accreditation, including creation of a welcoming environment for children and mothers. Special provisions such as dedicated

breastfeeding rooms, staff training on paediatric and maternal needs, and offering counselling and psychological support services to breastfeeding mothers were highlighted as key factors in achieving this recognition.

According to Dr Alawi, this achievement is the beginning of Khoula Hospital's journey towards excellence in paediatric care, with a vision to continually advance healthcare services for children to the highest possible standards.

Dr Salima bint Ali al Maamari, Director of Nutrition Department in the Ministry of Health, lauded the Baby-Friendly Hospital Initiative (BFHI) as a crucial programme for promoting breastfeeding within healthcare settings. She commended the Directorate General of Khoula Hospital for its steadfast commitment to implementing the ten-step BFHI, noting the exceptional efforts of medical staff in enhancing healthcare services for the community.

The accreditation follows meticulous evaluations by the Ministry of Health's Nutrition Department, affirming Khoula Hospital's adherence to the BFHI's stringent criteria for promoting and supporting breastfeeding practices.

The BFHI, initiated in 1991 by WHO and Unicef in response to the 1990 Innocenti Declaration, aims to equip healthcare facilities with guidelines to improve breastfeeding practices.

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Hakkai opens new branch in Al Khuwair

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The popular Chinese restaurant Hakkai opened a second branch in Al Khuwair near Ibis Hotel on Monday. Its first branch at Markaz al Bahja mall opened in 2021.

The new outlet has an extensive menu, including appetisers, main course items and desserts, besides an array of refreshing drinks. The 100-cover restaurant is designed to offer a delightful dining experience with both indoor and outdoor seating.

"At Hakkai, we believe in presenting a fusion of flavours to our patrons. While our roots are in

traditional Chinese cuisine, our menu is carefully curated with an infusion of local flavours," said Namrata Dhanwani Menghani, Managing Director of Hakkai.

She described this "culinary experimentation" aims to cater to the diverse palate of local customers. "The strategic location near Ibis Hotel in Al Khuwair positions Hakkai as an ideal destination for both residents and visitors for a memorable dining experience."

With an eye on Ramadan, which is around the corner, Namrata said the new branch will attract customers for iftar and also suhoor. "I had the same response in the first branch in Al Hail."

Duqm Refinery opening will spur investment: Yousef

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The inauguration of the Duqm Refinery in the presence of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and Sheikh Mishal al Ahmad al Jaber al Sabah, Emir of Kuwait, marks a significant leap in Oman's pursuit of economic diversification and attracting foreign investment.

The opening, as highlighted by H E Qais bin Muhammad al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry, and Investment Promotion, underscores the commitment to realising Oman Vision 2040, which focuses on broadening the economic base and diversifying income sources.

In a statement to ONA, the minister emphasised the strategic importance of the refinery within the Special Economic Zone at Duqm, anticipating the inauguration to spur further investments, especially in the petrochemical sector, leveraging the refinery's outputs.

"The Duqm Refinery is seen as a cornerstone for the industrial sector in Oman, representing a significant venture in terms of investment magnitude and



Alongside the Duqm Refinery, Oman prides in having three other refineries - Sohar, Mina al Fahal, and Salalah. These facilities are significantly contributing to the country's economy

H E QAIS BIN MUHAMMAD AL YOUSEF



production capability."

The refinery has already catalysed the development of high-value manufacturing industries, thereby enriching the local economy through contracts and procurements totalling over US\$2.4bn, with Omani construction and supply companies reap-

ing substantial benefits.

Highlighting the project's significance, Yousef said that the venture serves as a blueprint for future investments across various economic sectors, underscoring the strategic cooperation between Oman and Kuwait.

Adding to the sentiment, Ab-

dulsalam al Murshidi, president of the Oman Investment Authority, described the Duqm Refinery as the GCC's largest joint investment in the petrochemical sector. Murshidi expressed optimism that the refinery would attract further investments from regional and international in-

vestors, particularly to SEZAD, which boasts comprehensive infrastructure and prospects as an industrial hub.

"The refinery's operation is expected to spur growth in upstream and downstream industries, petrochemicals, and logistics, thereby adding significant value to SEZAD's industrial and investment landscape."

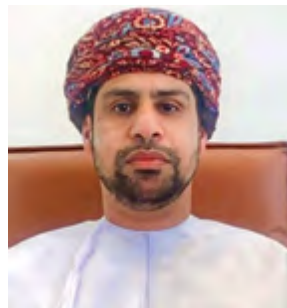
Yousef further noted that, alongside the Duqm Refinery, Oman prides in having three other refineries: Sohar, Mina al Fahal, and Salalah. These facilities are significantly contributing to the country's economy, investments and social fabric; besides bolstering the national strategy of revenue diversification.

These refineries, employing cutting-edge technologies, are dedicated to refining and processing oil into high-quality products, with a keen focus on health and environmental protection in alliance with relevant authorities, he added.

The inauguration of the Duqm Refinery is not just a testament to Oman's industrial growth but also a beacon of the sultanate's evolving economic landscape, promising a sound future.

Over RO74mn allocated to SMEs in Duqm

Our Correspondent
Muscat



Talal bin Said al Bartmani

The Special Economic Zone at Duqm is actively supporting small and midsize enterprises (SMEs) by committing to allocate 10% of all projects in the zone, an official said.

Talal bin Said al Bartmani, a specialist in SMEs at the zone, mentioned that SEZAD offers a 50% reduction in fees for all services provided to SMEs in the region. This reduction applies to over 130 activities, including registration services, commercial registry, and licences for entrepreneurs launching small and medium projects.

Till the end of 2023, there were 981 registered SMEs in the zone. The total value of business assigned to these enterprises by companies operating in the region from 2016 to 2023 amounted to RO74.5mn, with RO6.7mn assigned in 2023 alone.

Salim bin Ali al Shehri, Director of the SME Development Department in Al Wusta governorate, highlighted efforts to support entrepreneurs

through specialised training programmes, including the 'Jahzeey' programme, economic feasibility studies, and craftsmanship training for workers in the traditional crafts sector.

There are also two business incubators in Al Wusta, namely Sharaa Al Duqm Incubator and another at the Dry Dock in Duqm, he informed.

Abdul Rahim bin Zayed al Junaibi, Director of the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry branch in Al Wusta, emphasised the chamber's commitment to promoting business growth and motivating entrepreneurs. The chamber, through the one-stop shop in SEZAD, provides all necessary services and facilities for entrepreneurs and investors.

Ministerial team visits dates, textile projects in Dakhliyah

Our Correspondent
Muscat

A high-level delegation comprising several ministers visited Dakhliyah governorate on Monday and inspected the progress of Nizwa Dates Industrial Complex in Nizwa and the Textile Agriculture Centre in Bahla, affiliated with the Nakheel Oman Development Company (NODC).

The development projects in Dates Industrial Complex and the Agriculture Labour were reviewed by ministers, NODC stated.

The company, through a statement, informed that 'H E Eng Said bin Hamoud bin Said al Ma'awali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology; H E Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion; H E Sultan bin Salim al Habsi, Minister of Finance; H E Dr Hamad bin Said bin Sulaiman al Auli, Head of the Private Office; H E Dr Saud Hamoud al Habsi, Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources; H E Dr Khalfan bin Saeed al Shuaili, Minister of Housing and Urban Planning; and Sheikh Hilal al Hajri, Gover-



nor of Dakhliyah, visited the project sites for their first hand experience.

As per the statement, Ali Said Ali al Arai, general manager of NODC, gave a detailed presentation on the company's operations and various programmes, followed by a tour of the dates industrial complex and the Textile Agriculture Centre.

According to statistics from the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, there are approximately 9mn date palm trees of 325 varieties. The area under date cultivation is estimated at 62,000 feddans (26,000 hectares approx), constituting 22% of the total cultivated area.

Oman has more than 250 indigenous varieties of dates. The most cherished varieties among these known for their taste and succulence are the Khalas, Khunazi and Fardh.

NODC is the main recipient of the dates, as well as the palm waste, harvested in 11 farms distributed across six governorates of the One Million Date Palms Plantation Project.

Another company, Oman Dates Production and Packing Company, which was established in 2018, has invested in a project to set up an integrated factory in Barka and six collection centres in different governorates.

NODC purchases date products from the farmers.

Estidamah explores reforms

Continued from Page 01

On the workshop's significance, Iman emphasised its alignment with Oman Vision 2040's strategic pillars, which prioritise legislative, judicial and oversight reforms. Such reforms aim to establish a participatory legislative framework, a specialised and efficient judiciary, and an effective oversight mechanism.

"Integrating governance principles into legislative, judicial and oversight processes will significantly benefit Oman's business landscape," Iman noted. This approach is expected to boost investor confidence, elevate Oman's stature in global investment indices, spur economic growth, and direct international investments across diverse sectors.

The workshop saw participation of senior officials, including Nasser bin Khamis al Jashmi, Head of Tax Authority, Dr Khamis bin Saif al Jabri, Head of Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up Unit, Lord Gerry Grimstone, former UK Minister for Investment, H E Leanne Sanders, British Ambassador to Oman, and representatives of various governmental entities involved in legislative and legal affairs.

Winter fests see over 450,000 visitors in two governorates

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Buraimi Winter Festival and Tahayim Winter Festival in the governorates of Buraimi and South Sharqiyah respectively, have proven to be highly successful, attracting a combined total of over 450,000 visitors.

The Tahayim Winter Festival in Jaalan Bani Bu Ali, organised by South Sharqiyah governorate in collaboration with public and private entities, drew an impressive crowd of 300,000 people.

The festival featured a diverse range of activities, including children's programmes with interactive shows, competitions, and

juggling performances.

More than 159,000 people of various age groups visited the Buraimi Winter Festival.

Salim al Kaabi, Director of the Events and Awareness Department at the Buraimi Governor's Office, provided details about the Buraimi festival, highlighting the participation of 20 small and medium enterprises, nine communities, 35 productive families, and 20 restaurant owners.

The event comprised recreational and cultural activities, daily performances, theatre events, a heritage village, and dedicated spaces for small and medium enterprises, restaurants, and productive families.

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Tender No.	49/2023
Tender Title	Development of a Destination Branding and Place-making Strategy for Madinat Al Irfan (East)
Tender Submission Closing Date	07 March 2024
Tender Process Details	Please visit: www.omran.om/tenders/

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TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

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DISC/2024/019	UNE LOT 32E/2023	14/02/2024	06/03/2024	OMR. 52,500/-
DISC/2024/020	UNE LOT 01B/20	14/02/2024	06/03/2024	OMR. 52,500/-

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Source: xe.com

BRIEFS

Number of China listed firms hits 5,346

The number of listed companies on the Chinese domestic stock market reached 5,346 by the end of 2023, according to the China Association for Public Companies.

The number of companies listed on the country's Shanghai, Shenzhen and Beijing stock exchanges were 2,263, 2,844 and 239, respectively, said a monthly report published by the association.

There were 5,113 companies listed only on the A-share market and 11 companies listed only on the B-share market, while 222 firms were listed on multi-share markets such as A- and B-share markets as well as the A- and H-share markets.

The vast majority of companies in China by the end of 2023, were companies with manufacturing, information transmission, software and information technology services as their major focus.

Duqm Refinery all set to become key player in global energy market

OQ8 boosts Oman's oil refining capacity to over 500,000 barrels per day

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Duqm Refinery Project, a joint venture between Oman's global integrated energy group OQ and Kuwait Petroleum International, with an investment cost of approximately \$9bn, has positioned itself as a key player in the global energy market.

Duqm Refinery and Petrochemical Industries Company (OQ8) is setting benchmarks with its provision of high-quality energy solutions that fuel the growth and development of both industrial sectors and daily energy consumption. As one of the most advanced and expansive refineries in the Middle East and North Africa region, OQ8 relies on imported crude oil in its operations, setting it on a strategic path to be recognised as a world-class refining entity.

OQ8 has been recognised as the largest investment project between Oman and Kuwait and is one of the standout industrial ventures within the Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD) and a major stimulus for refinery-based projects.

OQ8's commitment to supplying superior petroleum products worldwide will significantly boost Oman's refining output, elevating the sultanate's refining capacity to over 500,000 barrels



per day.

Mulham Basheer al Jarf, Deputy President for Investment at Oman Investment Authority and Chairman of OQ Group, said that OQ8 is a testament to Oman's commitment to fostering strategic partnerships, particularly with fellow GCC nations. He further said that OQ8's objective is to optimize Oman's natural resources and significantly enhance the value of crude oil.

Constructed to meet the highest international standards and equipped with state-of-the-art technology, the OQ8 project is a cornerstone of OQ Group's strategy aimed at enriching the Omani economy through diversified investments.

Ashraf bin Hamad al Mamari, Acting CEO of OQ Group, said, "OQ8 marks a pinnacle of achievement for the Omani-Kuwaiti alliance. This collaboration not only merges our economic interests but also celebrates the profound connection and shared legacy that Oman and Kuwait hold."

He highlighted that the project's success unlocks further opportunities for future cooperation among GCC countries in developmental and economic initiatives, bolstering the stability of global energy supplies.

Shafi Taleb al Ajmi, CEO of Kuwait Petroleum International (Q8) and Vice Chairman of OQ8, said, "The establishment of OQ8 in Oman serves as a monumental milestone in the evolving economic relations between Oman and Kuwait and reflects the robust support and attention that both governments have afforded to the refinery."

Ajmi affirmed that OQ8 cements both countries' roles in the international energy landscape by pooling resources and expertise to foster technological progress and enable infrastructure enhancement, thereby stimulating innovation in renewable energy and other sectors.

He noted that OQ8 significantly boosts Oman's and Kuwait's efficacy in the energy sector, notably enhancing the trade flow between East and West. It opens new markets in Asia and Africa, where there is a consistently rising demand for energy.

Ajmi emphasised OQ8's strategic importance given its proximity to the Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean. This prime location positions it as a crucial gateway to international markets and maritime routes.

Integration with OQ projects
Duqm Refinery Project's syn-

ergy with nearby strategic projects establishes it as a pivotal industrial center, facilitating the growth of petrochemical and downstream industries within the Duqm region.

OQ8 is seamlessly integrated with a number of OQ Group investment projects, including OQ Gas Networks (OQGN), Oman Tank Terminal Company (OTTCO), Marafiq, and OQ Trading (OQT).

The Ras Markaz Crude Oil Terminal, expertly managed by OTTCO, is a shining example of this integration, as OTTCO provides crude storage tanks from which crude is transported to the refinery via pipelines extending over 80 km.

Marafiq, on the other hand, delivers vital services such as electricity, water, and sewage treatment to support OQ8 and several other projects, enabling the operations of various industries, including petrochemicals, manufacturing, and heavy industries, contributing to the development of manufacturing infrastructure.

Additionally, OQGN's extensive 221km long gas pipeline, stretching from Fahud to Special Economic Zone at Duqm, is strategically designed to cater to both the present and future gas supply requirements of the region.

OQ8 is leading strategic project between Oman and Kuwait: H E Sunaidy

Duqm – H E Dr Ali bin Masoud al Sunaidy, Chairman of the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ), appreciated the Royal interest of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik in the projects being implemented in the Special Economic Zone in Duqm (SEZAD).

In a statement to Oman News Agency, H E Sunaidy said that the visit of His Majesty the Sultan and His Highness the Emir of Kuwait to the SEZAD is a source of honor and pride for all workers in the zone.

