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Mahda gets record 320mm rain

Starting April 14 to April 17 midday, Mahda received nearly ten times the 2022 national average of 30.6mm

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman has been besieged by an unprecedented deluge and rainfall figures significantly surpassed the national annual average many times over. Within a span of four days, starting April 14 to April 17 midday, Mahda in Buraimi recorded an astounding 320mm of rain - nearly tenfold the national average of 30.6mm witnessed in 2022.

The highest rainfall in Buraimi in 2022 was in July, which stood at 31.8mm, while the highest in the country that year - 116.5mm - was recorded in South Sharqiyah in January.

Data from rain monitoring stations of Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources (MAFWR) paints a grim picture of the widespread impact of the current weather disturbance, with Yanqul receiving 243mm, followed closely by Liwa with 240mm and Shinas 236mm.

ANNUAL AVERAGE RAINFALL IN OMAN

2022	30.6mm
2021	105.8mm
2020	103mm
2019	94.3mm
2018	80.8mm

The heavy rains have not been isolated to any particular region, as evidenced by Ibra receiving 206mm, and Al Awabi, Khasab and Al Hamra getting 195mm, 194mm and 177mm respectively.

The extraordinary rainfall extend to other regions with Madha receiving 166mm, Mudhaibi 160mm, Wadi Bani Khalid 159mm, and Al Qabil and Buraimi 146mm each. Other rain recording stations like Bidbid, Bidiyah, Dibba, Sinaw, Jabal Akhdar and Sur reported precipitation between 123mm and 140mm.

Several other stations recorded rains between 46mm and 121mm.

MAFWR data also showed that the amount of rainwater retained by 49 dams from April 14 to 17 to protect against flood risks amounted to more than 179mn m3, with most full to capacity.

The downpour resulted in widespread flooding, infrastructure damage and agricultural disruption.

The event is a stark departure from the decreasing trend in annual rainfall observed in the last few years. The sultanate experienced a noticeable decrease of 71.1% in average annual rainfall, from 105.8mm in 2021 to 30.6mm in 2022.

Such unpredictable and extreme weather events underscore the need for robust emergency planning and infrastructure resilience. These also raise crucial questions on changing climate patterns and their impact on the sultanate.



(Supplied photos)



1,043 telecom stations hit by rains, flooding

Muscat - Ahmed bin Hassan al Haddabi, Executive Manager of Strategy Planning Unit at Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA), reported that 1,043 telecom stations were impacted by heavy rains and overflowing wadis, resulting in disruption in services, particularly in North Batinah and Buraimi.

"Services have currently been reinstalled in affected stations in Sohar through activation of local roaming services between operators. Approximately 50% of the stations are now operational," Haddabi informed.

Regarding TRA's ongoing efforts, he added, "We are actively seeking alternative solutions to expedite full service restoration. Additionally, a dedicated 24-hour communications centre has been established to promptly address reports and emergency situations via the 1000 hotline."

1,630 rescued, 630 evacuated: ROP

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Royal Oman Police (ROP) responded to numerous emergency calls over the last four days related to situations resulting from heavy rains, including vehicles swept away in wadis, flooding of houses, requests for help, and fire outbreaks.

In a statement, ROP said its efforts led to the rescue of over 1,630 individuals and evacuation of more than 630 people. Additionally, police aviation units conducted 50 sorties and 152 rescue operations in various governorates, providing assistance to those in need and transporting medical teams.

On Wednesday, Royal Air Force of Oman evacuated 89 people and patients in North Batinah, South Batinah and Al Wusta.

The heavy rains resulted in the loss of 19 lives, with four individuals still missing. Brig Gen Mohammed bin Nasser al Kindi, Director General of Operations at ROP, emphasised the ongoing efforts to provide aid, organise traffic, ensure security, and restore normalcy in affected areas in close collaboration with other public and private agencies.

Efforts are ongoing to provide aid, organise traffic, ensure security and restore normalcy in affected areas

BRIG GEN MOHAMMED AL KINDI



Brig Gen Kindi highlighted the tireless efforts of ROP personnel across all governorates, operating around the clock to deliver swift assistance in coordination with relevant authorities. He thanked citizens and residents for their cooperation and assistance in saving lives, commending their national spirit in dealing with the challenging weather conditions. In light of the ongoing situation, he urged the public to exercise caution, particularly around water bodies.

Record-breaking rains in UAE

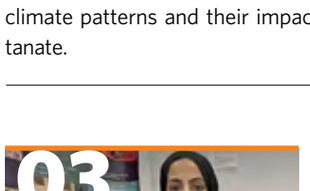
Dubai, UAE - United Arab Emirates witnessed unprecedented rains with 254mm precipitation in Al Ain on Tuesday in less than 24 hours. According to the UAE's National Centre of Meteorology, this is the highest since record keeping began in 1949.

The meteorology centre stated that the Khatm al Shiklah area of Al Ain received up to 254.8mm in less than 24 hours.

Although the heavy rains eased by late Tuesday, disruptions continued on Wednesday with Dubai's flagship Emirates airlines suspending check-in for passengers departing Dubai airport until midnight.

Dubai International Airport, one of the world's busiest, said it was facing significant disruptions after rains delayed or diverted flights.

"Flights continue to be delayed and diverted ... We are working hard to recover operations as quickly as possible in very challenging conditions," an airport spokesperson said.



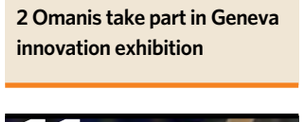
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2 Omanis take part in Geneva innovation exhibition



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Oman storm into ACC Men's Premier T20I Cup semifinal



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Oman's pavilion at Venice Biennale opens on April 19

RO79mn pact inked for Phase 1 of Batinah Coastal Road project

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MTCIT) has embarked on a significant development project with the signing of a RO79mn agreement on Wednesday for the first phase of the Batinah Coastal Road.

The project aims to enhance the transportation, logistics and infrastructure sectors, bolstering the national economy.

The agreement was inked by H E Said bin Hamood al Mawali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, and Muhammad Abdul Latif, General Manager of Consolidated Contractors Company Oman. The signing was witnessed by Bader bin Salim bin Marhoon al Mamari, Secretary-General of Tender Board.



(ONA)

H E Mawali highlighted the project's strategic importance, saying, "This road is crucial as it connects Khazaen Economic City with adjacent wilayats and the Port of Suwaiq."

He elaborated that Batinah Coastal Road will alleviate traffic congestion in the wilayats of Barka, Musannah and Suwaiq, and improve connectivity to Liwa and Shinas. "This development is expected to have a substantial positive impact on the local economy," the minister added.

Phase 1 of the project will see completion of 30km of unfinished segments, including 22km from Barka to Suwaiq Port and 8km from Sohar Port to Khatmat Malaha. Additionally, it will include construction of a flyover at Suwaiq Roundabout, four bridges and 67 culverts to ensure uninterrupted road use during rains, and service roads flanking the main road.

The agreement also includes a 4km dual carriageway from Barka Flyover to Barka Souq and a 6km link to Suwaiq.

The Batinah Coastal Road stretches from Barka to Khatmat Malaha in Shinas, covering a total distance of 244km. The project is divided into two phases, with the first phase consisting of two segments - Al Naseem intersection in Barka to Suwaiq Port and from Sohar Port to Khatmat Malaha.