He said, "The Duqm Refinery (OQ8) is a leading strategic project in the petroleum industries sector between Oman and Kuwait. It supports the efforts made to increase the added value of the converting sector and offers new investment opportunities for medium factories and small enterprises



H E Dr Ali al Sunaidy in Duqm."

H E Sunaidy underscored the importance of the strategic partnership between the two countries in the establishment of the Duqm Refinery and its strategic location close to the Asian and African markets which gives it a comparative advantage.

The OPAZ Chairman explained that the SEZAD translates Oman's plans for economic and social develop-

ment in accordance with Oman Vision 2040, strengthens the governorates' economy and expands the private sector's participation in the national economy.

He added that investors benefit from the infrastructure available in the Special Economic Zone at Duqm such as the Port of Duqm, Duqm Airport, the multi-purpose fishing port, and other road and infrastructure projects.

H E Sunaidy highlighted the diversity of investments in the SEZAD and other areas supervised by OPAZ. He pointed out that the volume of investments in the economic, free and industrial zones amounted to about RO17bn including RO4.2bn in the SEZAD, which reflects the interest of local and international investors and the efforts made to attract investments.

ONA

Over 300 firms to participate in Oman Petroleum and Energy Show in April

Muscat – Oman Petroleum and Energy Show (OPES) is set to take place from April 22 to April 24, 2024 at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre (OCEC).

Organised under the patronage of the Ministry of Energy and Minerals and hosted by Petroleum Development Oman (PDO), OPES stands as Oman's most significant international event for the oil, gas and energy industry.

The exhibition will include over 300 local and global oil and gas companies from more than 24 countries, expecting to attract over 15,000 trade visitors. Over the three days, the free-to-attend exhibition will also feature dynamic live product demonstrations that showcase the latest technologies fostering a resilient energy ecosystem.

OPES 2024, under the theme 'Affordable, Sustainable and Clean Energy', is more than just an event; it's a dynamic international platform driving the future of energy. This year, it will bring together global business leaders,



industry specialists and technology pioneers to foster opportunities for networking, new commercial partnerships and knowledge exchange.

The event is set to accelerate business growth, spur investment opportunities and highlight cutting-edge advancements in the energy industry.

In a press release, Dr Saleh Anbouri, Director General of the Directorate General of Exploration and Production at the Ministry of Energy and Minerals emphasised the pivotal role of OPES 2024 in shaping the future of energy.

He said, "This event is more than a showcase of industry advancements; it's a critical convergence point for global energy leaders to forge sustainable solutions. The activities will not only focus on current energy challenges but also on pioneering initiatives like energy transition and sustainability, renewable energy integration, carbon footprint reduction and technological in-

novations in energy efficiency. These dialogues are set to influence policy-making and operational standards, marking a significant leap towards a more sustainable, efficient and innovative energy landscape."

The SPE Conference at OPES, a prominent knowledge forum of OPES, will include a speaking faculty of renowned global experts and industry leaders. Participants will engage in thought-leadership sessions, panel discussions and technical presentations, diving deep into insights and best practices pivotal to the energy transition.

Technical workshops are on the agenda to facilitate discussions on the transition to energy sources that are not only affordable and clean but also sustainable, looking towards a future where energy generation does not compromise environmental integrity.

Other key highlights of OPES 2024 underscore the event's commitment to innovation and sustainable development within the energy sector.

Sohar Industrial Training Institute ranked as first category institute

Sohar – Sohar Aluminium Company (SA) announced that its Sohar Industrial Training Institute (SITI) has been ranked as a first category institute. The recently acknowledged ranking came in accordance with the specifications of the Ministry of Higher Education, Scientific Research, and Innovation, represented in the provisions of the regulation organising private training, issued by Ministerial Decision No 40/2021.

Being a professional institute,

SITI provides various training programmes and courses with competitive international standards in the technical and professional fields and personal skills development for employees, trainees, and contractors from within and outside Sohar Aluminium.

Sohar Industrial Training Institute consists of different well-equipped facilities, including seven classrooms, a computer lab, a Programmable Logic Controllers (PLC) lab, a welding and



fabrication workshop, an electrical and mechanical training workshop, hydraulic and pneumatic training labs, instrumentation training lab, two meeting rooms, library, and a multi-purpose auditorium with a 200+ seating capacity.

Along with state-of-the-art training facilities, SITI is proud of the credentials of its trainers who are highly qualified and specialised in their fields. SITI constantly strives to develop and improve the skills and knowledge

of its training staff to ensure that the trainees receive their optimum level of investment.

It is worth noting that Sohar Industrial Training Institute was established in 2008 as a training centre and was later upgraded to an institute in 2016. The institute primarily focuses on delivering technical vocational training while also providing safety and soft skills training. Its mission is to make training accessible within the region by adapting and delivering training wherever

required. Since its inception, the Institute has been able to train many employees, contractors, and trainees at Sohar Aluminium.

The institute also attracted a number of trainees from a group of private and public entities from within Oman and other aluminium sector companies from outside the country.

In addition, the institute conducted different training programmes that targeted students and job seekers.

Global LNG shipments rise 3.4% to record high in 2023

Ankara, Turkey - Global LNG shipments in 2023 grew by 3.4% compared to the previous year, according to statistics from the Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries' (OAPEC) LNG Market Report.

OAPEC figures show that global LNG imports hit a record high of 409.3mn tonnes last year.

The Asian market dominated imports, with China, Japan, and South Korea accounting for the lion's share. LNG imports into the Asian market rose by 3% to 261.6mn tonnes last year, compared to 2022.

In Europe, including Turkey and the UK, LNG imports totalled 126mn tonnes last year, up 0.07% from 2022.

However, excluding Turkey and the UK, the EU's LNG imports climbed by 4.9% year over year in 2023, reaching 100.3mn tonnes.

US LNG accounted for 48% of Europe's LNG import portfolio, totalling 60mn tonnes. Russia followed with a 13% share, Qatar with 12%, and Algeria with 8%, while other countries also contributed to the remainder.

North and South America's LNG imports increased by 8.3% to 13mn tonnes, although the Middle East's imports decreased by 8% to 6.6mn tonnes.



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Natural Gas, LNG and Hydrogen Expert at OAPEC, Wael Hamed Abdel Moati, stated in the report that the increase in global LNG imports was due to the increase in Chinese demand in Asia.

"China's demand increased by more than 13% on an annual basis compared to 2022, which enabled China to overtake Japan and become the largest market

in the global LNG market again."

While the EU's overall LNG imports have increased as a result of Germany's orientation toward a new LNG market to meet its natural gas needs, he said that in general, the Asian market is the main route of LNG shipments, with a 64% share of total global demand, followed by Europe with 31% and other markets with 5%.

US becomes LNG export leader

While the US, Qatar, and Australia accounted for approximately 61% of global LNG exports last year, the US exported the majority at 89.5mn tonnes.

On the global LNG market, Algeria, Angola, Cameroon, Indonesia, Mozambique, Norway, and the US were among the countries that saw increases in

their exports last year.

The Russia-Ukraine war has significantly affected LNG markets worldwide with increased competition, the consequences of which have been expanded liquefaction capacity at LNG terminals and Qatar ramping up production.

According to the report, Qatar aims to complete the expansion of the North Field oil and gas project in 2027 and increase the liquefaction capacity from 77mn tonnes to 127mn tonnes to once again rank as the world leader in LNG exports.

Anadolu Agency



OECD revises up 2024 global growth forecast to 2.9%

Paris, France - Global GDP growth projected to pick up pace in 2025 to come in at 3% thanks to ease of financial conditions

The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) on Monday revised up its global economic growth forecast for 2024 to 2.9%, from its previous projection of 2.7% in November.

This will follow a 3.1% growth last year with inflation declining more quickly than anticipated, the Paris-based organization said in its February Interim Economic Outlook report.

The global GDP growth is projected to pick up pace in 2025 to come in at 3%, thanks to ease of financial conditions, in line with the previous report.

The OECD revised up the US economic growth by 0.6 percentage points to 2.1% for 2024, backed by household spending and strong labor market conditions, but left it unchanged at 1.7% for 2025.

With activity held back by tight credit conditions in the near term, the eurozone GDP is estimated to rise 0.6% this year and 1.3% next year, revised downwards by 0.3 percentage points and 0.2 percentage points, respectively.

The OECD has kept China's growth forecast constant at 4.7% in 2024 and 4.2% in 2025 due to subdued consumer demand, high debt, and the weak property market.

The OECD foresees inflation will be back to target in most G20 countries by the end of next year with headline figure falling from 6.6% this year to 3.8% in 2025.

The core inflation in the G20 advanced economies will ease to 2.5% this year and 2.1% next year, it added.

The OECD warned that the growth could be weaker than expected if the lingering effects from past policy rate hikes are stronger than expected.

Agencies

Central banks need to be guided by data in monetary policy: IMF

Washington, US - International Monetary Fund (IMF) Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva said central banks around the world need to be guided by macroeconomic data in deciding their monetary policy path.

She said there is a risk of premature loosening interest rates for central banks during this time of their monetary tightening cycle, as well as 'a very tricky space of different countries being in different place in the cycle.'

"So you can not, as it was last year, where everybody needed to tighten and you kind of synchronise policy action. You can not do that anymore."

"You can not look at the other guy and say, oh, well, they are loosening, therefore I should be loosening, or they are staying put, therefore I should stay put. So that's a tricky part," she told at a media round table in Washington," IMF chief said.

Georgieva also pointed to the risk of keeping interest rates higher for longer, and that is why central banks need to pay attention to macroeconomic data.



Our team has looked back in history and the conclusion they drew is that the risk of premature monetary easing is higher than the risk of being slightly behind

KRISTALINA GEORGIEVA

"Our team has looked back in history, and the conclusion they drew is that the risk of premature easing is higher than the risk of being slightly behind, because a premature easing can reverse gains with more significant impact on confidence, both consumer confidence and investor confidence, and also anticipation for what inflation may look like in

the future," she explained.

About achieving a 'soft landing' - a situation where a central bank manages to bring down inflation but avoids a recession, the IMF chief said, "They need to lend the plane smoothly. They are going to lend it, lend it in the best possible way. Not too early, not too late, move into policy easing."

Anadolu Agency

China continues to strengthen financial sector role in serving real economy

Beijing, China - China is continuing to make concrete efforts to deepen the financial sector's role in serving the real economy as the fundamental goal of high-quality financial development, experts and insiders observed.

"Since last year, financial institutions have continued to strengthen the allocation of resources in key areas and weak links such as scientific and technological innovation, infrastructure, private small and micro enterprises, and green development, and have shown obvious characteristics of serving high-quality development," said Dong Ximiao, chief researcher at Merchants Union Consumer Finance Company Limited.

Chinese political advisors have also called for efforts to continuously improve the capacity, quality and efficiency of the financial sector, and promote the sector's high-level opening up to provide support for the building of a nation with a strong financial sector.

These are the latest developments echoing the commitments made at a central financial work conference held in Beijing at the end of October last year. The conference noted that more fi-



The People's Bank of China headquarters in Beijing

ancial resources should be leveraged to support scientific and technological innovations, advanced manufacturing, green development, micro, small and medium-sized enterprises, as well as innovation-driven development strategies and coordinated regional development strategies.

As these policies took effect, many enterprises got energised. At the beginning of this new year, Yan Bing, customer manager of China Everbright Bank

Nanjing Branch, has visited a dozen enterprises without stopping and issued loans of nearly 200mn yuan (about \$28.15mn).

Yan, in particular, issued a loan of 10mn yuan to Yangzhou Daika Wheel Manufacturing Co, making it the Nanjing branch's first enterprise loan issued this year for small and medium-sized enterprises that specialise in a niche market, meeting the financing needs of the enterprise's business expansion.

"Last year, China Everbright

Bank selected 'science and technology finance' as one of the three new business development tracks," said Yan, introducing characteristic products to optimize the credit model, improve the approval efficiency, and strengthen its service to scientific and technological enterprise customers.

Other banks and financial institutions are also vying for opportunities emerging in serving the real economy.

Xinhua

Mukesh Ambani tops Brand Guardianship Index 2024 among Indians

Mumbai, India - Mukesh Ambani, Chairman and Managing Director of Reliance Industries Limited, has been ranked first among all the Indians and second globally in the Brand Guardianship Index 2024 compiled by Brand Finance.

The Brand Guardianship Index is a global recognition of CEOs, who are building business value in a sustainable manner by balancing the needs of all stakeholders - employees, investors,

and the wider society. Notably, Mukesh Ambani was placed at the second position globally in the 2023 ranking as well.

This year Ambani was ranked at the first position in Brand Guardianship Index 2024 among the 'Diversified' conglomerates.

Ambani was ranked ahead of global majors like Satya Nadella of Microsoft, Google's Sundar Pichai, Apple's Tim Cook and Tesla's Elon Musk, as well as fel-



Mukesh Ambani

low Indians such as N Chandrasekaran of Tata Group and Anish Shah of Mahindra Group, among many others. Brand Finance's survey gave Mukesh Ambani a BGI score of 80.3, just below 81.6 of Huateng Ma of China-based Tencent.

Brand Finance constructs a balanced scorecard of measures designed to identify the factors that best capture the ability of CEOs to act as stewards of their company's brand and long-term

value. This year's analysis reveals that ESG has become the single most important driving force in determining CEO reputation.

Being regarded as 'a sustainability champion' accounts for 14% of variation in reputation scores, ahead of factors such as perceived trustworthiness (12.5%), having 'a strong strategy and vision' and global recognition.

According to Brand Finance,

the role of a brand guardian is to build brand and business value. It is a global recognition of the CEOs, who forge win-win partnerships to build a sustainable future, redefining the role of a CEO from ultracompetitive entrepreneur to collaborative diplomat. The Brand Guardianship Index celebrates the CEOs, who balance the needs of commercial success, long-term brand building and personal reputation management.

Brand Finance follows a balanced scorecard of measures that capture the ability of a CEO to act as the guardian of their company's brand and a steward of long-term shareholder value.

Recently, Jio' was recognised as the strongest brand from India in the latest report 'Global 500 - 2024' published by Brand Finance, ahead of multi-decade-old Indian brands like LIC and SBI.

ANI

OQGN kicks off its Open Learning Day 2024

OQ Gas Networks - the exclusive operator of Oman's Natural Gas Transmission Network - organised its annual Open Learning Day 2024 under the patronage of H E Sayyid Salim bin Musallam al Busaidi, Undersecretary for Human Resources Development in the Ministry of Labour, on Sunday.

Held at OQGN headquarters in Muscat, the day was attended by a number of notable officials from the Oman Investment Authority, OQGN Board of Directors and OQ.

The anticipated learning day saw dynamic and interactive learning activities organised with the overarching goal of fostering a culture of continuous learning within the organisation.

OQGN commitment to creating a vibrant learning environment is evident in the diverse range of learning activities, initiatives and innovative tools offered, catering to the learning needs of all employees.

The event started with an opening ceremony, where OQGN Managing Director, Mansoor al Abdali, took the stage to share insights on the importance of embracing a culture of open learning.

The open learning day, continued with an engaging tour of the exhibition, featuring the business booths of nine functions: People,



Technology and Culture, Quality, Health, Safety, Security and Environment, Business Development and Commercial, Technical Services, Finance, Project Delivery, and Legal & Compliance.

Each booth offered shared knowledge activities related to their departments, enriching an exchange of ideas and connections across diverse backgrounds. Beyond the focus on

shared knowledge, the Open Learning Day also became a platform to celebrate the remarkable talents within OQGN workforce. Various booths showcased different talents, ranging from

drones technology, photography, horse riding, painting and more.

Faisal al Mamari, vice president of People, Technology, and Culture said on this occasion: "At OQGN, our perpetual commit-

ment revolves around nurturing a culture of continuous learning and development among our employees. As we are proud of the achievements of the efforts of more than 480 employees, as

OQGN scored 75 points in the employee satisfaction index on culture and work environment, which is the highest compared with Middle East benchmark.

"At a stunning Omanisation rate of 94%, we believe that by empowering our workforce with diverse opportunities to learn, we not only fulfill our organizational goals but also play a role in the broader socio-economic advancement of our cherished nation."

The event provided a unique opportunity to all employees to learn from OQGN expertise throughout different tailor-made sessions particularly in the fields of Process Safety Management, Sustainability, Contracting Improvement and many more.

OQGN is the exclusive owner and operator of Oman's Natural Gas Transmission Network (NGTN), holding a natural monopoly over this critical infrastructure. With a decade-long track record of 99.99% gas availability and no supply interruptions in 2023, our operational excellence is evident. OQGN's health and safety record further demonstrates our adherence to the highest standards. Our operations consider societal interests and Oman's economic development, aligning with the government's environmental sustainability efforts.

Third lecture of 'Mandvi to Muscat' series held

The Embassy of India in Muscat organised the third lecture in the series 'From Mandvi to Muscat: Indian Community and the shared history of India and Oman'.

Renowned historian, economist, and member of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Economic Advisory Council, Sanjeev Sanyal, delivered the lecture titled 'Mandvi to Muscat: Five thousand years of exchange'.

The lecture shed light on the historical ties between India and Oman, exploring ancient maritime connections, shipbuilding traditions, and maritime trade. Sanyal shared insights into the Government of India's project to reconstruct an ancient stitched ship based on a 4th and 5th century AD concept.

The ambitious plan involves sailing the ship from Mandvi to Muscat, a project announced during the state visit of His Majesty the Sultan Haitham bin



Tarik to India in December last year.

The event witnessed enthusiastic participation from the Indian community, Omanis of Indian origin, scholars, and distinguished guests.

Pareesh Shah from the Shah Nagardas Family shared a narrative of his family's history, under-

scoring their contributions to the historical relations between India and Oman.

In the final segment of the programme, Anisha Parjit, founder of the Oman Book Lovers Club, interviewed Sanjeev Sanyal, delving into his insights as an accomplished author of best-selling books.

UTAS participates as technology, applied science partner at GHEDEX Exhibition

As part of its active collaboration with various community institutions and its commitment to promoting awareness, the University of Technology and Applied Science is participating in the Global Higher Education Exhibition (GHEDEX) for the year 2024.

The university serves as the Technology and Applied Science partner in the exhibition, taking place at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Center.

The primary objective is to introduce visitors to the university, its academic programs, system, and its 11 branches distributed across different governorates of the Sultanate of Oman.

The university's participation in this year's event aims to solidify its vision as a scientific entity in the field of higher education, scientific research, innovation, and entrepreneurship.

It emphasises the university's role in supplying the job market with specialized national outputs



in various fields. The exhibition provides a platform to showcase academic programs, specialties, future skills empowerment steps, and upcoming projects in the field of technical and applied education.

GHEDEX serves as an oppor-

tunity for the university to introduce itself and engage with various segments of society and institutions. The university's booth at the exhibition welcomes visitors, providing insights into the establishment of the university, its system, and its notable

status as the largest university in the sultanate with 11 branches spread across the country.

Additionally, the booth highlights the university's programmes and unveils its plan to introduce a postgraduate programme for the first time.

ROHM to present A Midsummer Night's Dream opera

The Royal Opera House Muscat will present *A Midsummer Night's Dream* - an opera by Benjamin Britten to be performed at the opera house over two nights on February 9 and 10.

This wonderful classical tale, based on the comedy by William Shakespeare, is a brand-new production between Teatro Carlo Felice di Genoa and the Royal Opera House Muscat, and was premiered in Genoa in October 2023.

The production is mesmerising. Directed by the acclaimed British director and producer, Laurence Dale, the crew and cast are as glittering as the production. Gary McCann is in charge of costumes and the choreography has been revived by Carmine De Amicis.

Britten's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was first shown in the UK in 1960 making it a relatively young opera. *The libretto* was penned by Peter Pears (1910-1986) and is faithful the original



wording by Shakespeare. The transformation to opera makes this well known and loved comedy even more spectacular on stage.

Loosely carved into three dimensions, the story revolves around the passion and rivalry between the strong main charac-

ters: Wile the fairy king and queen quarrel over a young page; young Athenians fall in and out of love, defying their parent's wishes and falling prey to the mischievous meddling of Puck, the fairy with the love potion made from the nectar of flowers; and in the same forest, an hilari-

ous group of friends gather to rehearse a play for the wedding of the Theseus, the Duke, among them the infamous character known as Bottom. The story weaves its wonderful magic, set against the backdrop of a tangled forest and fizzing with the magic of fairies. Tickets for *A Midsum-*

mer Night's Dream are available at the box office. They can also be purchased on the website or via the ROHM app. A pre-performance talk, discussing the production with members of the creative team, will take place at 6pm each evening. This talk is for ticket holders only.

Indian School Sur holds annual award ceremony

Indian School Sur hosted its Annual Award Ceremony for the academic year 2023-24 with grandeur and enthusiasm at the Al Sharqia Hall, University of Technology & Applied Sciences, Sur.

The ceremony was graced by a plethora of dignitaries, including the chief guest Dr Rashid Nasser al Matani, assistant vice-chancellor of the UTAS Sur; guests of honour Mohammad Ameen, former SMC president and Managing Director of Sea Pride Group of Companies; Ilyas Syed, head of Finance & Business Support, Waterfront and Marina SAOC (OMRAN); Krishnendhu S, Director, Board of Directors, and Director In-Charge of Indian School Sur, Ifthikar Ali Khan, Director Operations, OMIFCO; Jami Srinivas Rao, SMC president;

Pradeep Kumar A V, convener; members Dr Ramkumar, Shabeeb Mohammed, and Nishreen Basheer and other invited guests.

The Student of the Year Award was given to Master Hashim Ashraf of Class XII for his exceptional contributions in academics, co-curricular activities, sports, and leadership roles.

He received a gold medal sponsored by Sea Pride Group of Companies. Class XII topper Krishnendu Sajith Karimil and Class X topper Master Srihari Pradeep were honoured for their excellence in CBSE exams along with other subject toppers.

Certificates of excellence were presented to students who achieved A+ grades in co-curricular activities and class toppers in academics.



Bank Muscat's Green Sports field in Bidiya

Bank Muscat, the leading financial service provider in the sultanate, handed over the Green Sports field to the Al Etihad Sports and Cultural team from the wilayat of Bidiya for the completion of the lighting system project," adding that "Bank Muscat is keen to continue implementing the Green Sports programme and has announced earlier this year the launch of the 13th edition of Green Sports."

This programme, he said, aims to support local sports teams by enhancing sports fields infrastructure in order to empower the talents of Omani youth and use the premises to organize various social activities.

"I would like to take this opportunity to wish the team members all the best."

Younus bin Amer al Hajri, head of Al Etihad Sports & Cultural Team, Bidiya, said, "I would like to thank Bank Muscat for continuing to implement the Green Sports programme to support local sports teams across the Sultanate."

"We are pleased to celebrate the inauguration of the lighting system project and we call on everyone in the community to make the best use of the new facility in the different sport, cultural and social activities."

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

Since its inception in 2012, the Green Sports programme continued to reaffirms the bank's commitment to providing ample opportunities for young Omanis to develop their talents.



Aster Al Raffah Hospital opens mother and childcare in Sohar

Aster Al Raffah Hospital in Sohar, part of Aster DM Healthcare - a leading integrated healthcare provider in the region, opened a dedicated Mother and Childcare Department in its 60-bedded multispecialty hospital, a release stated.

This is a testament to the hospital's commitment to advance medical care in the region by making top-notch clinical expertise and worldclass services locally available, the release added.

The dedicated department for maternity and childcare is fully equipped to provide end-to-end comprehensive care supporting a mother's journey from conception to delivery and specialised paediatric and neonatal care as needed.

A special highlight is the introduction of Royal Delivery Suites which would provide care and comfort for the mother, the newborn, and the family in a premium setting. All parents would have access to the Aster Nurture App, a digital platform that would aid their journey into parenthood.

Parents will have exclusive access to the Aster Nurture App, an innovative digital platform designed to support them on their parenthood journey. This unique and premium app, the first of its kind in Oman, reflects our dedication to providing exceptional treatment to the precious gift of motherhood, acknowledging its significance in the most technologically advanced way.

The inauguration ceremony was graced by Sheikh Ahmad bin Mohammad bin Shihab al Baloushi, wali of Sohar. The inauguration also witnessed the presence of Dr Sherbaz Bichu, Chief Executive Officer, Aster Hospitals & Clinics, UAE, Oman & Bahrain; Shailesh Guntu, Chief Executive Officer, Aster Hospitals and Clinics, Oman; Dr Sheikha al Jabri, senior consultant, Obstetrics and Gynecology, Sohar Hospital, alongside officials and staff from Aster Oman.

The Mother and Childcare department provides modern labor and delivery suites, high-end equipments, advanced technology, and a Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) for specialized care.

Emphasizing patient-centric care, the Unit seamlessly blends expertise, care, and technology to ensure the well-being of both mothers and newborns.

Speaking at the event's inauguration, Baloushi said, "We are committed to establishing a thriving healthcare hub that aligns with our vision centred around wellbeing and happiness and that not only meets the needs of our nation's people but also addresses the requirements of our vast region."

BEC opens Carrier Experience Centre

Bahwan Engineering Company (BEC), a pioneer in introducing high-efficiency Carrier air-conditioning solutions in Oman over 45 years back, inaugurated the state-of-the-art Carrier Experience Centre in Mabela on Monday, a release stated.

H H Faisal Abdul Rawoof Abbas al Said honoured the occasion as the chief guest during the inaugural event, attended by representatives from the media and senior management officials from both Carrier and BEC.

"We take pride in being an Omani Company that over the decades, has helped clients in a comprehensive range of market verticals such as healthcare, hospitality, banking, education, residential, commercial and government high rise buildings, airports, and other iconic projects in achieving faster returns on investment, lower operating costs, and higher operating efficiencies," said a senior BEC management representative present on the occasion.

"This Carrier Experience Centre is not just retail expansion, but a showcase of the world-leading quality, cutting-edge technology, and globally trusted reliability from Carrier that is available for Omani homes and residential buildings," he added.

Since 1902, Carrier has been a trailblazer in heating and cooling solutions, with its founder Willis Carrier pioneering the development of the first modern air conditioning system, revolutionising the world's living standards.

Guided by the philosophy that 'big innovations are not just for big buildings', Carrier provides expert solutions encompassing VRF, ducted, ductless, packaged products, and window room air conditioners, delivering high efficiency and superior comfort in diverse settings such as homes, offices, apartments, retail spaces, and various other applications.

"Carrier products with their high efficiency and sustainable design contribute directly to the objectives of Oman's National Strategy for an Orderly Transition to Net Zero," said Madhanagopal Chandrakumar, Chief Executive Officer of AHI Carrier.

"As in other parts of the world, we have started to see effects of global warming in the region as well in the form of more tropical storms, more days with temperatures exceeding 45°C, and reports of increasing desertification. It is highly commendable that in the Government of Oman's planned orderly transition, decarbonization takes priority and would optimize for all five of the transition objectives," added Chandrakumar.

"Decarbonisation is where we add tangible value through engineered technical solutions and high efficiency equipment, that in applications in the GCC, have reduced energy requirements by more than 40%, contributing greatly to decarbonisation."



Al Habib group takes part at IDF Oman Expo

Al Habib & Co is participating at the tenth Interior Design Furnishing Expo Oman, which was inaugurated at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre under the patronage of H H Sayyida Meyyan bint Shihab al Said, the Chairperson of Oman Design Association, in Muscat on Monday.

Al Habib is a market leader in real estate services with over four decades of experience, expertise and knowledge in real estate management, brokerage, valuation, property development, facilities management, market research and interior fit-outs.

Through its participation at the expo for the first time, the company aims to showcase its expertise and the unique smart solutions it offers based on client's aesthetical and functional needs. It is also showcasing its history in interior fit-outs and the projects it has delivered, reflecting its committed attention to quality across various business interests and real estate sectors.

This step comes as part of the company's wider new plan to expand its presence and business lines.

National Museum inaugurates Italian art exhibition in Bayt Greiza

In furtherance of cultural communication between Oman and Italy, the National Museum inaugurated an exhibition of the works of Italian artists in the historical Bayt Greiza.

'The Infinity of White: Lucio Fontana and the Italian Artists of the Absolute' is the first art exhibition of its kind in the Middle East, displaying eight works of art by Italian artists, in cooperation with the Italian 'Robilant and Voena' foundation, a long-established art house devoted to the promotion of Italian post-war art.

The exhibition brings together works by eight of the most influential artists, who energised Italian painting and sculpture in the mid-twentieth century: Agostino Bonalumi, Enrico Castellani, Pietro Consagra, Lucio Fontana, Piero Manzoni, and Paolo Scheggi.

The exhibition aims to bring the work of these artists to new audiences, bringing a greater understanding of how they uprooted artistic traditions to explore the limitless potential of space.

The inauguration ceremony was attended by number of Highnesses, Excellencies, Ambassador accredited to the Sultanate of Oman and those interested in the cultural and museum field.

In addition to the exhibition at Bayt Greiza, R+V is lending an artwork by Agostino Bonalumi, Rosso (Red), to the National Museum, where it will be displayed alongside the museum's permanent collection.

Jamal Hassan al Moosawi, Secretary-General of the National Museum, said to complement the legacy of this historic house with its exquisite geometric design, the idea of the project came up titled 'A Masterpiece in Bayt Greiza', through which the National Museum enriches the artistic and expressive dimensions of this palace by hosting art exhibitions with splendid implications and senses within its walls, such as the 'The Infinity of White' exhibition.

"We hope that visitors to the exhibition will have an unforgettable artistic experience. In this regard, we do not forget to express our deep gratitude for the efforts and generous support of the 'Robilant and Voena' foundation in organising and preparing this exceptional exhibition," the Secretary-General of the National Museum added.



China's health commission warns COVID cases could rise during Spring Festival

Beijing, China - China's National Health Commission (NHC) on Sunday said that at present, the COVID-19 epidemic is at a low level in China. However, the recent surveillance data showed that positive case reports have witnessed a slight rise, suggesting that the epidemic is on the rise, Global Times reported.

According to NHC, the number of COVID-19 cases is expected to rise due to the inter-regional movement of people and the increase of crowd gathering around the Spring Festival.

While addressing a press conference on Sunday, Chen Cao, a researcher at the Institute of Viral Diseases of Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention (China CDC), said currently, the JN.1 variant of the COVID-19 virus has become the dominant strain in local cases in China, particularly mild infections, according to Global Times report.

According to the press conference, influenza has been witnessing a downward trend. However, it is still the most important pathogen of respiratory disease infection and other respiratory diseases are at a low level. In February, epidemics of multiple respiratory diseases will continue to spread in China, the Global Times reported, citing the press conference. The flu is expected to witness a decline to a low level around the Spring Festival holiday which falls from



Folk artists perform on the day of 'Lichun' (the beginning of spring), the first solar term in the traditional Chinese lunar calendar, in Rongcheng, east China's Shandong Province on Sunday (Xinhua)

February 10-17.