Phase II, spanning 111 km, will extend from Suwaiq Port to Sohar Port and commence following finalisation of compensation for those affected by the project, the minister informed.

Oman hosts Mideast human trafficking forum

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The fifth Government Forum to Combat Trafficking in Persons in the Middle East was held in Muscat on Wednesday focusing on strengthening labour legislation and procedures to combat human trafficking.

The forum, attended by experts and delegates from many countries, highlighted the need for periodic reviews of existing laws to address the evolving nature of this crime.

H E Dr Mahad bin Said bin Ali Ba'owain, Minister of Labour, emphasised the forum's goal to create a unified approach to combat human trafficking in line with recent criminal trends. "It is vital to ensure our efforts are sustainable and effective, enhancing the skills of those working to combat human trafficking," he stated.

The forum recommended the formation of a technical working group comprising representatives of the participating nations, the Permanent General Secretariat of the forum, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, and other relevant UN bodies. This group will develop a roadmap for implementing the forum's recommendations and monitor progress towards set goals.

Key strategies discussed included leveraging the experiences of participating countries in labour inspection, regulatory enforcement, and facilitating police and judicial cooperation between countries that host labour forces and those that supply them. The importance of preserving workers' rights to legal recourse with simplified procedures was also underlined, along with the provision of legal and technical support in partnership with judicial entities.



(Supplied photo)

Cybersecurity exercise held to bolster telecom sector resilience

Our Correspondent
Muscat

An event called National Cybersecurity Exercise was held in Muscat on Wednesday aimed at enhancing security across the telecommunications sector. Major telecom companies, including Omantel, Ooredoo and Vodafone Oman, participated.

Inaugurating the event, Omar bin Hamdan al Ismaili, CEO of Telecommunications Regulatory Authority, said, "This exercise was organised in collaboration with key stakeholders to assess the telecommunications sector's ability to pinpoint and rectify vulnerabilities, and to evaluate the preparedness of our infrastructure and legislative frameworks."

He described the exercise as "a sophisticated practice within the sector and a chance to identify and address existing gaps".

Ismaili emphasised the dynamic and evolving nature of the information technology and communications sector, highlighting the need for cooperation among both public and private sector entities to serve the community effectively.

Elaborating on the exercise's specifics, Dr Ahmed Hammad al Kalbani, Dean of Advanced Cybersecurity Academy, said, "The focus is on communications through a scenario that encompasses multiple dimensions: cybersecurity, regulatory compliance and management of public perception linked to these scenarios."

Maqbool bin Salem al Wahaibi, CEO of Oman Data Park, informed that the exercise was part of a two-day Oman Cybersecurity Conference, which also started on Wednesday. "It is one of the pivotal components of the conference, simulating potential cybersecurity and hacking scenarios."

Wahaibi stressed the importance of inter-agency collaboration and teamwork to achieve optimal outcome of cybersecurity efforts.

The exercise underscored Oman's proactive stance in fortifying its cybersecurity infrastructure, ensuring that the telecom sector remains robust against emerging threats.



Passenger traffic surges 22% to 2.7mn at Oman's airports

Our Correspondent
Muscat



Oman's airports saw a significant increase in passenger traffic, with figures for February 2024 showing a 21.85% increase compared to the same period last year.

According to preliminary statistics from the National Centre for Statistics and Information, a total of 2,717,835 passengers were recorded in 2024 till the end of February, up from 2,231,451 passengers in the corresponding period of 2023.

Muscat International Airport saw 2,463,856 passengers, marking a 22.9% increase. This surge in passenger traffic was supported by a 16.4% increase in flights, totalling 16,996.

Of these, 15,678 were international flights which flew 2,288,119 passengers. The airport also handled 1,318 domestic flights, serving 175,737 passengers.

Indian nationals made up the highest number of travellers through Muscat International Airport in 2024 till February end, with 75,521 arrivals and 70,951 departures. This was followed by passengers of Bangladeshi nationality (15,867 arrivals and 20,980 departures) and Pakistanis (23,803 arrivals and 21,740 departures).

Salalah Airport also witnessed an uptick in activity, with passenger numbers reaching 232,077 - an increase of 10.1%. Flight operations at the airport rose 6.1% to 1,572 flights. International flights accounted for 840 of these, carrying 115,060 passengers, while domestic flights numbered 732, with 117,017 passengers.

Muscat International Airport saw 2,463,856 passengers, marking a 22.9% increase. This surge in passenger traffic was supported by a 16.4% increase in flights, totalling 16,996

Meanwhile, Sohar and Duqm airports reported modest figures. Sohar Airport facilitated 11,410 passengers in 110 flights, and Duqm Airport saw 10,492 passengers on 104 flights.

The growing passenger traffic highlights Oman's increasing role as a hub for air transport, reflecting broader trends in travel and tourism within the region.

be'ah collects over 31,000t of waste during Eid

Muscat - During the five-day Eid al Fitr holiday, Oman Environmental Services Holding Company (be'ah) reported a 13% increase in waste collection, receiving over 31,000 tonnes of municipal and slaughter waste. This spike in waste generation compares to typical daily amounts.

Mohsen bin Mohammed al Barwani, Director General of Planning and Service Improvement at be'ah, highlighted the company's proactive approach in addressing this seasonal surge.

"In anticipation of the Eid period, we devised a comprehensive strategy in collaboration with operational teams across various governorates," he stated.

It involved the strategic placement of large containers for slaughter waste in populous areas to facilitate easier disposal, alongside an uptick in the frequency of waste collection services and enhanced on-ground supervision to ensure service quality throughout the holiday.



(Supplied photo)

Slaughter activities significantly contributed to the increase in waste generation, with additional surges in other forms of municipal waste.

Barwani informed that Dhofar, North Batinah, and Buraimi witnessed the most substantial increases, accounting for over 93% of the total additional waste measured across the sultanate.

He also noted a shift in community behaviour in disposal of slaughter waste, attributing this change to targeted awareness campaigns conducted by be'ah. "Our concerted efforts to educate the community before and during Eid on proper disposal practices and environmental preservation have fostered a positive change," Barwani said.

These measures underscore be'ah's commitment to environmental management and community education, particularly during periods of increased waste production.



Oman to celebrate World Heritage Day today with focus on cultural diversity

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Sultanate of Oman, through the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MHT), is set to commemorate World Heritage Day on Thursday. This year's celebration, themed 'Discover and Experience Diversity', aligns with the global observance of the day dedicated to promoting cultural heritage.

In conjunction with World Heritage Day, Oman will introduce the 'Sur - Capital of Arab Tourism Programme' for 2024. This initiative aims to highlight the historical and archaeological wealth of Sur, enhancing its profile as a key destination for culture tourism.

H E Ibrahim bin Saeed bin Khalaf al Kharousi, Undersecretary for Heritage at MHT, underscored the significance of the day. "World Heritage Day offers a unique opportunity to highlight our rich cultural legacy, which mirrors our historical and civilisational roots," he stated.





(Supplied photos)

> *MHT's ongoing efforts to preserve heritage include documentation and restoration of historical sites, conducting archaeological digs and cataloguing artefacts*
>
> **H E IBRAHIM BIN SAEED AL KHAROUSI**

The undersecretary outlined the day's objectives, which include raising awareness on heritage conservation, promoting community participation in safeguarding heritage, encouraging research in cultural heritage, and building community partnerships to bolster identity and citizenship.

The ministry has planned a series of activities at City Walk Centre in Sur to mark the occasion, including an exhibition, educational workshops for children on archaeological excavation techniques, decoupage workshops, and the crafting of souvenirs using ancient Omani symbols.

H E Kharousi also highlighted the ministry's ongoing efforts to preserve heritage, including documentation and restoration of historical sites, conducting archaeological digs and cataloguing artefacts. These initiatives are aligned with Oman Vision 2040, aiming to enhance local economies through heritage tourism.

As of 2023, the ministry had documented approximately 36,000 archaeological sites and restored 366 historical monuments across the sultanate, promoting their preservation as symbols of Omani civilisation through the ages.

World Heritage Day was proposed by the International Council on Monuments and Sites in 1982 and approved by the General Assembly of Unesco in 1983. It is celebrated to raise awareness on the value of cultural heritage and emphasise the collective responsibility to protect and preserve it globally.

2 Omanis take part in Geneva innovation exhibition

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Omani innovators Razan Hamad al Kalbani and Sumaiya bint Saeed al Siyabi are participating in Geneva International Exhibition of Inventions, which commenced on Wednesday in Switzerland.

A global platform showcasing innovations by over 1,000 participants from 40 countries, the exhibition highlights projects that tackle pressing global challenges.

Razan is participating with a groundbreaking project - a paint designed to absorb X-rays using lycopene, a natural compound found in tomatoes, watermelon and other red fruits and vegetables. Her innovation, pioneering in its use of natural substances for radiation shielding, boasts a remarkable 97% radiation absorption rate. It is also water and moisture resistant, 95% heat resistant and non-flammable, and prevents mould and bacteria growth.

Razan's work earlier earned her the grand prize at the Korea International Women's Innovation Competition and Exhibition, where she competed against 353 innovations from 18 countries.



Sumaiya bint Saeed al Siyabi



(Supplied photos)

Razan Hamad al Kalbani

Sumaiya's project addresses the environmental threat posed by microplastics through a novel integration of biology and nanotechnology. She developed a floating sphere that uses microbial mats and a catalyst to break down microplastics into carbon dioxide and water. Designed to operate in oceanic garbage patches, it targets and neutralises microplastic pollution. This innovative approach won her top honours in *Star of Science*, a popular Qatari edutainment reality TV show.

Both innovators are passionate about representing Oman and demonstrating the capability of Omani youth to compete and excel on the international stage.

The Geneva exhibition, recognised as the largest event for inventions globally, is held annually in partnership with World Intellectual Property Organization. It aims to showcase and celebrate innovations that contribute to technological and economic advancements worldwide.

EA steps up awareness efforts in N Batinah

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Environment Authority (EA) distributed 2,560 eco-friendly products and conducted 40 environmental activities in North Batinah in the first quarter of 2024. These efforts were part of a broader campaign to promote environmental awareness and conservation in governorates across the sultanate.

Nizar bin Salem al Araimi, Director of Environmental Management Department in North Batinah, emphasised the significance of these initiatives and said, "Our department is dedicated to enhancing environmental awareness and preserving Oman's natural beauty through a range of educational and community engagement activities."

In the first three months of the year, the department organised several awareness-raising activities, including lectures, exhibitions, outdoor campaigns and environmental forums. These events took place at Saham Administration Centre and the Environmental Centre in Suwaiq, drawing attention to the critical issues facing Oman's ecosystems.

The eco-friendly products distributed included 740 cloth and paper bags and 1,820 containers as alternatives to plastic water bottles. These items were handed out during the launch of the Environmental Council project at Sohar University in February. The target audience for these products included educational institutions - schools and universities - as well as local community organisations.

The programmes and activities focused on the detrimental impact of plastics on living organisms in various ecosystems and aimed to integrate environmental topics into the curricula of different educational stages. Environmental awareness events saw active participation.

Araimi highlighted the collaborative efforts of the Environmental Management Department with various public and private institutions in the governorate.





MARKET WATCH

MSX30	4,722.93
Sensex	72,943.68

FOREX RATES

(RO1 equals)	
India	217.31
Pakistan	722.57
Bangladesh	284.89
Philippines	148.74
Sri Lanka	783.89

*Rates as on April 17
Source: xe.com

BRIEFS

Oil prices drop on increased US stockpiles

Oil prices declined on Wednesday, with data indicating lower demand in the US, the world's biggest oil consumer, outweighing supply concerns from tension in the Middle East.

International benchmark Brent crude traded at $89.72 per barrel at 0811GMT, a 0.33% fall from the closing price of $90.02 per barrel in the previous trading session.

US benchmark West Texas Intermediate (WTI) traded at $85.02 per barrel at the same time, a 0.40% drop from the previous session that closed at $85.36 per barrel.

Prices declined during early Asian trade following the release of data reflecting bearish demand in the US. Uncertainty over when the US Federal Reserve will start interest rate cuts continues to influence oil prices.

Oman LNG signs 10-year gas supply deal with Shell

Our Correspondent
Muscat



The agreement represents a significant milestone in the ongoing collaboration between two entities, with Shell emerging as the largest offtaker of liquefied natural gas from Oman LNG

Oman LNG Company announced on Wednesday the signing of a major sales and purchase agreement (SPA) with Shell International Trading Middle East to deliver up to 1.6mn metric tonnes per annum of LNG for a 10-year period, starting in 2025.

This agreement represents a significant milestone in the ongoing collaboration between the two entities, with Shell emerging as the largest offtaker of liquefied natural gas from Oman LNG.

Hamed al Naamany, CEO of Oman LNG, emphasised the importance of this deal, saying, "This agreement positions Shell as our primary long-term buyer and solidifies a crucial partnership with a major industry player. It not only reflects Shell's confidence in Oman LNG's product but also fosters opportunities for further expansion in the LNG market."

By entering into this SPA, Oman LNG not only reaffirms its status as a reliable LNG provider but also demonstrates its proficiency in efficiently managing business operations to deliver secure and sustainable energy to global customers.

Walid Hadi, Senior Vice President and Country Chairman of Shell in Oman, said, "This agreement strengthens our LNG and integrated gas portfolio, enabling us to meet the increasing demand for flexible and reliable energy from our global clientele. Shell takes pride in its role as the largest private shareholder in Oman LNG for the next decade."

This deal enhances Oman LNG's reputation as a dependable and trusted LNG supplier worldwide, showcasing its ability to produce clean energy safely and reliably.

Oman LNG has emerged as the second-largest income generator for the sultanate, following oil revenues.

The SPA with Shell follows agreements signed in October 2023 to extend shareholding and gas supply agreements for Oman LNG until 2034, with Shell being the largest private shareholder.

As part of its global marketing efforts, Oman LNG has secured several long-term gas supply agreements since the beginning of 2023.

On Tuesday, Oman LNG signed a significant sales and purchase agreement with JERA, Japan's largest power company, committing to supply 0.8mn metric tonnes per annum of LNG over 10 years, starting in 2025.