The data showed that the situation of acute respiratory diseases in China has witnessed a drop for two consecutive weeks after reaching a peak in early December 2023. Cases were then

reported at the end of December and continued to fluctuate at a high level and dropped in the past three weeks. NHC spokesperson Mi Feng said that the diagnosis and treatment of respiratory diseases in outpatient

and emergency departments of level II medical institutions and above continued to remain stable, Global Times reported.

According to Mi, the current situation is due to travel before the Spring Festival, and the in-

crease in domestic North-South cross tourism and increasing overseas sightseeing tours.

The mass movement and gathering of people makes it easy to increase the spread of respiratory diseases, and respiratory

diseases will remain at a certain epidemic level before and after the Spring Festival.

Li Tongzeng, the chief physician of the infection department at Beijing You'an Hospital, said that in his hospital, influenza B

The number of COVID-19 cases is expected to rise due to inter-regional movement of people and the increase of crowd gathering around the Spring Festival

cases are still at the top spot, with COVID-19 ranking second. Li noted that influenza B is still the main type of flu, with a decrease in cases while the proportion of COVID-19 cases has witnessed a rise recently.

Li warned that many people during the spring festival holiday will meet their families and visit elderly relatives, which implies that the infection rate among the elderly could rise and called on the people to look after their families, Global Times reported.

He added that currently, a few elderly people still face more severe symptoms of COVID-19 infections, and there are also people who have been infected with COVID-19 for the first time, which raises the risk of developing a moderate to severe illness.

According to the press conference on Sunday, the NHC has made special preparations for epidemic prevention and control work around the spring festival.

ANI

US: Hiker's remains found nine months after disappearance

California, US - The remains of a hiker who went missing in a park in Southern California last year were found, nearly nine months after the man's disappearance, CNN reported citing the US National Park Service.

Joshua Tree National Park's staff members discovered the skeletal remains of Trammell Evans, 25, on January 25 off a trail in the park's Black Rock area, park officials said on Tuesday in a statement.

"Park staff were led to the discovery when park researchers found an unattended backpack, which was later confirmed as belonging to Trammell Evans," the release said.

The hiker, Evans, was last

seen after being dropped off at the Black Rock Campground on the night of April 30 last year, according to the park service, CNN reported.

He was supposed to be picked up on May 5, last year after a few days of hiking, an NPS news release said. He was reported missing that day.

Evans was considered an 'athletic and experienced long-distance hiker' who was familiar with Joshua Tree, according to a park service news release last year.

Evans' loved ones had ran a Facebook page seeking information on his whereabouts in the months since his disappearance.

ANI

Death toll in Chile wildfires rises to 99

Santiago, Chile - Deadly wildfires in Chile have claimed at least 99 lives till now, reported CNN citing the government's Legal Medical Service (SML).

A state of emergency has been proclaimed as smoke engulfed the coastal cities of Chile, forcing residents in core regions to flee their homes.

President Gabriel Boric announced on Sunday, following his visit to the affected districts, that Monday and Tuesday would be designated as national mourning days in honour of the fire victims, CNN reported.

He also stated that the death toll 'will increase significantly', in a press conference on Sunday.

The governor of the Valparaiso region, Rodrigo Mundaca, announced on Sunday that a curfew was being enforced in the towns of Vina del Mar, Quilpue, Villa Alemana, and Limache so that officials could concentrate on putting out the



A state of emergency has been proclaimed as smoke engulfed the coastal cities of Chile (Anadolu Agency)

fires.

Valeria Melipillan, the mayor of Quilpue, told CNN Chile that the fire was 'probably the largest ever' in the area and that around 1,400 homes had been damaged.

Although the evacuation attempts had been effective, Melipillan noted that several residents of the impacted areas had expressed a reluctance to leave their houses.

"Pray for the deceased and injured victims of the devastating fires that have affected central Chile," Pope Francis urged people to pray for those who lost their lives in wildfires, in a post on X.

Meanwhile, Chile's President Boric said in a televised statement on Saturday that the defence ministry would send additional military personnel to the impacted areas and would provide all required supplies.

The fires triggered evacuations in several regions of central Chile. In February 2023, fires in the country swept through more than 400,000 hectares and killed more than 22 people.

Though this year's fires have not spread as widely, Toha said they are 'multiplying rapidly' and are spreading closer to urban areas, so the potential to affect more people and structures is 'very high', as per NBC News.

The fires broke out as Chile faces a heat wave that has affected other Latin American countries as well. Boric declared a state of emergency, and red alerts were issued for at-risk areas.

ANI

Trump name-drops Tim Scott, Kristi Noem as top vice president choices

Washington, US - US former president Donald Trump on Sunday stoked rumours about his choice for a running mate in 2024 by mentioning Senator Tim Scott and Governor Kristi Noem of South Dakota in response to a question about his preference for the vice president contenders, The Hill reported.

During an interview with Fox News's Maria Bartiromo for 'Sunday Morning Futures', Trump said 'not for a while' when asked when he would announce his choice for vice president.

After Trump said 'there are a lot of good people', Bartiromo questioned whether Trump had still not chosen one of them.

"I haven't, and there's no reason," Trump responded.



Donald Trump

He continued saying he talks to 'everyone' and disclosed that he recently spoke with Scott, who withdrew his presidential run last year and then endorsed Trump wholeheartedly.

"I called him and I said, 'You are a much better candidate for me, than you were for yourself,'"

he said. "When I watched Tim, he was fine, he was good, but he was very low-key. I watched him in the last week, defending me, and sticking up for me and fighting for me," reported The Hill.

Subsequently, Trump said Noem has 'been incredible fighting' for him, citing her declaration that she would never challenge him 'because (she) can't beat him'. The names of Scott and Noem have been in circulation lately, along with a few others, according to The Hill.

After winning in New Hampshire and Iowa, Trump has a commanding lead over the last significant opponent of the Republican Party, former UN Ambassador Nikki Haley.

ANI

Mbumba sworn in as Namibia's president

Windhoek, Namibia - Nangolo Mbumba, the former vice president of Namibia, took the oath of office on Sunday in the capital Windhoek, officially becoming the nation's 4th president after former President Hage Geingob passed away earlier this morning at the age of 82.

The swearing-in ceremony extended beyond the presidency, as Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah, the former deputy prime minister and minister of International Relations and Cooperation, assumed the role of the new vice president.

Nangolo Mbumba, born on August 15, 1941, had previously served as the second vice president of Namibia since 2018. A dedicated member of the South West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO), Mbumba boasts



Nangolo Mbumba during the swearing-in ceremony in Windhoek (Xinhua)

an extensive career, having led various ministries in Namibia.

His portfolio includes Minister of Agriculture, Water and Rural Development (1993-1996), Minister of Finance (1996-2003), Minister of Information and Broadcasting (2003-2005), Minister of Education (2005-2010), and Minister of Safety and

Security (2010-2012). From 2012 to 2017, Mbumba held the position of secretary-general of the ruling SWAPO.

In a statement released by the Namibian Presidency on Sunday morning, Mbumba said: "It is with utmost sadness and regret that I inform you that our beloved Dr Hage G Geingob, the Presi-

dent of the Republic of Namibia, has passed on today, Sunday 4 February 2024 at around 00h04 at Lady Pohamba Hospital where he was receiving medical treatment from his medical team."

Geingob, the first prime minister and third president of Namibia, traversed a remarkable journey from an anti-apartheid activist to a statesman of great repute throughout his career. Geingob was sworn in as Namibia's president on March 21, 2015, and was re-elected for another five-year term in 2019. He served as prime minister from 1990-2002 and 2012-2015.

On January 19 this year, the Namibian presidency said Geingob's medical team discovered cancerous cells following a biopsy examination.

Xinhua

Iran offers visa-free entry for tourists from 28 countries

Tehran, Iran - From now on, tourists from 28 countries will be able to visit Iran without needing to obtain a visa as the Persian Gulf country looks to revive its tourism industry.

The countries whose citizens are exempted from visas for traveling to Iran include Japan, Brazil, India, Mexico, Peru, Indonesia, Singapore, Cuba, Tunisia and Tanzania.

In line with the Ebrahim Raisi government's 'neighborhood-friendly' policy, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, UAE and some Central Asian countries are also included in the list announced by the Iranian Foreign Ministry.

Last year, Iran restored its diplomatic ties with Saudi Arabia after seven years following marathon negotiations between the arch-foes mediated by Iraq, Oman and China.

Tehran has also buried the hatchet with the UAE and Kuwait and has been engaged in hectic diplomacy to revive ties with Bahrain. The list also indicates Iran's inclination to strengthen both diplomatic and cultural ties with countries in Latin America, South Asia and Central Asia, say experts.

Earlier this week, Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister for Consular Affairs Ali-Reza Bigdeli confirmed that nationals



The Persian Gulf country looks to revive its tourism industry (Anadolu Agency)

from 28 countries will be granted visa-free entry into Iran.

The visa waiver applies to tourists traveling to Iran by air, not through land border crossings, the official announced.

Bigdeli said in statements cited by the state-run news agency IRNA that the ministry has notified all relevant bodies of the Cabinet order regarding this unilateral decision.

Indian nationals can travel to Iran without obtaining a visa provided they come by air, but they would need a visa if they travel by road, he added.

Last month, Tourism Minister Ezzatollah Zarghami said the decision to grant visa waivers aimed at reviving the country's tourism sector.

It comes as Iran has already given visa-free entry to nationals from Turkey, Oman, Azerbaijan, Armenia, China, Lebanon and Syria.

After the outbreak of coronavirus in early 2020, Iran's sanctions-battered tourism industry was hit hard, as tourist footfall plunged dramatically.

However, since mid-2023, the industry has seen signs of recovery, according to official statistics, but officials are looking at other incentives, including visa waivers, to attract foreign tourists.

Anadolu Agency

Palestine rejects Israeli bid to replace Rafah border crossing: PM Shtayyeh

Ramallah, Palestine - Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayyeh said on Monday that Palestine rejects any Israeli attempt to transfer or replace the Rafah border crossing between the Gaza Strip and Egypt.

"Israel is trying to relocate the crossing to another location. We affirm this is a pure Egyptian-Palestinian matter," Shtayyeh said in a government session.

The Israeli Channel 13 reported on Saturday that the Israeli government is considering relocating the Rafah border crossing with Egypt to the Kerem Shalom area.

Relocating the crossing to the border triangle between Israel, Gaza, and Egypt aims to prevent Cairo from intervening in the management of it, the channel added. Rafah border crossing is the sole crossing point between Egypt and Gaza Strip.

Israel has launched a deadly offensive on Gaza following an October 7 attack by the Palestinian group Hamas, killing at least 27,365 Palestinians and injuring 66,630 others, while nearly 1,200 Israelis are believed to have been killed in the Hamas attack.

The Israeli offensive has left 85 per cent of Gaza's population internally displaced amid acute shortages of food, clean water, and medicine, while 60 per cent of the enclave's infrastructure has been damaged or destroyed, according to the UN.



Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayyeh

Israel is trying to relocate the crossing to another location. We affirm this is a pure Egyptian-Palestinian matter

MOHAMMAD SHTAYYEH

by Israeli police in occupied East Jerusalem on Monday, according to the official news agency Wafa.

Wafa, citing eyewitnesses, said Wadee Oweisat, 14, was killed at an Israeli military check-

point near the town of Al-Eizariya.

Palestinians shared a video on social media showing a child, medically unattended, bleeding on the ground. The child died at the scene.

Israeli public broadcaster KAN said police shot a Palestinian in an alleged stabbing attempt in Jerusalem, without providing any further details.

No injuries were reported among Israeli soldiers.

There was no comment yet from the Palestinian Health Ministry on the report.

Raids in West Bank
The Israeli army raided early on

Monday several cities, towns, and refugee camps in the occupied West Bank, detaining at least 20 Palestinians.

Witnesses told Anadolu that Israeli forces stormed Tubas city and arrested two people, inciting clashes with dozens of Palestinians. The army also raided Tulkarm and rounded up five people amid armed clashes with Palestinian gunmen in several areas of the city, witnesses said.

Local sources told Anadolu

that the army surrounded a house in the Al-Ain refugee camp west of Nablus and arrested two more people, amid clashes with dozens of Palestinians.

Other witnesses said the Israeli army arrested eight people in the town of Arraba, near Jenin city, after storming dozens of homes.

Three more Palestinians were detained in the town of Halhul near Hebron, witnesses said.

So far, there has been no official confirmation of any casualties during the clashes.

Tensions have been running high across the West Bank amid an Israeli military offensive on the Gaza Strip following a cross-border attack by Hamas on October 7.

The Israeli army has since killed 381 Palestinians in West bank, injured 4,400 others, and detained 6,512 people, according to Palestinian figures.

Meanwhile, at least 540 Israeli soldiers have been injured by 'friendly fire' since Israel expanded its ground operations in the Gaza Strip on October 27, according to Israeli media on Monday. Israeli Channel 12, citing military figures, said that 1,300 soldiers have been wounded since the start of the ground offensive in Gaza, including 540 in operational accidents.

Military figures show that 562 soldiers have been killed and 2,820 others injured since the outbreak of the Gaza conflict on October 7.

Anadolu Agency

US military base in Syria comes under drone attack

Tal Abyad, Syria - A US military base in Syria's Deir ez-Zor province came under drone attack from Iranian-backed groups, local sources said on Monday.

Iranian-backed groups stationed on the western bank of the Euphrates River attacked Al-Omar oilfield, where US forces are stationed, with multiple kamikaze drones. No casualties have been reported. The US has not released a statement so far on the attacks.

The US began carrying out airstrikes on Friday against the Quds Force of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and Iranian-backed militias in Iraq and Syria after a suicide drone attack killed three American troops in Jordan last month.

The strikes were conducted with numerous aircraft, including long-range bombers that launched from the US, Central Command (CENTCOM) said in a statement. In all, more than 85 targets were hit with more than 125 precision munitions.

Since the beginning of the year, bases where US forces are deployed in Syria have been attacked at least five times with rockets and kamikaze drones of unknown origin.

Anadolu Agency

Defunding UNRWA could cause threat to regional stability: Borrell

Ankara, Turkey - The EU's foreign policy chief has warned against defunding the UN agency for Palestinian refugees (UNRWA), calling it 'dangerous' and threatening regional stability.

Josep Borrell wrote a blog post on the EU's official website late on Sunday, saying that 'allegations against UNRWA staff are serious, and no one responsible should go unpunished'.

However, he stressed political responsibility over emotional reactions, warning that 'defunding UNRWA would be both disproportionate and dangerous'.

Borrell recalled UNRWA's significant role in the Gaza Strip, such as 'distributing food, water, and medicine to 1.1mn people suffering from catastrophic hunger and the outbreak of diseases', and noted that the other UN agencies could not operate without UNRWA's assistance.



European Union's foreign policy chief Josep Borrell

"Currently, the suspended funds amount to more than US\$440mn, almost half of the agency's expected income in 2024, putting its very existence at risk. Should UNRWA cease or limit services, which may be the case as early as the end of Febru-

ary, it would significantly aggravate the ongoing dramatic humanitarian crisis," Borrell warned.

UNRWA's 'demise' would also threaten regional stability, he added.

Several countries have suspended UNRWA funding after

Currently, the suspended funds amount to more than US\$440mn... Should UNRWA cease or limit services, it would aggravate the ongoing dramatic humanitarian crisis

JOSEP BORRELL

Tel Aviv alleged that some of the agency's employees were involved in the cross-border attack on Israel on October 7.