In March, Oman LNG finalised a sale and purchase agreement with Germany's SEFE (Secure Energy for Europe) to deliver 0.4mn metric tonnes of LNG annually to Germany. This landmark agreement signifies a significant milestone in the strategic energy partnership between Germany and Oman.

Oman's oil exports rise 5.5% on increased China demand

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oil exports to China, biggest buyer of Oman crude, rose by 15.6% to 51.429mn barrels in the first two months of 2024

Oman's oil exports increased by 5.5% during the first two months of 2024 despite a 4.3% decline in the country's total production.

The sultanate's total oil exports increased to 52.430mn barrels during the January–February period of this year against 49.713mn barrels in the same period of 2023, according to the data released by the National Center for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

Most of the rise in Oman's oil exports can be attributed to a significant growth in shipments to China. Oil exports to China, the biggest buyer of Oman crude, rose by 15.6% to 51.429mn barrels in the first two months of 2024.

However, Oman did not export oil to India during the same period.

While crude exports to Japan fell more than 21% to just 1mn barrels during the first two months of 2024 from 1.267mn barrels a year ago, exports to South Korea remained zero during this period.

Oman sold its crude at an average price of $80.2 per barrel during the January–February period of this year, a decrease of two per cent from the $81.8 per barrel average price achieved in the corresponding period of 2023.

Oman's total oil production decreased 4.3% to 60.073mn barrels during the first two months of 2024 from 62.750mn barrels recorded in the same period of last year. Crude oil production dropped 6.8% to 46.025mn barrels this year from 49.391mn barrels in 2023, while condensate production rose 5.2% to 14.047mn barrels, the NCSI data showed.

The sultanate's daily average output was 5.9% lower at 1mn barrels per day (bpd) in the first two months of 2024 against 1.063mn bpd in the same period a year ago. The average daily production in February decreased at 994,400 bpd.

Earlier in March, Oman and other OPEC+ member nations agreed to extend their voluntary cuts to oil production through the second quarter of 2024. The move is part of the OPEC+ group's strategy to stabilise the oil market and prices by reducing supply.



Saudi Arabia's mineral wealth estimated at $2.5tn

Riyadh, Saudi Arabia – The mining sector in Saudi Arabia is undergoing a significant transformation, poised to become a key pillar for the nation's economic diversification efforts outlined in Vision 2030.

The kingdom's abundant mineral wealth, estimated at SAR9.4tn ($2.5tn), presents a crucial opportunity to expand non-oil revenue streams alongside the oil and petrochemical industries.

To accelerate exploration and development, the kingdom has increased its estimated mineral wealth and invested SAR682.5mn ($182mn) in exploration incentives by the end of 2023.

This commitment was reinforced by the issuance of 152 new industrial licenses by the Ministry of Industry and Mineral Resources in January 2024 alone. The licenses include 20 for non-metallic mineral products and 19 for activities related to manufacturing formed metal products, excluding machinery and equipment.

According to a report by the National Industrial and Mining Information Center, the 152 industrial licenses issued since the beginning of 2023 contributed to bringing the total number of operating and under-construction factories in the kingdom by the end of January 2024 to 11,672.

Recent discoveries, including significant gold reserves along a 100km stretch in the Mansoura and Masara mines, further emphasise the vast untapped potential of Saudi Arabia's mineral wealth. These mines boast a projected annual production capacity of 250,000 ounces of gold.

QNA

Oil prices could hit $100 this year if OPEC+ maintains cuts: Vitol CEO

Our Correspondent
Muscat



Spot crude oil prices could hit $100 per barrel this year if OPEC+ maintains its production cuts and continues to withhold crude from the global markets, according to Russell Hardy, CEO of independent commodity trading group Vitol.

Brent crude futures have increased almost 20% since the start of the year, as fears of widening conflict in the Middle East disrupting supplies face growing expectations of robust economic fundamentals.

OPEC+ has also taken some 5mn barrels per day (bpd) of crude off the market under voluntary production cuts since late 2022 to help support oil prices as concerns over the pace of global economic growth dragged on demand forecasts.

"It's really a supply-constrained market but we've averaged about $83 per barrel so far this year, so $80 to $100 feels like a sensible range for the market given OPEC's control of inventories around the world," Hardy told the FT Commodities Global Summit in Lausanne, as reported by S&P Global Commodity Insights.

On the demand side, Hardy said Vitol is expecting global growth of 1.9mn bpd this year, similar to 2023, with China, India and jet fuel from increased air travel continuing to underpin growth.

Predictions that oil prices will hit $100 per barrel this year have been growing of late, fuelled by escalating tensions between Israel and Iran and stronger-than-expected demand data, the S&P Global Commodity Insights report said.

In a note on March 28, oil analysts at S&P Global Commodity Insights said they expect Dated Brent prices of around $90 per barrel on a monthly average basis in the second to third quarters but said there is an upside risk if OPEC+ holds on to its cuts.

"The risk for higher prices...has increased owing to the extension of production cuts, originally announced in November 2023 by the 'OPEC+ Six' — Iraq, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Algeria, Kazakhstan and Oman. Also, more damage to Russian oil infrastructure from Ukrainian drone attacks could tighten the global balance and push prices higher," oil analysts at S&P Global said, noting that Ukrainian drone attacks on Russian refineries posed another an upside risk to both crude and product prices.

Last week, OPEC+ said it would maintain its voluntary cuts until July. The cartel is expected to decide on its continued production cuts beyond then at its next full ministerial meeting scheduled for June 1.

Samsung regains top slot as it bites into Apple's phone business

Indrabati Lahiri

Samsung has recently surpassed Apple once again, to become the world's biggest smartphone producer by number of shipments. Currently, Samsung commands about 20.8% of the global smartphone market, while Apple has approximately 17.3% of the market.

Xiaomi came in at third place, with a 14.1% share.

Apple had briefly seized the crown in 2023, pausing Samsung's 13-year reign as top dog in the smartphone market, however, that victory was short-lived.

Apple saw smartphone shipments plunge around 10% in Q1 2024, following Android competition heating up significantly, from makers such as Samsung, Huawei, Xiaomi and more.

As a result, iPhone sales fell considerably in China, mainly due to consumers becoming more price and value-conscious, following the pandemic and the ongoing cost of living crisis effects.

At the top end, Apple saw Huawei as a formidable competitor, while consumers seemed to prefer Vivo, Oppo and Xiaomi products at the middle end.



Apple smartphones and its App Store have also been facing more issues and restrictions in China, in retaliation for the US cracking down on Chinese social media apps such as Tik Tok.

On the other hand, Samsung's Galaxy S24 smartphone sales have been surging, having overtaken the previous Galaxy S23 model as well, with the former shipping more than 60mn units in the first quarter of the year.

This is mainly due to the S24 model having Galaxy artificial intelligence (AI), which offers features such as chat assistance, live translation, transcription assistance, interpretation, generative editing and much more. On the other hand, Apple has made no move as of yet to include AI in its smartphones.

Worldwide smartphone shipments touched 289.4mn, during the first quarter of the year.

Although Samsung is currently at the top of the smartphone production race, the company could still face tough competition from Chinese phone rivals such as Xiaomi, Huawei and Transsion, which owns Itel, Techno and Infinix.

This is especially due to these Chinese brands seeing increased popularity with bargain-hunting customers both domestically and abroad, especially in Europe. Xiaomi especially, has been making big moves to revamp its global strategy and portfolio.

This can especially be seen in other important south-east Asian markets, such as India, where the company has moved from offering mainly budget-friendly phones, which used to suit customer tastes earlier, to launching more upscale models, as consumer demands evolved.

Xiaomi has also recently captured investor and client attention, by launching its first electric vehicle, the SU7 which, the company has said, is expected to take a step closer to bridging the gap in the Human x Car X Smart Home Ecosystem circle.

(Source: Euronews.com)

IMF raises global growth forecast to 3.2%

Washington, US – The International Monetary Fund (IMF) upgraded its forecast of global growth in 2024 to 3.2%, 0.1 percentage points higher than its projection in January, according to its newly released World Economic Outlook (WEO) report.

Despite gloomy predictions, the global economy remains remarkably resilient, with steady growth and inflation slowing almost as quickly as it rose, Pierre-Olivier Gourinchas, chief economist of the IMF and director of the Research Department, told a press briefing during the 2024 Spring Meetings of the IMF and the World Bank. "Most indicators continue to point to a soft landing."

Despite less economic scarring from the crises of the past four years, the IMF estimates that there will be more scarring for low-income developing countries, many of which are still struggling to turn the page from the pandemic and cost-of-living crises, he said.

The IMF expects advanced economies to grow 1.7% in 2024, up 0.2 percentage points from its January forecast. The US economy will grow 2.7% in 2024 and slow to 1.9% in 2025. The eurozone economy will grow by 0.8% in 2024, accelerating to 1.5% in 2025.

"The strong recent performance of the United States reflects robust productivity and employment growth, but also strong demand in an economy that remains overheated. This calls for a cautious and gradual approach to easing by the Federal Reserve," said Gourinchas.



Pedestrians walk past the IMF headquarters in Washington, DC on Tuesday (Xinhua)

IMF estimates that global headline inflation is expected to fall from 6.8% in 2023 to 5.9% in 2024 and 4.5% in 2025, with advanced economies returning to their inflation targets sooner than emerging market and developing economies

He noted that the US fiscal stance, out of line with long-term fiscal sustainability, is of "particular concern." It raises short-term risks to the disinflation process, as well as longer-term fiscal and financial stability risks for the global economy, he said.

The IMF expects emerging market and developing economies to grow by 4.2% in 2024, up 0.1 percentage points from its January forecast. IMF forecasts show that China's economy will grow 4.6% in 2024.

Despite welcome developments, Gourinchas noted that numerous challenges remain, and decisive actions are needed.

The WEO report showed that the latest forecast for global growth five years from now – at 3.1% - is at its lowest in decades.

The IMF estimates that global headline inflation is expected to fall from an annual average of 6.8% in 2023 to 5.9% in 2024 and 4.5% in 2025, with advanced economies returning to their inflation targets sooner than emerging market and developing economies.

"While inflation trends are encouraging, we are not there yet. Somewhat worryingly, progress toward inflation targets has somewhat stalled since the beginning of the year," said Gourinchas.

The IMF chief economist pointed out that oil prices have been rising recently in part due to geopolitical tensions and services inflation remains stubbornly high.

The report pointed out several downside risks: new price spikes stemming from geopolitical tensions, including those from the Ukraine crisis and the Gaza-Israel conflict, could, along with persistent core inflation where labor markets are still tight, raise interest rate expectations and reduce asset prices.

A divergence in disinflation speeds among major economies could also cause currency movements that put financial sectors under pressure, the report said.

High interest rates could have greater cooling effects than envisaged as fixed-rate mortgages reset and households contend with high debt, causing financial stress, it added.

Xinhua

India set to remain fastest growing among major economies in 2024: IMF

New Delhi, India – India is set to remain the fastest growing among major economies in 2024, according to International Monetary Fund's latest World Economic Outlook.

The IMF, in its latest outlook, raised India's growth projections for 2024 from 6.5% to 6.8%. For 2025, the IMF has kept India's growth rate projection at 6.5%.

It attributed robustness and strength in domestic demand and a rising working-age population behind its growth projections.

Countries with a demographic dividend could help support growth in the global workforce, in which nearly two in every three new entrants over the medium term will come from India and sub-Saharan Africa, IMF noted in its latest World Economic Outlook report.

The report said that China is expected to grow at 4.6% this year and 4.1% in 2025.

Economic growth in the 10 emerging markets of the Group of Twenty (G20) has consistently outperformed that of advanced economies over the past two decades.



As their share of world GDP has more than doubled since 2000, Argentina, Brazil, China, India, Indonesia, Mexico, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, and Türkiye (G20 emerging markets) have continued to integrate into the global economy – notably through trade and global value chains.

According to India's official data, the country grew at a massive 8.4% during the October-December quarter of the financial year 2023-24 and the country continued to remain the fastest-growing major economy. The Indian economy grew 7.8% and 7.6% during the preceding two quarters – April-June and July-September.

India's economy grew 7.2% in 2022-23 and 8.7% in 2021-22, respectively.

ANI

Fed chief signals higher for longer rates as inflation data dent confidence on cuts

Yasin Ebrahim

US Federal Reserve chairman Jerome Powell said Tuesday the recent inflation data have not given the Fed greater confidence to begin cutting rates and indicate that rates will likely need to be higher for longer.

"The recent data have clearly not given us greater confidence, and instead indicate that it's likely to take longer than expected to achieve that confidence," Powell said Tuesday to the Wilson Center's Washington Forum on the Canadian Economy.

The Fed has previously flagged the need for greater confidence, led by incoming economic data, that inflation is on sustainable path lower to begin cutting rates.

The Fed chief, however, added that policy is "well positioned to handle the risks that we face," easing some fears, albeit still nascent, that the central bank may be forced to consider the prospect of higher interest rates.

There is a growing risk that the Fed could raise rates to as high as 6.5% next year as US economic growth and sticky remains sticky, strategist at UBS highlighted in a note recently, though said that this hawkish outcome wasn't its base case scenario.



Recent inflation data have clearly not given us greater confidence, and instead indicate that it is likely to take longer than expected to achieve that confidence

JEROME POWELL

In another sign that rates are likely to higher longer, Powell said that the recent inflation data suggest that it would be appropriate to allow restrictive policy to work overtime and return inflation sustainably to the 2% target.

"Inflation declined quite significantly over the last year over the typically in the second half, but 12 months core PCE inflation, which is one of the most important things, is estimated to have been little change in March," Powell added.

The labour market, meanwhile, continues to normalise as strong demand for workers has been offset by a jump in the pool of available workers and immigration.

Strong demand for workers "has been met by a substantial increase in the workforce due both to rising labour force participation and a substantial increase in immigration," Powell said. Despite this strength, "our labour market has been moving into better balance over the past year," he added.

The Fed chief, however, also said that given the current level of rates, there was space to ease should the labour market deteriorate significantly.

(Source: Investing.com)

UK inflation drops to 2.5 year low as food prices cool

London, UK – Stabilising food inflation and falling house prices both contributed to UK inflation coming down further in March, leading to renewed hopes that the Bank of England might cut rates soon.