UNRWA said it terminated contracts with several employees following the Israeli allegations.

Anadolu Agency

NATO chief dismisses immediate Russian military threat to alliance

Berlin, Germany - NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said on Sunday that there is currently no imminent military threat from Russia towards a NATO member, highlighting the alliance's strengthened defence capabilities.

In an interview with German public broadcaster ARD, Stoltenberg dismissed claims that Russia would attack a member of the alliance if it wins the war in Ukraine.

"We do not currently perceive a military threat against a NATO ally in the near future," he said, noting that NATO has been 'significantly strengthened' in recent years and all member states have invested 'significantly' in their own defence.

NATO has adapted to the new reality arising from Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014, acknowledging and adjusting to the changed circumstances, he said.



NATO chief Jens Stoltenberg

Stoltenberg said he expects Germany and all NATO members to modernise their armed forces and equip them accordingly, noting that Germany is currently the member with the highest defence spending after the US and the UK.

Stoltenberg emphasised Germany's contribution to the collective defence of NATO and urged both Germany and other partners to intensify their efforts to build a

reliable defence for the future.

Assessing the potential impact on NATO should former US President Donald Trump be re-elected, Stoltenberg expressed confidence that the US would remain a reliable and loyal ally for NATO due to various reasons aligning with its security interests.

Regarding Trump's past criticism of members not spending enough on NATO, he clarified that it was more a critique of insufficient spending by NATO allies, emphasising that with increased spending and unity, NATO remains secure.

Stoltenberg also highlighted that NATO members account for 50 per cent of the world's economic and military power, making the alliance essential for the US, and he expects them to remain reliable partners as long as they stand and act together.

Anadolu Agency

New drug found for aggressive breast cancer

Canberra, Australia - Researchers have found a new drug that can successfully inhibit the growth of the most aggressive form of breast cancer, a study showed on Monday.

A pre-clinical study led by the University of Adelaide has been considered an exciting development in the battle against triple negative breast cancer, which is the most aggressive form of the disease, said Theresa Hickey, a breast cancer expert at the University of Adelaide's Dame Roma Mitchell Cancer Research Laboratories.

The results of this study, according to tests in animals, cells and tissue, show that this drug could hold the key to improving survival rates, as there is currently no treatment that specifically targets this type of breast cancer, with chemotherapy and immunotherapy being the only options.

The drug is designed to be taken orally and works by targeting a specific protein in the cancerous tumor called CDK9, which speeds up cell growth, Hickey said.

Xinhua

Maldives: First group of Indian troops to be sent before March 10

Male, Maldives - Maldivian President Mohamed Muizzu on Monday said that India and Maldives have agreed to send back the first group of Indian troops deployed in Maldives before March 10 this year, Maldives-based Sun Online reported.

In his first presidential statement at the opening of the last session of the 19th Parliament, he said that talks are ongoing with India to send back their troops.

He said that the Indian Army will move the military personnel from one of the three aviation platforms in the Maldives by March 10, 2024. He said that the military personnel of remaining two platforms will leave by May 10, Sun Online reported.

Muizzu said that his biggest presidential promise is to protect the freedom and sovereignty of the people of Maldives. He said that the support of a large majority of the people of Maldives for his government was a 'pledge to withdraw foreign troops from Maldives, recover the lost part of Maldives seas and cancel any agreement made by the state that could undermine Maldives sovereignty'.

In his address at the Parliament, Mohamed Muizzu announced that he will establish the ability of the Maldives military to maintain the Exclusive Economic



Maldivian President Mohamed Muizzu (ANI)

Zone (EEZ) 24 hours a day, according to Sun Online report.

He noted that the main principle his government will hold in running the affairs of Maldives is to give priority to the people and

the country or the policy of 'Pro Maldives', Sun Online reported.

Only 24 Maldives Members of Parliament (MPs) attended the opening sitting of the People's Majlis where President Mo-

hamed Muizzu delivered his first presidential address, Maldives-based online news outlet Adhathu reported.

The opposition Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP) and

Maldivian President Mohamed Muizzu said Indian Army will move the military personnel from one of the three aviation platforms in Maldives by March 10, 2024

the Democrats decided to boycott the sitting due to the 'undemocratic ways of the government'. A total of 56 MPs boycotted the opening sitting. This includes 13 MPs from the Democrats and 44 MPs from the MDP.

The removal of Indian troops in the Maldives was the main campaign of Muizzu's party. Currently, there are around 70 Indian troops, along with Dornier 228 maritime patrol aircraft and two HAL Dhruv helicopters, stationed in the Maldives.

On the second day of assuming office, Muizzu officially requested the Indian government to withdraw its military personnel from the Maldives. In December last year, Muizzu

claimed that, after talks with the Indian government, an agreement was reached to withdraw Indian military personnel.

Last week, the second meeting of the high-level core group between the Maldives and India took place in New Delhi.

"Both sides agreed that the Government of India will replace the military personnel in one of the three aviation platform by 10 March 2024, and will complete replacing military personnel in the other two platforms by 10 May 2024,' the Maldives Foreign Ministry stated.

The Maldives said that both sides reviewed the existing bilateral cooperation to improve and enhance the partnership in the fields of defence and security co-operation, economic, and development partnership.

It was also agreed that the third meeting of the high-level core group will be held in Male on a mutually agreeable date during the last week of February. The Ministry of External Affairs stated in its statement that both India and Maldives have agreed on a set of mutually workable solutions to enable continued operation of Indian aviation platforms that provide humanitarian and medvac services to the people of the Maldives.

ANI

India: New government in Jharkhand wins trust vote

Ranchi, India - The newly formed government of Jharkhand, led by Chief Minister Champai Soren, passed the confidence motion in the state Assembly on Monday.

The coalition government won the floor test with a 47-29 majority. The Assembly Speaker Rabintra Nath Mahato asked the members of the House who were in favour and against the motion to stand at their places one by one.

"(A total of) 47 votes have been received in favour of the motion. There were 29 votes against the motion. Thus, this House passes the trust vote," the Speaker said before adjourning the House till 11am on Tuesday.

In the 81-member assembly, the half way mark for a majority is 41. The Jharkhand Mukti Morcha with 29 seats, and its ally Congress with 17 were confident of easily sailing through the trust vote.



Jharkhand CM Champai Soren during the floor test at the state assembly, in Ranchi on Monday (ANI)

Former Jharkhand Chief Minister Hemant Soren, who was arrested by the Directorate of Enforcement in the alleged land scam, was also present in the Assembly to attend the floor test. A special court in Ranchi allowed Soren to participate in the trust vote. Participating in the debate,

Hemant Soren, said that his arrest is just an example of the oppression faced by tribal people and Dalits in society in multiple ways.

"If you look back at the oppression faced by adivasis, backward, Dalits and minorities, it has been brought forward in multiple ways in different forms. January 31 is an

example of this oppression," he said.

Lashing out at the Bharatiya Janata Party, the former CM said: "I do not understand why the ruling (central) government has so much hatred towards adivasis and dalits."

ANI

Pakistan: 10 killed, 6 injured in attack on police station

Islamabad, Pakistan - As many as ten policemen have been killed, six injured in an attack on a police station in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Dera Ismail Khan district, the Pakistan police said on Monday, Geo News reported.

As per the police, terrorists attacked the police station with heavy weapons at 3am in the Daraban tehsil.

The injured have been shifted to DHQ Hospital, the police added, as per Geo News.

The terrorists attacked the police station from all sides with grenades and heavy gunfire.

The police retaliated but the terrorists escaped in the darkness of the night, the law enforcement agency added.

Police forces have now cordoned off the area and launched a search operation to hunt down the fleeing militants, while the quick response force has reached with additional force, as per the police, Geo News reported.



Terrorists attacked police station at 3am in the Daraban tehsil (Anadolu Agency)

Police forces have now cordoned off the area and launched a search operation to hunt down the fleeing militants, Geo News reported

Meanwhile, The News International newspaper recently reported that Pakistan has seen a surge in terror attacks with at least 93 militant attacks taking place in the country in January this year, in which 90 people were killed and 135 injured.

Moreover, 15 individuals have been reportedly abducted in January 2024.

The data was released by an Islamabad-based think tank, the Pakistan Institute for Conflict and Security Studies (PICSS).

ANI

More Rohingya flee to Bangladesh amid ethnic clashes in Myanmar

Dhaka, Bangladesh - Internally displaced Rohingya from Myanmar's Rakhine state have fled to neighbouring Bangladesh in a new wave of forced migration in search of safety, refuge, and food as clashes between military junta forces and rebel groups escalate.

Many have crossed into the Rohingya refugee camp in southeastern Cox's Bazar, where 1.2mn Muslims from Myanmar have already sought refuge.

Mohammad Nur Hashem, a Rohingya Majhi, or community leader, in the Cox's Bazar Rohingya camp, told Anadolu by phone that 'hundreds of Rohingya have gathered along the Bangladesh border in southeastern Bandarban and Transboundary Naf River'.

"We confirm that some Ro-



hingya have taken refuge in the Kutupalong and Balukhali camps in Cox's Bazar through illegal border crossing. The dire situa-

tion in Myanmar forced the new influx," said Hashem.

UN human rights chief Volker Turk also said last week that the

ongoing armed conflict between Myanmar's junta and opposition armed groups had a significant impact on the suffering Ro-

hingya community.

Hashem said: "Over a hundred Rohingya already reached different camps in Cox's Bazar in

the last two months."

Mohammed Rezuwan Khan, who lost contact with his sibling in Rakhine state, told Anadolu that 'some of his relatives in Rakhine have internally been displaced as junta military conducted drive mostly in Muslim villages'.

The new reports of Rohingya, as well as Burmese security personnel fleeing Myanmar, come as at least three ethnic armed groups, known as the Brotherhood Alliance, have been fighting the junta regime for control of northern Myanmar since late October.

Many people have been killed.

Earlier on Sunday, about 95 Burmese border police personnel fled to Bangladesh.

Last month, 276 Burmese sol-

diers from Myanmar sought refuge in India's northeastern state of Mizoram.

Since February 2021, opposition armed groups have attacked junta forces that rule the Buddhist-majority Southeast Asian nation in ethnic clashes centred primarily in northern Myanmar, including Shan and Rakhine states.

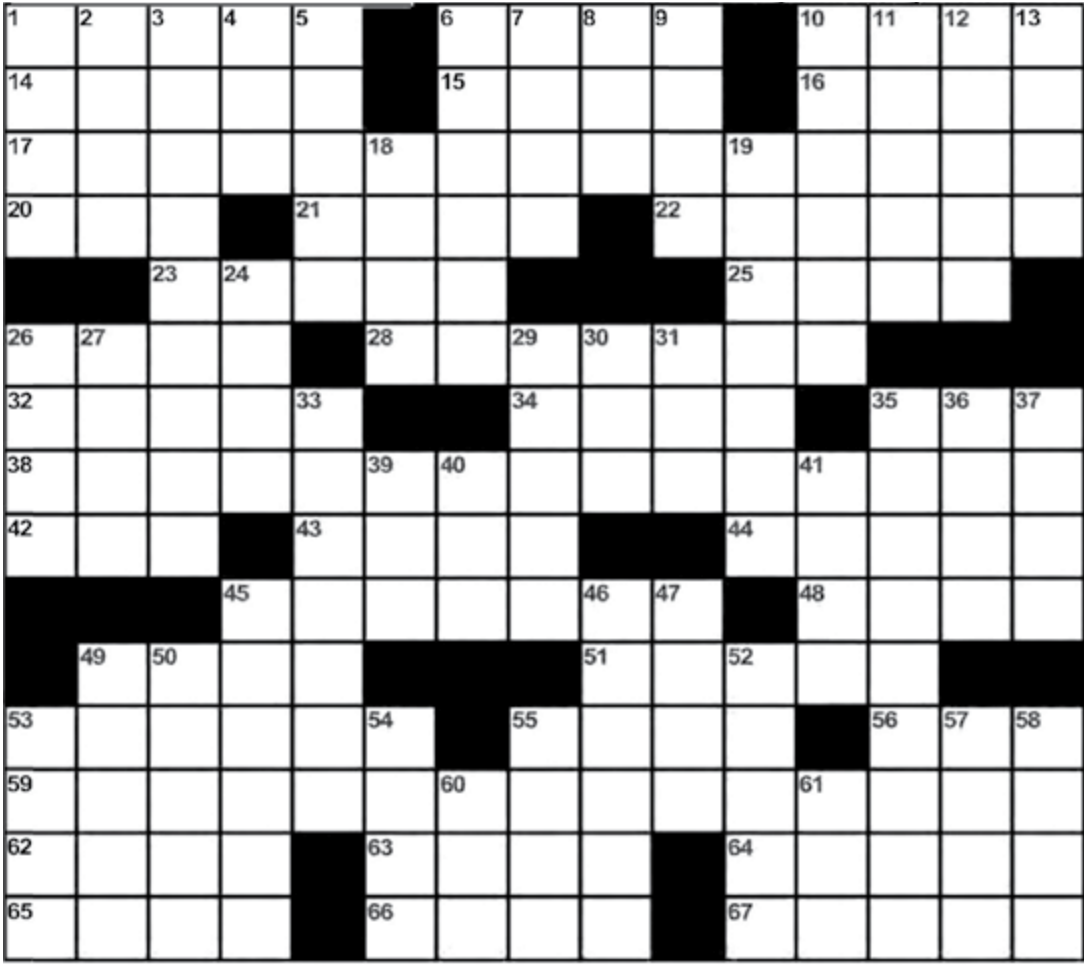
They have captured many towns and outposts.

Earlier in mid-January, China brokered a cease-fire between warring parties and the ruling military junta.

The ongoing conflict is the world's most violent with 2.6mn people remaining displaced and more than 18mn in need, according to Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project.

Anadolu Agency

DAILY CROSSWORD



ACROSS

- 1) Disorderly outbursts
- 6) Hairpieces, in slang
- 10) Ominous sign
- 14) " _ you coming?"
- 15) Non-cutting sword
- 16) Make angry (with "up")
- 17) Three boys
- 20) Back end?
- 21) Indian bread
- 22) Learned teacher
- 23) Slip cover?
- 25) Doofus
- 26) "Comin' _ the Rye"
- 28) Similar stuff
- 32) Certain comedic tribute
- 34) Maitre d's offering
- 35) Cataract locale
- 38) Three more boys
- 42) _Wee Herman
- 43) Egg on
- 44) Cat's eyes, at times
- 45) Experienced one
- 48) Mine entrance
- 49) C-section reminder
- 51) Bible unit
- 53) Typeface with slanted letters

- 55) Italian farewell
- 56) Biochemistry abbr.
- 59) Three more boys
- 62) Emerald_ (Ireland's nickname)
- 63) 100 dinars
- 64) Gullible
- 65) Open carriage
- 66) Scrawny
- 67) Prescribed amounts
- DOWN**
- 1) Item on a to-do list
- 2) Killer whale
- 3) Remove water from
- 4) Whom Lennon married
- 5) Blarney_
- 6) Cover old ground
- 7) "Once _ a time ..."
- 8) Diamond or emerald
- 9) Spring purchase
- 10) Delphic predictor
- 11) Beginning for "graph"
- 12) African antelope
- 13) Avian home
- 18) Bringing up the rear
- 19) Some models
- 24) Santa _ Calif.
- 26) It may be sprung
- 27) Bad thing to have in one's pocket

- 29) Fire remnant
- 30) Hawaiian giveaway
- 31) Traveler's rest
- 33) It's attached to the sternum
- 35) Outer layer of the skin
- 36) Abominable mountain creature
- 37) At one time, at one time
- 39) Old-style computer monitor
- 40) "Act your _!"
- 41) "Poor me!"
- 45) Napa or San Fernando
- 46) With great enthusiasm
- 47) Approach
- 49) Squirrel away
- 52) Lily type
- 53) Certain wading bird
- 54) Dieter's no-no, briefly
- 55) Blue hue
- 57) "Scream" star Campbell
- 58) Mythical god of war
- 60) "Who's Who" entry
- 61) Longtime Chinese chairman

NOTE PAD



YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE



ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

Your perfectionism can be a mixed blessing. It often enables you to excel. You beat the competition and win the best reward. But sometimes, like today, it can slow you down, isolate you from other people, and keep you from seeing the bigger picture. Try not to get too lost in the details of this day. What people are wearing, how things are spelled, and messy desks don't matter at all. Put more effort into letting go and letting the chips fall where they may.



LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

Your life could use a little more structure to it. Flying by the seat of your pants might be exciting, but it can cause quite a bit of chaos with your friends and waste everyone's time. So take some time to get things more organized today. A smart thing would be to review your budget. And if you don't have a budget, today you need to make one. Your spending isn't too bad, but it could be a lot better. Build up that rainy day fund.



SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

Someone you work with or see every day is going through some heavy issues in their personal life, and it's start to affect their demeanor. Their drama is causing them to get distracted, which is understandable, but it's also creating more stress for you. It's time to gently ask them if there's something you should know. Don't offer to help, but offer to listen. Sometimes that's enough help in and of itself. Don't rush at them with demands. Just give them a gentle reality check.



TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

It's time to stop putting off that conversation you've been dreading. If you feel like sharing your thoughts about someone, then do it honestly. The critical things you have to say are just as valuable as the positive ones (if not more so). Just remember to be tactful and use your diplomacy skills to deliver your message without hurting anyone's feelings. It will feel good to get everything out in the open. It's a valuable way to show this person you ultimately respect them.



VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

You're especially skilled at seeing the subtext of what people are really saying right now, which will help you sense when the tension is running high between two people, and that's your cue to get the heck out of there! Step away and be by yourself. The last thing you need to be is a bit player in someone else's drama. So give these people their space to handle their messy issue on their own. You didn't create it, so you shouldn't have to help tidy it up.



CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

Today, you will start to move into a more inward time, where reflecting on your life will feel valuable and even a little fun. You should be more deliberate about figuring out where you want to go, what you want to do, and who you want to do it with. But you will still have time to get things done. You'll have enough time to look inward as well as outward. It's a good day to plan details, when you can schedule a new social event and finalize the guest list.



GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

Whether or not you realize it, your actions affect the world around you. The patterns of your behavior cause ripples around you and influence how other people behave, especially today, when you are with people who can be very easily influenced. Take this responsibility seriously and don't do anything that could set a bad example for others. This shouldn't be very difficult for a good person like you, but it should be something to keep at the front of your mind.



LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

Sometimes following the rules is not the best way to get ahead. It's not that you should go around breaking the rules on purpose today, but you shouldn't be afraid to work outside the norm. Make your own guidelines. As long as you're not hurting anyone, you can do what you think is right even if those in charge don't agree. Be willing to explain your actions. There is no one you can't persuade to your way of thinking. You are a powerful force to be reckoned with.



AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

You have done a good job of surrounding yourself with people who are more grounded than you are, and this will help you immensely when you are faced with challenges. Turn to these people and let them take the lead in reacting. You are too likely to be fanciful and try solutions that are too unrealistic to work. These people have the kind of focus you could benefit from, plus they will be able to help you become much more grounded yourself!



CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

You have a vested interest in someone else's decision today. If they go one way, you'll have sunny skies and a lot of hope. But if they go another way, things could get cloudy for you really quickly. Instead of getting nervous about what side they will come down on, though, you will be able to stay cool and calm about it. After all, you know that you can't control what someone else does, so why even try? No matter what happens, you can roll with the punches and do well.



SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

If you're trying to keep a few secrets right now, you'd better lock yourself up and throw away the key! There is no way that you will be able to resist the urge to spill the tea now. Sure, you could try to speak in code in order to confuse any eavesdroppers, but this is a risky move. After all, how are you going to know that the person you're talking to knows the code? So either get ready to be taken to task for sharing a secret or don't talk to anyone today.



PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

Achieving effective communication could be a problem for you today. The people you'll be dealing with are not patient enough to listen with any great concentration, and they aren't smart enough to hide their distraction. There will be some serious misunderstandings that create delays and confusion, but you can get everyone calm and back on track again. You're just about the only person who can get everyone's attention for any significant period of time.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

01. Who was on the English throne at the time of the "Gunpowder Plot" to blow up the House of Lords

- A. James I
- B. William I
- C. King Canute
- D. Harold I

2. According to the Guinness Book of World Records in 2010, what is the most watched TV series, ever?

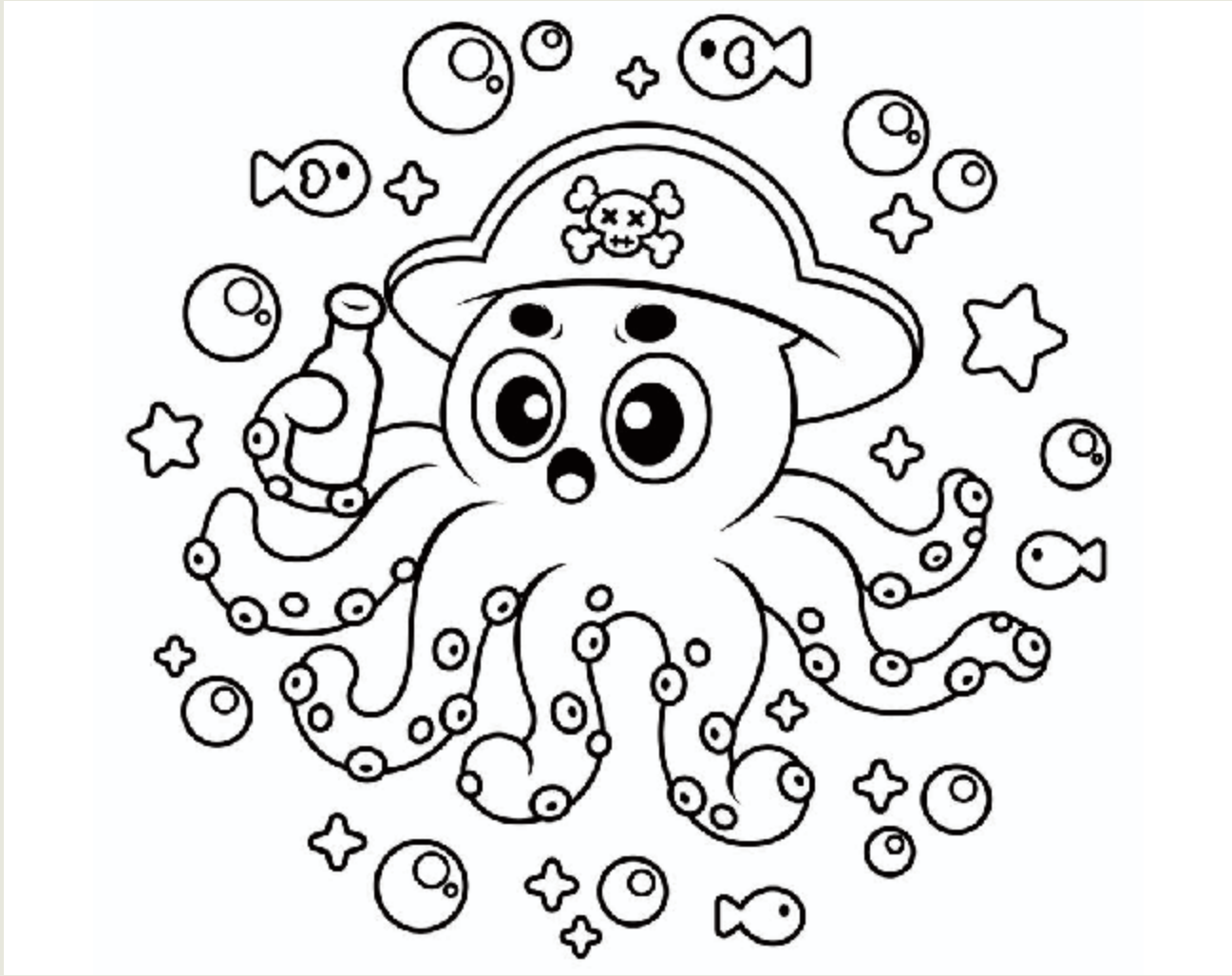
- A. Bay Watch
- B. Dallas
- C. Star Trek
- D. Coronation Street

3. Before 1972, what was Sri Lanka known as?

- A. East Pakistan
- B. Burma
- C. Ceylon
- D. Persia

Answers: 1.A 2.A 3.C

KIDS COLOURING



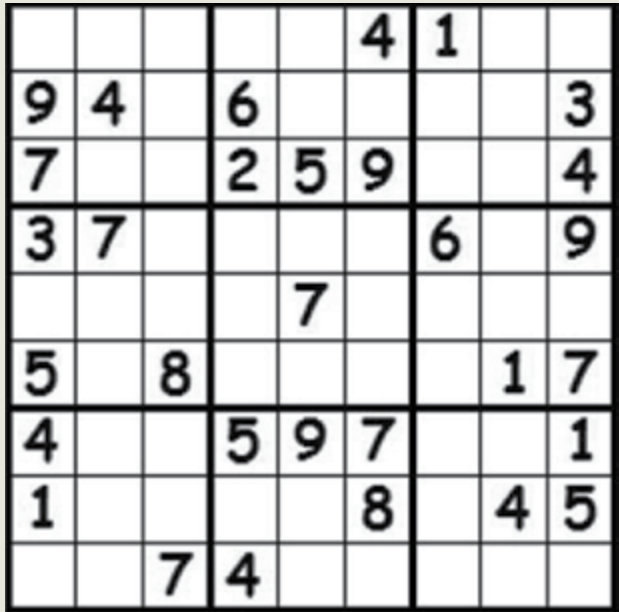
BOGGLER



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



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



ASHWIN AND BUMRAH SHOW

India beat England in second Test to level series

Visakhapatnam, India - Ravichandran Ashwin and Jasprit Bumrah claimed three wickets apiece to bowl India to a 106-run victory in the second Test against England on Monday.

Chasing a victory target of 399, England were 95-1 before losing five wickets in the morning session as India set about leveling the series. Opener Zak Crawley struck 73, with Ben Foakes (36) and Tom Hartley (36) producing defiant knocks down the order, but England were eventually dismissed for 292 in the second session on day four.

"We know winning a Test match in these conditions is not going to be easy, but the bowlers stepped up," said India captain Rohit Sharma.

"The wicket was good to bat on, a lot of the batters got starts but didn't convert. This win gives us a lot of confidence. Very proud of such a young squad."

Former captain Virat Kohli missed the first two tests for personal reasons and India were also without batter KL Rahul and all-rounder Ravindra Jadeja after they picked up injuries in the series opener in Hyderabad.

Left-arm spinner Axar Patel removed Rehan Ahmed, who did a decent job as England's night-watchman by scoring a brisk 23 after play resumed on day four.

Ashwin then rattled England



Indian players celebrate the fall of an England wicket in the second Test on Monday

by dismissing Ollie Pope and Joe Root in successive overs.

Pope made 23 before edging to Rohit Sharma's outstretched left hand at slip. Root, nursing a finger injury, smashed Patel for a six but gifted his wicket when he danced down the track to Ashwin and top-edged a catch to Patel at backward point. Crawley batted with characteristic aggression and Jonny Bairstow (26) also looked set before they departed in successive overs before lunch.

England's hopes were effectively snuffed out when Ben Stokes was run out for 11.

Foakes and Hartley refused to throw in the towel, though, prompting Rohit to bring back pace spearhead Bumrah.

Bumrah had Foakes caught and bowled with a slower delivery before Hartley had his stumps rearranged by a Bumrah outswinger.

"We had full belief we could chase down 399," Stokes said af-

We know winning a Test in these conditions is not easy, but the bowlers stepped up. The wicket was good to bat on, a lot of the batters got starts but didn't convert

ROHIT SHARMA

terwards. "The way we applied ourselves and tried to put the India bowling attack under pressure was great."

Bumrah's nine-wicket match haul in a spin-dominated contest earned him the player-of-the-match award.



Rui Vitoria

Egypt sack coach Vitoria after dismal campaign at Cup of Nations

Cairo, Egypt - Egypt sacked Portuguese coach Rui Vitoria on Sunday, a week after their disappointing last-16 exit at the Africa Cup of Nations in the Ivory Coast, the Egyptian Football Association (EFA) announced.

Vitoria's deal was supposed to run until the 2026 World Cup but Egypt's dismal Cup of Nations campaign, which culminated in a shootout loss to the Democratic Republic of Congo following a 1-1 draw last Sunday, brought a premature end to his tenure. The EFA said the 53-year-old and his entire backroom staff had been relieved of their

New Jersey to host 2026 World Cup final, Mexico gets opener

Zurich, Switzerland - The 2026 World Cup final will be held in New Jersey at the home of the National Football League's New York Giants and New York Jets, world soccer's governing body FIFA announced on Sunday, along with the entire schedule for the global soccer showcase.

The 48-team World Cup, which will conclude on July 19 at MetLife Stadium in East Rutherford, is being co-hosted by the United States, Canada and Mexico.

Canada will host 13 games in total, including 10 in the group stage split evenly between Toronto and Vancouver. Mexico will also get 13 games, including 10 during the group stage in Mexico City, Guadalajara and Monterrey. The rest of tournament will be held in 11 cities across the United States.

Toronto, Mexico City, and Los Angeles will host the opening matches of their respective national teams.

The open-air stadium for the final, which opened in 2010 and has a capacity of 82,500, hosted the Copa America Centenario



Estadio Azteca in Mexico will host the opening match of the 2026 World Cup

The 48-team World Cup is being co-hosted by the United States, Canada and Mexico

final in 2016 when Chile denied Lionel Messi's Argentina for a

second time in a penalty shootout.

FIFA did not announce kickoff times for the games. Mexico City's Estadio Azteca will host the opening match of tournament on June 11 when Mexico will become the first nation to stage the World Cup for a third time. The opening day will also feature a match in Guadalajara.

Mexico head coach Jaime Lozano, said in translated com-

ments that his squad will have pressure playing in front of home fans but that they are also happy to feature in the opening game and called it a special day in his life and of the national team.

Mexico hosted the World Cup in 1970 and 1986, with the finals of both editions held at Estadio Azteca where Pele's Brazil crushed Italy 4-1 and Diego Maradona's Argentina beat West Germany 3-2.



Hussein Ammouta and Juergen Klinsmann



Jordan eyes upset against favourites South Korea

DOHA, Qatar - South Korea and Jordan are both prepared for their Asian Cup semi-final to go the distance if required with extra time and penalties, the two teams' coaches said on Monday after they played out a thrilling 2-2 draw in the group stage.

Although Hussein Ammouta's Jordan reached the semi-finals with wins over Iraq and debutants Tajikistan in normal time, South Korea have had a bruising journey to the last four against Asian heavyweights Saudi Arabia and Australia.