The UK year-on-year inflation report for March 2024 came out on Wednesday morning, clocking in at 3.2%, according to the Office for National Statistics (ONS), marking a decline from February's 3.4%.

However, it was still above analyst estimates of 3.1%, although the lowest number since September 2021.

Food inflation slowing down was one of the biggest contributors to the decline, coming down to 4% from 5% in the previous month.

Regarding food and non-alcoholic beverages prices, the ONS said, "Prices have been relatively high but stable since early summer 2023, rising by less than 2% between May 2023 and March 2024. This compares with a sharp rise of around 22% seen between March 2022 and May 2023."

Agencies

Euro area inflation decreases to 4-month low

Greta Ruffino

In March 2024, inflation in the euro area fell from 2.6% to 2.4%, as reported by Eurostat on Wednesday, marking a four-month low and confirming preliminary data.

The euro area comprises countries that use the euro as their national currency within the European Union.

The main components contributing to inflation vary. In March, services saw the highest yearly increase, remaining at 4.0% compared to February. Following this, food, alcohol, and tobacco had a rate of 2.7%, down from 3.9% in the previous month.



Non-energy industrial goods rose by 1.1%, a decrease from 1.6% in February, while energy prices experienced a decrease of 1.8%, which was less steep than February's -3.7% drop.

In the euro area, inflation is determined by averaging the weighted Harmonised Index of Consumer Prices (HICP). However, the main components contributing to inflation vary in importance.

In 2024, services make up the largest portion, accounting for approximately 44.9% of household spending in the euro area, followed closely by non-energy industrial goods at around 25.7%.

Food, alcohol, and tobacco, as well as energy, represent 19.5% and 9.9% respectively. Despite their smaller share of spending, their prices can fluctuate significantly, having a considerable impact on inflation.

In the euro area, inflation rates can differ between countries due to specific events, varying trade and consumption patterns, and different financial systems, according to the European Central Bank.

(Source: Euronews.com)

Majlis A'Shura to discuss Draft Media law



On April 22, the Majlis A'Shura will host H E Dr Abdullah Nasser al Harrasi, Minister of Information, who will deliver the Ministry of Information's statement during a public session. The session is part of the 8th regular sitting of the Shura's first annual convening during the 10th Term (2023-2027).

A day earlier, the Shura will hold its 7th regular session during which it will discuss the 'draft media law' referred by the government. This was informed by Sheikh Ahmed Mohammed al Nadabi, Secretary-General of the Shura Council.

Nadabi said that the statement of the Minister of Information will deal with 12 main topics specified earlier by the council. The minister will elaborate on the Sultanate of Oman's media strategy and policy, laws regulating the media sector in Oman, the ministry's efforts to develop media training, the role of Oman News Agency and its daily follow-up and coverage of local, regional and international events.

The statement will focus on investment in 'media making' and the challenges posed to the industry. It will review efforts to develop Omani drama, governorates' Media and foreign media.

The deliberations will also cover the extent to which the Government Communication Centre activates liaison with government institutions.

The statement will explain how the media handles different social issues and addresses the challenges facing the media sector. Nadabi added that the session will include discussions on the 'Draft Media Law', being one of the major legislations that were studied by the Council over the past months since the bill was forwarded to the council.

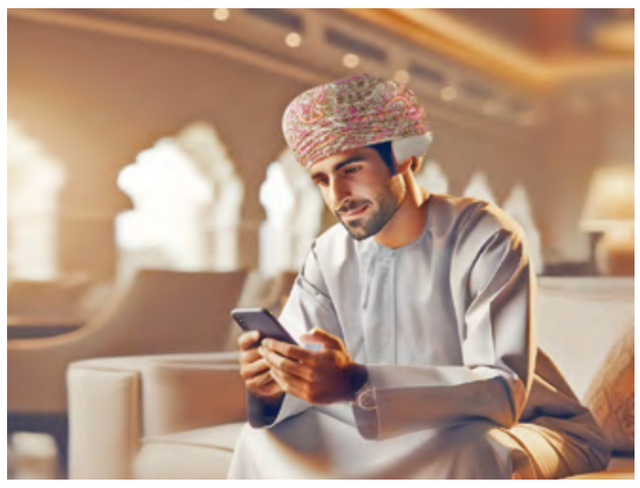
TRA notes Ooredoo's speeds

Say goodbye to Internet slowdowns, as Ooredoo's ultrafast 5G speeds are delivering and exceeding customer expectations across Oman.

A recent report by the Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA) confirmed that Ooredoo's 5G network provides unparalleled average download speeds of up to 294Mbps in the Wilayats of Quriyat and Al Amerat, a press release said.

These TRA results show that Ooredoo has requirements of households covered; homes of gamers, streamers and downloaders but also smaller businesses looking to improve their efficiency and productivity. During the monthly TRA survey in Quriyat, the average download speed of Ooredoo's 5G network reached 193Mbps.

BankDhofar progresses digitally



BankDhofar is presently dedicated to bolstering governmental directives and diverse developmental strategies aligned with Oman Vision 2040, particularly emphasising the employment sector and the provision of job opportunities for citizens.

This commitment significantly contributes to the revitalisation of the national economy, with a particular impact on the banking sector. Over the past months, the bank has facilitated over 250 employment opportunities for Omanis across various fields and academic backgrounds, resulting in a notable rise in the Omanisation rate to 92%, a press release said.

Furthermore, BankDhofar is steadfast in its efforts to perpetually enhance its digital channels, in harmony with the government's vision for digital transformation aimed at fostering a sustainable knowledge society and advancing the information technology industry in the Sultanate of Oman. The bank has successfully broadened its digital footprint by enabling customers to open bank accounts through smartphones and other digital platforms, facilitating convenient and timely banking transactions. This initiative has driven an 85.5% surge in total digital transactions in 2023, coupled with a 55.3% increase in transaction values.

Recently, the bank introduced 'Dhofar Pay', an innovative service marking a first in the Sultanate of Oman, allowing customers to easily and securely make payments via smartphones, eliminating the need for traditional debit cards.

In 2024, BankDhofar continues its customer centric momentum by prioritizing the delivery of superior customer service, enhancing the branch network and introducing bespoke product and services. Additionally, BankDhofar also provides tailored products to diverse segments of society, including small and medium enterprises, children, youth, women, and minors.

The bank is actively pursuing an enhancement of its credit rating, capitalising on the improved business environment in the Sultanate of Oman, heightened foreign investments, and in light of the continuous rise in oil prices. In 2023, BankDhofar attained a BAI rating from Moody's, BB from Standard & Poor's, and BB+ from Fitch.

As one of the oldest banks in the Sultanate of Oman, BankDhofar remains committed to deliver unparalleled services to its customers. It stands as the second-largest bank in terms of branch network, with a growing number of branches.

International School of Choueifat to host 'Sabis Stars' event in Muscat



The main organising committee of Sabis Stars revealed details of the global Sabis Stars event at the International School of Choueifat.

The global event is held every two years among students of Sabis schools around the world. This year, it will be hosted by the International School of Choueifat – Muscat in cooperation with the Ministry of Education from April 19 to 20.

At the beginning, Hamad bin Faisal al Raisi from the main committee of the event said, "We are pleased that the school is hosting the Sabis Stars event, which provides a platform for students to display their talents in various fields of arts and sciences, including advertising, public speaking, debate, poetry recital, creative writing, photography, drawing, science, and singing.

"It is certain that the event is an exceptional opportunity to enhance students' creativity and innovation skills and discover and support their talents. This event also contributes to building bridges of communication between Sabis school students from different parts of the world and inspires them to work together to build a better future."

Fadi Kleib, director of Regional Projects at Sabis schools, pointed out that the event is expected to be attended by about 500 students representing 36 Sabis schools from 17 countries, making it a unique display of academic abilities, innovation, and student talent.

The competitions provide students with an opportunity to showcase their talents in various fields, as they compete in advertising design, where the participating team will create a marketing campaign that includes the brand name, logo, short video, and billboard.

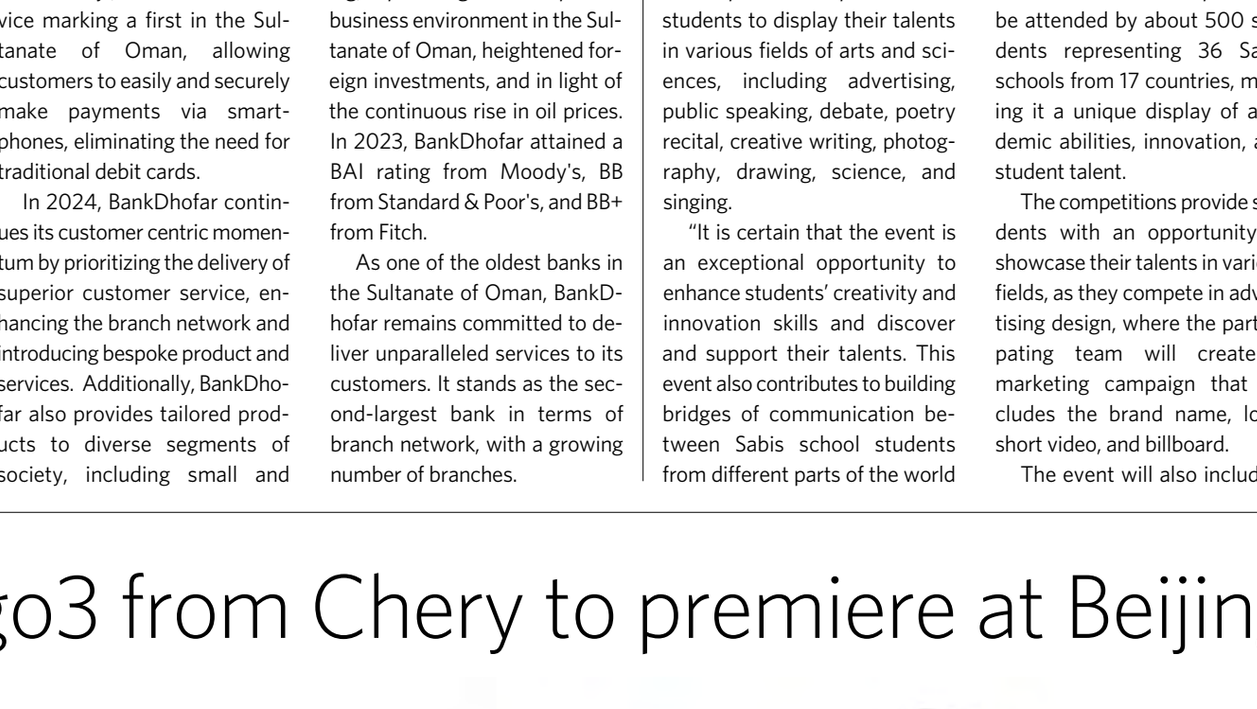
The event will also include a poetry recitation competition, a creative writing competition, a debate competition, science and innovations exhibition, as well as a public speaking, plastic arts and photography competition, and a singing competition.

He stressed that the competitions are subject to careful arbitration by specialised committees that include experts in various fields, in addition to representatives of the Ministry of Education, and that arbitration mechanisms ensure transparency and fairness in evaluating students' creativity.

Armen Mansourian, director of the Choueifat School, said, "Preparation for the event began last year through specialised committees and teams that planned and organised this major global event to ensure the success of the competitions according to everyone's expectations. There are 48 expert arbitrators from various government institutions, including universities and the Ministry of Education in the Sultanate of Oman."

He also thanked the Ministry of Education, saying, "We thank the Ministry for their continued support and cooperation by harnessing resources and allocating professionals to ensure the success of this event. We appreciate their cooperation and look forward to continuing to work towards common goals in the future."

New Tiggo3 from Chery to premiere at Beijing Auto Show



Chery is gearing up for the Beijing Auto Show, where the flagship model of the Tiggo family will premiere. Marking the pinnacle of Tiggo brand development, this move will lead the trend and direction of global urban SUVs backed by capabilities of QPower.

To align with the evolving paradigms of the modern era, there is a requirement to redefine consumer demands and further segment the market. In response, the flagship model of the Tiggo family aims to redefine what flagship products can offer by bringing state-of-the-art technology within reach of consumers globally, meeting their demand for quality and innovation.

This model benefits from Chery's extensive global R&D resources, presenting a fresh take on technology that paves the way for a new era of upscale global travel, a press release said.

On April 25, Chery will make a striking appearance at the Beijing Auto Show, standing at the forefront of the automotive industry's new era with its emphasis on innovative technology, top-notch products, and brand values that go beyond what's expected.

During the event, the flagship model of the Chery Tiggo family will premiere at the auto show, powerfully leading the future trend of travel.

Tiggo's new model is set to bring life to the idea of harnessing smart technology for sustainable travel. It's designed to elevate the driving experience, aiming to attract more sophisticated users with its commitment to innovation, advanced technology, and superior quality. It adopts new-generation drive modes and forward-looking technologies for a green journey.

Equipped with the latest PHEV technology from Qpower, the new model boasts impressive power. QPower is the culmination of Chery's extensive experience in powertrain technology, covering a wide range of energy options—ICE, PHEV and BEV.

It stands out for its 'strong and swift', 'efficient and green', and 'high-energy and intelligent' energy advantages. Furthermore, Qpower offers the optimal power solution for mainstream energy types and caters to all user travel scenarios, thereby offering enhanced support for the new model.

Looking forward, the new model will create a valuable experience that consistently exceeds expectations and brings constant surprises to users.

Kantar and Google jointly released the 2023 Chinese Global Brand Builders Top 50. Chery is ranked as the best Chinese global brand builder in cars and 14th in the overall list and its brand power has achieved strong growth.

In Oman, Chery vehicles are distributed by Saud Bahwan Group. Test Drive requests are catered to at the website - www.chery.om and www.instagram.com/cheryoman. For any further details & to ascertain the availability of stocks, please visit the Chery Showroom at Wattayah, Mawaleh and Sohar.

Israel has outdone Hitler: Turkish president

Erdogan said Israel is carrying out massacres in Gaza and West Bank that are marks of shame in history

Ankara, Turkey - By killing over 14,000 innocent children in Gaza, Israel has already outdone Nazi leader Adolf Hitler, the Turkish president said on Wednesday.