Juergen Klinsmann's side needed a penalty shootout to beat Saudi Arabia before forcing extra time against Australia in the quarter-finals, playing 120 minutes on both occasions compared to a well-rested Jordan.

"The willingness to suffer, to go to the end if it's needed - 120 minutes, penalty shootout - we are prepared for that," Klinsmann told reporters.

"There are many, many factors that are important in order to go far in the tournament and we prepared well. We started in Seoul on Dec. 26 to build fitness and we have only two injuries

now. We are extremely hungry.

"It's the physical and mental side, but it's also the spirit of the group... It's a marathon and we're nearing the end of the marathon. Hopefully we can win it all."

South Korea advanced after they forced extra time in both their knockout games with stoppage-time goals and Ammouta praised their resilience.

"It's true that South Korea have great potential in terms of mental, technical and tactical preparedness. We've seen this in different games - the control, possession and quick movement of the ball," he said.

"I hope we've reached the point to put in a good performance, especially in the final minutes of the game. Saudi Arabia and Australia were ahead and they made mistakes at the end.

"Our focus has to be strong and it's going to be tiring. This is necessary, we will have to struggle."

Ammouta added that fatigue would not be a factor in Tuesday's semifinal because South Korea showed how well they coped with going to extra time in

Shnaider upsets Zhu for first WTA title

Hua Hin, Thailand - Russian teenager Diana Shnaider won her first WTA Tour title on Sunday, topping defending champion Lin Zhu in the finals of the Thailand Open in Hua Hin.

Shnaider, 19, defeated the No. 2 seed Zhu of China, 6-3, 2-6, 6-1 in 1 hour and 59 minutes. She also eliminated top seed Magda Linette of Poland and third seed Xinyu Wang of China at the tournament.

Ranked No. 108, Shnaider is now 2-0 against No. 45 Zhu in

her career. On Sunday, she converted all five break-point opportunities and won 63.6 percent of her second-serve points.

Ostapenko triumphs

Top seed Jelena Ostapenko won for the first time in Linz, defeating No. 2 seed Ekaterina Alexandrova 6-2, 6-3 in the finals for her second WTA Tour singles title this year.

Ostapenko of Latvia won in 70 minutes over Russia's

Alexandrova, the 2018 runner-up, and earned her eighth career singles title on the tour.

Bublik champion

Alexander Bublik of Kazakhstan made ATP Tour history on Sunday, becoming the first player to win a tournament having lost the first set in each of his matches. Bublik rallied yet again in beating Croatia's Borna Coric, the fourth seed, 5-7, 6-2, 6-3 in the finals of the Open Sud de France in Montpellier, France.



Diana Shnaider celebrates with the trophy

BACK IN THE HUNT

Arsenal beat Liverpool to close gap to two points

London, England - Arsenal spiced up an already intriguing Premier League title race as they beat lacklustre leaders Liverpool 3-1 to slice the gap to two points and move into second spot on Sunday.

Arsenal deserved the points that lifted them above Manchester City although they would not have expected a helping hand from Virgil van Dijk and Alisson whose comic mix-up allowed Gabriel Martinelli to restore their lead in the 67th minute.

Substitute Leandro Trossard then soothed any late nerves among the Emirates faithful as he secured the victory in stoppage time with a shot through Alisson's legs.

Bukayo Saka had given Arsenal an early lead with a cool finish in the 14th minute but a Gabriel own goal on the stroke of half-time undid all of their good work.

Heading for only their second league defeat of the season, both in north London, Liverpool's frustrations boiled over as Ibrahima Konate was sent off in the closing minutes for a second booking after a foul on Kai Havertz.

Arsenal's title challenge had waned at the start of the year but a third successive win lifted them to second on 49 points to Liverpool's 51 with both clubs having played 23 games. Champions Manchester City have 46 from 21 games.

"It was a kick in the teeth to concede so late after having a really good first half, but we knew we had a really big 45 minutes in



Arsenal's title challenge had waned at the start of the year but a third successive win lifted them to second on 49 points to Liverpool's 51 with both clubs having played 23 games. Man City have 46 from 21 games.

our season," Arsenal's Declan Rice said. "We were top at Christmas and then had a few sloppy results. We seem to have ourselves back on the right track."

For the fourth Premier League game in a row between the sides

Arsenal got their noses in front early. Liverpool were sluggish and Saka had already gone close to scoring with a glancing header from Martinelli's cross before the visitors were picked apart by a silky passing move.

Martin Odegaard's first-time pass released Havertz and although the former Chelsea striker's shot lacked conviction it rebounded off Alisson's chest and Saka took a touch before confidently sweeping home the rebound.

There was a conspicuous lack of a response by a disjointed Liverpool and they could count

themselves fortunate to reach halftime on level terms, courtesy of an Arsenal gift.

Arsenal defender William Saliba, under pressure from Luis Diaz, attempted to shepherd the ball back towards his keeper David Raya but the ball broke loose and the retreating Gabriel ended up bundling it into his own goal.



Atletico Madrid's Marcos Llorente celebrates after scoring against Real Madrid on Sunday

Last-gasp Llorente goal gives Atletico 1-1 draw against Real

Madrid, Spain - Atletico Madrid's Marcos Llorente scored deep in stoppage time to cancel out Brahim Diaz's first-half opener for leaders Real Madrid as the city rivals drew 1-1 in LaLiga at the Santiago Bernabeu on Sunday.

Real are on 58 points at the summit, two ahead of Girona, who they host on Saturday. Atletico remain fourth with 48 points, two behind third-placed Barcelona.

"It was a good game from our side, we controlled the game but we were unlucky to concede a goal in the last minute," Real manager Carlo Ancelotti told reporters.

"We did well, we deserved to win but we have nothing to complain about. We are leaders and we have another chance to take a big step forward next Saturday. "The team has to be calm, a good point has come out of it."

The hosts opened the scoring

after 20 minutes when Diaz seized on a loose ball after some sloppy Atletico defending inside the box to slot home from close range and score his fourth league goal this season.

Atletico thought they had equalised in the opening minutes of the second half, but VAR intervened to rule out Stefan Savic's towering header for offside.

Diego Simeone's side finally scored in the final seconds of the game when midfielder Llorente headed past Real keeper Andriy Lunin from a Memphis Depay cross. "The goal tastes very good, we worked hard during the game, we got a point and we are happy with the team's work," Llorente told Movistar.

"It doesn't taste like a win the way the game was going, but we got a valuable point."

Atletico next host Athletic Bilbao in the Spanish Cup semifinals on Wednesday.

Inter beat Juve to extend Serie A lead

Milan, Italy - A first-half own goal from Federico Gatti gave leaders Inter Milan a 1-0 win at home against second-placed Juventus on Sunday, increasing their advantage at the top of Serie A to four points.

Inter scored eight minutes before the break as a cross into the box eluded Benjamin Pavard's attempt at a scissor kick, and instead struck the stomach of Juve defender Gatti, who deflected the ball into his own net.

The result put Inter on 57 points with a game in hand over their title rivals Juve, who have 53. AC Milan are third with 49 points.

Inter manager Simone Inzaghi was not getting carried away after the match with a long season still ahead.

"There are still four intense months to go with many games, we have to continue like this," he told DAZN. "However, it is only one step in a long journey. Juve and Milan will not give up."

Inter were aggressive from the outset at a lively San Siro as



Inter Milan players celebrate their victory against Juventus on Sunday

they went in search of their sixth consecutive victory to continue their perfect start to the year.

"The way we prepared, played and controlled the game, we are very happy. The fans pushed us on from the warm-up to the final whistle and beyond," Inzaghi said. "We earned a victory, an important and fully deserved win that we wanted with the whole

squad."

Marcus Thuram nearly gave Inter the lead around the 30-minute mark as he received a cross from Federico Dimarco inside the box, but Juve defender Gleison Bremer thwarted him with a well-timed sliding tackle.

Inter continued to apply pressure in the second half with Hakan Calhanoglu hitting a dip-

ping volley against the upright just before the hour mark.

Only alert goalkeeping from Juve's Wojciech Szczesny prevented the hosts from doubling their lead as he made several crucial saves to deny clear goal-scoring opportunities.

Juve manager Massimiliano Allegri was disappointed and emphasised that his side are not

among the title favourites.

"We are pleased to be doing so well, angry about this defeat, but I always said Inter were the favourites for the Scudetto and I stand by that," he said.

"If we do well to win a few games and stay close to them, that's good. Milan are in the mix too and the unexpected is always around the corner."

Brazil footballer Dani Alves on trial in Spain for alleged sexual assault

Barcelona, Spain - Former Barcelona and Brazil footballer Dani Alves will go on trial in Barcelona on Monday over a claim that he sexually assaulted a woman in the bathroom of a nightclub in the city in 2022.

The 40-year-old defender was arrested in January of last year in the Spanish city and has been held in prison since then.

Alves initially denied any sexual encounter with the woman whom he said he did not know.

He later said he had consensual sex with his accuser, saying he had denied it originally to protect his marriage.

The case has attracted significant attention not only because of Alves' profile but because sexual assault is a dominant political theme in Spain, more notably still following the alleged non-consensual kiss Spanish football federation chief Luis Rubiales planted on the lips of a female player following her team's Soccer World Cup win last August.

Alves is one of the most successful footballers in history having won more than 40 trophies for his country and clubs like Barcelona. Following his arrest, he was fired by Mexican side Pumas UNAM.

In Spain, a claim of rape is investigated under the general accusation of sexual assault and

convictions can lead to jail time of between four and 15 years.

A Spanish public prosecutor is seeking a nine-year prison term



Dani Alves

and for Alves to pay damages worth 150,000 euros (\$163,215.00) to the woman.

A panel of three judges will

chair a trial expected to last three days at Barcelona's highest courthouse. It will include the testimony of Alves, the alleged victim and about 30 other people.

The alleged victim will testify from behind a screen and in the recording of the trial her voice and image will be distorted to protect her identity.

The 2016 gang-rape of a teenager during the San Fermin bull-running festival led to the

toughening of sexual violence laws in Spain and triggered national soul-searching on the topic that continues to this day as gender violence rates remain stubbornly high.

Alves is one of the most successful footballers in history having won more than 40 trophies for his country and clubs like Barcelona.

Following his arrest, he was fired by Mexican side Pumas UNAM.



RB Leipzig's Lois Openda celebrates after scoring against Union Berlin on Sunday

Leipzig ease past struggling Union Berlin in Bundesliga

Leipzig, Germany - RB Leipzig beat lowly Union Berlin 2-0 in the Bundesliga on Sunday thanks to goals from Lois Openda and Benjamin Sesko in a match where the visitors finished with 10 men after captain Christopher Trimmel was sent off.

Leipzig struck early after Benjamin Henrichs' deflected shot was neatly struck into the top corner by Openda in the 11th minute.

The home piled on the pressure in the first half but were left frustrated as Union goalkeeper Alexander Schwolow pulled off some acrobatic saves in the rain-soaked match which was stopped for a couple of minutes due to several tennis balls being thrown onto the pitch.

Leipzig increased their lead shortly after the break when Sesko headed home from a free

kick after a foul on Simons. The Slovenian scored again nine minutes later but the goal was disallowed for offside after a VAR review.

Union Berlin were down a player after captain Trimmel was red-carded for a foul on David Raum in the 73rd.



Alex Albon (L) with Logan Sargeant

Albon: Williams car requires adjustment in driving style

New York, United States - Alex Albon expects to have to adjust his driving style this season as Williams seek to move up a gear after leaping from Formula One's bottom-placed team to seventh last year.

Albon scored all but one of the former champions' points in 2023 and, now starting his third season at Williams, is a target for top teams as Mercedes and Red Bull consider their options for 2025.

"Coming off the back of a very positive year we're hoping to build on our progress into 2024, working hard to make some good steps forward in performance," the Thai said at a livery launch in New York on Monday. The new FW46 Mercedes-powered car, blue with a red and white pin-stripe, will make its track debut on a filming day in Bahrain on Feb. 20 before official pre-season testing starts on Feb. 21.

"We've asked a lot of the team and the factory to get this car where it needs to be, and we've also slightly changed the philosophy of the car, so I'm interested to see if we can improve some of the characteristics it has historically had," added Albon.

"It will require an adjustment in driving style but I'm confident it will be a change for the better."

The presentation, at Puma's flagship Fifth Avenue store, also introduced a principal partnership with Japanese machinery maker Komatsu. Komatsu also worked with Williams in the 1980s and 1990s, providing gearbox parts to the title-winning FW18 and FW19 cars.

Williams, who last won a title in 1997, are owned by U.S.-based private investment firm Dorilton Capital and also have the sport's sole U.S. driver in Logan Sargeant, starting his second season.

FULL THROTTLE

Oman's Al Harthy registers second win of ALMS season to increase championship lead

Muscat - Asian Le Mans Series Championship leaders Ahmad al Harthy, Louis Deletraz and Nikita Mazepin claimed their second victory of the 2023/2024 season in round three at Dubai Autodrome on Sunday, to also boost their advantage at the top of the standings to 20 points.

Delivering an exceptional performance during the opening stint of the four-hour contest, having qualified on the front row in the No.99 Oreca 07-Gibson LMP2 car, Oman's Al Harthy challenged hard for the lead early on before being forced to mount a stirring recovery after contact from a rival.

Driving impeccably, and producing some outstanding, determined overtaking, Al Harthy battled back with aplomb from sixth place and worked his way through to the lead on lap 23. Following similarly strong stints from Mazepin and Deletraz, the 99 Racing squad celebrated the win by 3.5 seconds.

"It's always great to win, but to have fought back so strongly after the contact and to have extended our lead in the championship is fantastic" said Al Harthy.



Oman's Ahmad al Harthy (R) celebrates with Louis Deletraz (C) and Nikita Mazepin on the podium

It's always great to win, but to have fought back so strongly after the contact and to have extended our lead in the championship is fantastic. Everyone did an amazing job

AHMAD AL HARTHY

"Everyone at the team did an amazing job all weekend here in Dubai, and Nikita and Louis both drove an incredible race. Our car was strong and the strategy

worked well, and I was very happy with my pace as well as the overtake to get the lead.

"We're in a great position in the championship and have a

good lead ahead of the final two ALMS races in Abu Dhabi next weekend, but there's a lot of racing to go and a lot that can happen. We'll keep our heads down and work as hard as ever to ensure we have the best car and set-up for Yas Marina and, hopefully, be able to continue our great momentum and push for the title."

Al Harthy made a strong start, challenging for the lead on the outside at Turn One but having to tuck in behind the No.90 car on

the exit. The pole-starting No.55 prototype had been shuffled to third and did make slight contact with Al Harthy's car after the apex of the corner, but thankfully there was no damage caused.

Due to a heavy accident in the pack further behind, the action was quickly placed under Safety Car conditions and the race didn't resume until lap six.

Al Harthy made a good restart and stayed in the leader's wheel tracks, sticking within one second of his rival.

Al Zubair and team finish close second in third race at ALMS in Dubai

Muscat: Oman's Al Faisal Al Zubair along with his teammates, Fabian Schiller of Germany and China's Anthony Liu guided the Al Manar Racing by Getspeed Mercedes-AMG GT3 Evo to second place in the third race of the 2023/2024 Asian Le Mans Series at the Dubai Autodrome in Dubai, UAE, on Sunday.

After Lui had earned the trio a fine pole position for Sunday's 4H of Dubai, the crew battled hard with the pace-setting Pure Rxcing team of Klaus Bachler, Joel Sturm

and Alex Malykhin in a Porsche 911 GT3 R and finished a nail-biting contest just 0.775 seconds behind the new championship leaders after 112 laps of racing.

The result means that the Pure Rxcing team leads the GT Teams Trophy on 58 points and Al Manar Racing by Getspeed are well-placed in third on 43 points behind Saintéloc Racing (44pts).

Al Zubair and Schiller have 43 points apiece in the GT Drivers' Trophy and hold third position, a

mere point behind second-placed Christopher Haase, Gilles Magnus and Alban Varutti heading to the final two races at Yas Marina in Abu Dhabi.

The AF Corse trio of Simon Mann, François Heriau and Davide Rigon rounded off the podium places in a distant third place in their Ferrari 296 GT3.

Speaking after the awards ceremony, Al Zubair said: "The race was great overall. We started on pole after Anthony's superb lap in qualifying. We

went into the race and Anthony had a great opening to make a nice gap for us, which we lost, unfortunately, in the pits. Because they (Pure Rxcing) under cut us and gained two laps. That was unfortunate. Sturm got passed me after gaining six seconds on a full course yellow. We have no idea now. That was also unfortunate. But the race was a good one and we should be happy with P2. It's not the same as first place. We hope to improve on that in the next two



Oman's Al Faisal Al Zubair in action at the Asian Le Mans Series in Dubai on Sunday

Al Manar Mercedes finished the first practice session on Friday in second position behind the AF Corse Ferrari 296 GT3. Liu used the time to acclimatise to the car and the crew ran for 39 laps with a best run of 1min 59.016sec.

Schiller finished the second 37-lap practice stint on Saturday morning with the car down in third place behind the GR Racing Ferrari and the Triple Eight JMR Mercedes.

CLASSIFIEDS

SITUATION WANTED

A female project co-ordinator and research assistant with 15 years experience in training, recruitment, administration, and finance; work experience with UN-FAO; Exe, with MBA, MSc in Sustainability, MA in English, is looking for a full-time job. Contact: +968-98260708 email: meena.v24@gmail.com

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Urgently required for a Water Network Project (PAEW/OWWSC-approved): 1. SCADA Engineer 2. Resident Engineer. Kindly send CV's to www.consult2021@gmail.com

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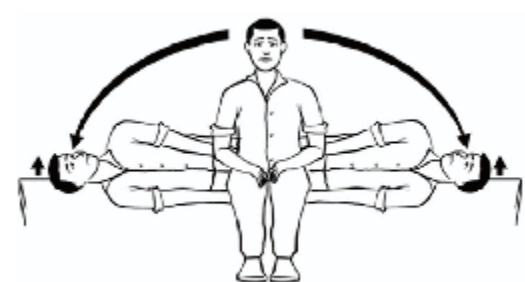
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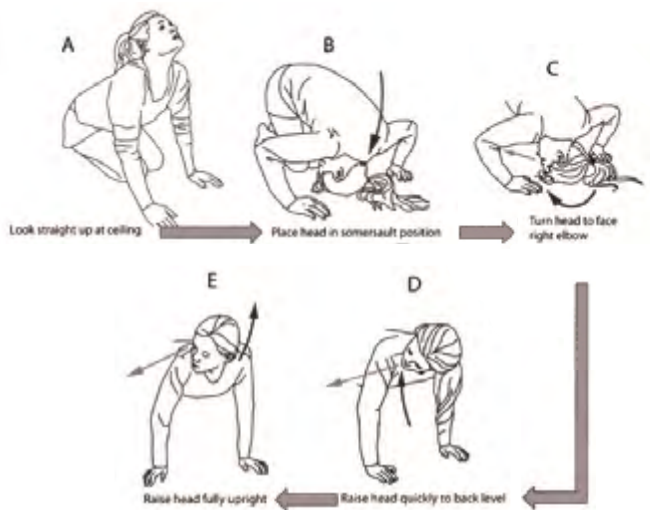
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BRANDT-DAROFF EXERCISES

Brandt-Daroff exercises use gravity to help dislodge crystals from the semicircular canal. Follow these steps:

- Sit in the middle of a bed with your feet on the floor. Turn your head 45 degrees to the right.
- Without moving your head, lie down on your left side. Wait for the dizziness to pass, then wait 30 more seconds. If you're not dizzy, pause for 30 seconds.
- Return to the starting position. Pause for 30 seconds.
- Turn your head 45 degrees to the left. Repeat steps two and three on the right side.
- Return to the starting position. Pause for 30 seconds.
- Complete one set of five repetitions on each side.
- Before standing up, wait for any dizziness to pass.



FOSTER MANOEUVRE

The Foster manoeuvre, sometimes called the half somersault, is one of the easiest exercises for vertigo — it doesn't require you to be in bed or have help from another person. Follow these directions for left or side, alternate the position suitably for right side:

- Kneel down and place your hands on the floor. Tilt your head up and back. Wait until any dizziness passes.
- Place your forehead of the floor, tucking your chin toward your knees.
- Turn your head 45 degrees to face your left elbow. Hold for 30 seconds.
- Keeping your head 45 degrees, raise your head until it's level with your back and shoulders. Hold for 30 seconds.
- Raise your head to the fully upright position.

VERTIGO EXERCISES



SWOON solutions

Vertigo is a medical condition characterised by a sensation of spinning, dizziness, or a feeling that the environment around you is moving or spinning. It is often accompanied by other symptoms such as nausea, vomiting, sweating, or difficulty balancing. Vertigo can be caused by a variety of factors, including inner ear disorders, such as be-

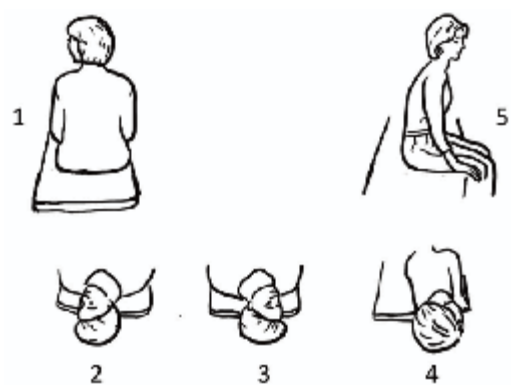
nign paroxysmal positional vertigo (BPPV), Meniere's disease, or vestibular neuritis. It can also be caused by head injury, migraines, certain medications, or as a side effect of other medical conditions. Treatment for vertigo depends on the underlying cause. In some cases, it may resolve on its own or with simple exercises, while in other cases, medication or more invasive procedures may be necessary.



EPLEY MANOEUVRE

The Epley manoeuvre is another popular exercise for vertigo. The original Epley manoeuvre requires help from a healthcare provider. But the modified version below can be done on your own at home. This version is known as the home Epley manoeuvre. Follow these steps for left side, alternate the position suitably for right side:

- Sit upright in bed. Place your legs straight ahead and put a pillow behind you.
- Turn your head 45 degrees to the left.
- Lie back quickly until your shoulders are on the pillow. Wait for your dizziness to subside, plus 30 seconds.
- Turn your head 90 degrees to the right without lifting it. Hold for 30 seconds.
- Turn your body until you're lying on your right side. Wait for the dizziness to subside, plus 30 seconds.
- Sit upright on the right edge of the bed.



SEMONT MANOEUVRE

The Semont manoeuvre, or liberatory manoeuvre, is another exercise for BPPV. It takes slightly less time than the Brandt-Daroff exercises, but it's best to do it under the supervision of your healthcare provider.

If you have left-ear BPPV, your provider will likely walk you through the following steps:

- Sit upright on the edge of a bed and turn your head 45 degrees to the right.
- wiftly drop to the left until your head is on the bed. Hold for 1 minute.
- In one movement, quickly move your body to the right side. Don't change the angle of your head (you should now be facing the floor).
- Hold for 1 minute. Slowly return to starting position.
- If you have right-ear BPPV, turn your head to the left and drop on your right side first.

Is snacking good or bad?



VANDANA CHAWLA

NUTRITION & YOU

Snacking is considered healthy by some while there is another school of thought which does not agree with it.

For a young mom, snacking is tiresome, for an office goer, it's easy to go and grab food, and for a health-conscious person, it is great to rely on until the next meal.

What is a snack?

A snack is defined as a small meal or a beverage taken in between meals. It can be once a day or a few hours after every meal. Sometimes, it sets a biological clock, and our tummy starts giving hunger signals at a certain time after meals. Sometimes, it is the location, social environment, appetising food or just a dip in

energy levels that makes one go for a snack, irrespective of whether it is healthy or not.

PROS AND CONS Effect of snacking on weight management

There is a strong belief that snacking increases metabolism which, in turn, can help in weight management. Eating six small meals instead of three main meals is a great way to boost metabolism. Logically, it makes sense, but it varies from individual to individual and from one snack to another in the same individual.

Small meals throughout the day can keep one full and avoid large swings in hunger levels but, at the same time, give more occasions to consume more calories. For example, taking 100 calories extra in every snack will mean taking 600 calories more during the day. Hence, some of the latest research indicates that snacking does not boost metabolism or help in weight loss but rather keeps one hungry throughout the day.

Effect of snacking on diabetes



management

Tufts Medical Centre suggested that snacking can help in stabilising blood sugar levels. As carbohydrates are spread out throughout the day, medicine along with snacks can help control sugar highs and hunger pangs in diabetics. But again, it's not all snacks, the ones that are high in fibre and protein, and sourced from plant foods, are more satisfying and nutrition-

ally healthy.

Tips to snack healthily

- Focus on Nutrient-dense foods - Foods that have a high nutrient content for the number of calories that they contain are nutrient-dense. Foods like, fruits, nuts, legumes, and veggies are nutrient-dense. For example, one banana (100g) gives

around 80kcal, while the same amount of banana chips, will give 500kcal. Not just the kcal but the nutrients that banana brings are tremendous and no match to chips.

- Make sure the amount of food taken in every snack is in moderation and not in excess.
- Keep snacking 2-3 times a day and not more.
- Try adding proteins and high-fibre food to every snack, as they keep one full till the next meal. Nuts, seeds, nut butter, low-fat dairy, beans, fruits, and veggie sticks are some of the examples.
- Keep portable snacks as mentioned above, when on the move.
- Be mindful of why you are snacking. If it's really because of hunger pangs and the next meal is quite late, it is fine, but eating anytime because of boredom, or stress is cause for concern.

(Vandana Chawla is an Online Nutrition Expert and a Registered Nutritionist-UKVRN)



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MYTHS AND FACTS

THERE ARE THREE MAIN TYPES OF STROKE – ISCHEMIC, HEMORRHAGIC, AND TRANSIENT ISCHEMIC ATTACK (MINISTROKE) – BUT NUMEROUS MYTHS SURROUNDING THESE, FROM LINKING IT WITH THE HEART TO LINKING IT WITH THE ELDERLY

In 2019, stroke was the second leading cause of mortality globally, accounting for 11% of deaths. In 2020, stroke accounted for approximately 1 of every 21 deaths in the United States. The steady rise has, however, been a cause for concern globally.

There are three main types of stroke. The first and most common, accounting for 87% of cases, is an ischemic stroke. It occurs when blood flow through the artery that supplies oxygen to the brain becomes blocked. The second is a stroke, caused by a rupture in an artery in the brain which, in turn, damages surrounding tissues.

The third type of stroke is a transient ischemic attack (TIA) Trusted Source, which is sometimes called a 'ministroke'. It happens when blood flow is temporarily blocked to the brain, usually for no more than 5 minutes.

While stroke is very common, it is often misunderstood. To dispel myths on the topic Dr Rafael Alexander Ortiz, chief of Neuro-Endovascular Surgery and Interventional Neuro-Radiology at Lenox Hill Hospital, shares some information:

MYTH 1
Stroke is a problem of the heart
Although stroke risk is linked to cardiovascular risk factors, strokes happen in the brain, not the heart. A stroke is a problem of the brain, caused by the blockage or rupture of arteries or veins in the brain.

People tend to confuse stroke with a heart attack which is caused by a blockage in blood flow to the heart.

MYTH 2
Stroke is not preventable
The most common risk factors for stroke include hypertension, smoking, high cholesterol, obesity, diabetes, trauma to the head or neck, and cardiac arrhythmias, many of which can be modified by lifestyle changes. Exercising regularly and eating a healthy diet can reduce risk factors such as hypertension, high cholesterol, obesity, and diabetes. Alcohol consumption and stress are also lifestyle factors that pose risks and can be regulated.

MYTH 3
Stroke is not hereditary
Single-gene disorders, such as sickle cell disease, increase a person's risk for stroke. Genetic factors, including a higher risk for high blood pressure and other cardiovascular risk factors may also indirectly increase stroke risk.

As families are likely to share environments and lifestyles, unhealthy lifestyle factors are likely to increase stroke risk among family members, especially when coupled with genetic risk factors.

MYTH 4
Stroke symptoms are hard to recognise
The most common symptoms for stroke form the acronym **F.A.S.T.**
F: face dropping - when one side of the face becomes numb and produces an uneven 'smile'
A: arm weakness - when one arm becomes weak or numb and, when raised, drifts slowly downward
S: speech difficulty - slurred speech
T: it's time to call 999

Other symptoms of stroke include:

- Numbness or weakness in the face, arm, leg, or one side of the body
- Confusion and trouble speaking or understanding speech
- Difficulty seeing in one or both eyes
- Difficulty walking, including dizziness, loss of balance and coordination
- Severe headaches without a known cause

MYTH 5
Stroke cannot be treated
Emergency treatment of a stroke with injection of a



Understanding stroke

clot busting drug, minimally invasive mechanical thrombectomy for clot removal, or surgery can reverse the symptoms of a stroke in many patients, especially if they arrive to the hospital early enough for the therapy (within minutes or hours since the onset of the symptoms). The longer the symptoms last, the lower the likelihood of a good outcome. Therefore, it is critical that at the onset of stroke symptoms an ambulance should be called for transport to the nearest hospital.

MYTH 6
Stroke occurs only in the elderly
Age is a significant risk factor for stroke. Stroke risk doubles every 10 years after age 55. However, strokes can occur at any age. One study examining healthcare data found that 34% of stroke hospitalisations in 2009 were under age 65. Approximately 15% of all ischemic strokes occur in young adults and

adolescents in whom the stroke risk factors (hypertension, diabetes, obesity, lipid disorders, and tobacco use) are among the most common co-existing .

MYTH 7
All strokes have symptoms
Not all strokes have symptoms, and some research suggests that symptom-free strokes are far more common than those with symptoms. Evidence of these so-called silent strokes appears on MRI scans as white spots from scarred tissue following a blockage or ruptured blood vessel. Often, silent strokes are identified when patients receive MRI scans for symptoms including headaches, cognitive issues, and dizziness.

MYTH 8
Stroke always causes paralysis

Stroke is a leading cause of long-term disability, but not everyone who has a stroke will experience paralysis or weakness. Research shows that stroke leads to reduced mobility in over half of stroke survivors aged 65 and over.

The long-term impacts of stroke, however, vary on many factors, such as the amount of brain tissue affected and the area affected. Damage to the left brain, for example, will affect the right side of the body and vice versa.

If the stroke occurs in the left side of the brain, effects may include paralysis on the right side of the body, speech and language problems, slow and cautious behaviour, and memory loss. If it affects the right side of the brain, paralysis may also occur on the left side of the body. Other effects may include vision problems, quick and inquisitive behaviour, and memory loss.

(Source: medicalnewstoday.com)