With unconditional support from the West, Israel is carrying out massacres that are marks of shame in human history, both in Gaza and the West Bank, Recep Tayyip Erdogan told a Justice and Development (AK) Party group meeting in the Turkish parliament. Saying that no one can question Turkey's sensitivity to the Palestinian issue, Erdogan added that the Palestinian cause gave his life new meaning.

"As long as God grants me life, I will continue to defend the struggle of Palestine, and will be the voice of the oppressed Palestinian people," Erdogan added.

Comparing the struggle of the Palestinian resistance group Hamas to the Turkish War of Independence over 100 years ago, Erdogan said: "We are well aware that there is a price to pay for saying this."



A total of 33,899 Palestinians have been killed in Israeli attacks on the Gaza Strip since last October

Saying that no one can question Turkey's sensitivity to the Palestinian issue, at an AK party meeting, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan added that the Palestinian cause gave his life a new meaning

56 more Palestinians killed in Gaza

A total of 33,899 Palestinians have been killed in Israeli attacks on the Gaza Strip since last October, the Health Ministry in the besieged enclave said on Wednesday.

The Gaza-based Health Ministry made the statement as the Israeli deadly onslaught on Gaza entered its 194th day.

The ongoing onslaughts have also injured 76,664 Palestinians, it added.

It noted that in the past 24 hours, Israel committed six massacres against families across the Gaza Strip that left 56 fatalities, and 89 wounded who arrived in the hospitals.

Israel has pounded the Gaza Strip since a cross-border attack by Hamas, which Tel Aviv says killed nearly 1,200 people.

The Israeli war on Gaza has pushed 85 per cent of the territory's population into internal displacement amid acute shortages of food, clean water, and medicine, while over 60 per cent of the enclave's infrastructure has been damaged or destroyed, according to the UN.

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

Meanwhile, a Palestinian official on Wednesday said the number of Palestinian detainees in Israeli jails since October 7 has increased by 130 per cent.

Speaking to Anadolu, Qaddoura Fares, head of the Prisoners and Ex-Prisoners Affairs Authority, described the situation of Palestinian detainees in Israeli jails as 'catastrophic and extremely dangerous'.

He noted that the detainees are exposed to torture and systematic assaults, and that 'the journey of torture starts from the moment of storming into the house and assaulting the detainee and the family, and sabotaging the house properties'.

He said the past winter was the most difficult winter season for the detainees as the Israeli prison authorities deprived them of proper clothes and blankets, as well as regularly stripping them of their clothes.

The Palestinian official added that the number of Palestinian detainees in Israeli jails before October 7 was nearly 5,000, but now the number is expected to reach 12,000, including the detainees from Gaza.

Anadolu Agency



Hezbollah, Israel exchange attacks

Beirut, Lebanon - Beirut, Lebanon - Hezbollah and Israel exchanged cross-border attacks on Wednesday amid escalating tensions along the Lebanese-Israeli border.

At least 18 people were injured in a missile attack in northern Israel from Lebanon on Wednesday, the Israeli public broadcaster KAN reported.

Three of the injured were in serious condition in the attack that targeted a community centre in the northern border town of Arab al-Aramshe.

Hezbollah said in a statement that it targeted an air surveillance unit at the Israeli base of Miron with missiles, causing damage.

Hezbollah fighters also fired rockets and artillery shells at a gathering of Israeli soldiers near the Ramiyah site and the command headquarters of the Israeli army's 91st Division in the Biranit barracks in northern Israel.

An Israeli military vehicle was also struck at the Metulla site in northern Israel, causing casualties among soldiers, the Lebanese group said.

Israeli warplanes, meanwhile, staged airstrikes in the town of Ayta al-Shaab in southern Lebanon, the state-run National News Agency reported.

Israeli fighter jets also struck the outskirts of the border towns of Alma al-Shaab and Dahieh with white phosphorus shells, the broadcaster said.

There were no available reports yet of casualties or damage.

Anadolu Agency

Google staffers protests company's contract with Israel government

New York, US - Protesting the company's ties with Israel, Google employees held sit-ins at two of the tech giant's offices in California and New York City.

The Tuesday protests were led by a group called 'No Tech For Apartheid', which says it demands that Google and Amazon 'drop their Nimbus contract with the Israeli government and military'. In Sunnyvale, California, protesters pledged to stay until Google ends its US$1.2bn contract with Amazon, which would provide cloud services and data centres to Israel for the Nimbus project.

The employees also occupied the office of Google Cloud CEO Thomas Kurian in California and the 10th floor of Google's New York offices.

The sit-in was accompanied by outdoor protests at Google offices in New York, Sunnyvale, San Francisco, and Seattle.

Stating that he was speaking as a 'Jewish Googler', a Google staffer in New York said that at the protests: "I sat in as a Jew, because 'never again' means never again for anyone."



Tuesday's protests in California and New York City were led by a group called 'No Tech For Apartheid'

In Sunnyvale, protesters pledged to stay until Google ends its US$1.2bn contract with Amazon, which would provide cloud services and data centres for the Nimbus project

"I sat in as a descendent of Holocaust survivors and Holocaust victims," he added, laying out similarities between the World War I genocide of Jews and others and the plight of the Palestinians in Gaza.

Another Google employee said on X: "Not another nickel, not another dime, not another tech for genocide. We will not stand by as our work aids and abets the apartheid."

The protest was livestreamed on the group's Twitch channel.

About 10 hours into the protests, police arrested groups of employees in both New York and California, the group reported on X.

The protests also coincide with Israel's continuing offensive on the Gaza Strip, which since last October 7 has taken nearly 34,000 lives.

Nimbus includes a cloud and machine learning system that enables data storage, collection, analysis, motif and feature identification from data, and prediction of potential data and motifs.

A US$1.2bn contract for the project was signed in April 2021 between Israel and Google and Amazon.

Israel announced in April 2021 that Google and Amazon won the massive state tender, allowing Israel to establish its local cloud storage server centres.

Anadolu Agency

US Treasury chief warns of more sanctions on Iran

Istanbul, Turkey - US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen warned on Tuesday that her agency may impose more sanctions on Iran after its attack on Israel.

"Treasury will not hesitate to work with our allies to use our sanctions authority to continue disrupting the Iranian regime's malign and destabilising activity," she told a press conference ahead of the 2024 spring meetings of the International Monetary Fund and World Bank.

"The attack by Iran and its proxies underscores the importance of Treasury's work to use our economic tools to counter Iran's malign activity," she said.

Yellen noted that the Treasury Department has targeted over 500 individuals and entities connected to terrorism and terrorist financing by the Iranian regime and its proxies since the beginning of the Joe Biden administration, which included targeting Iran's drone and missile programmes and its financing of Hamas, the Houthis, Hezbollah and Iraqi militia groups.

"From this weekend's attack (on Israel) to the Houthi attacks in the Red Sea, Iran's actions threaten the region's stability and could cause economic spillovers," she added.



Janet Yellen

Iran on Saturday launched an airborne attack on Israel in retaliation for an April 1 airstrike on its diplomatic compound in the Syrian capital. It reportedly fired more than 300 drones and missiles, with almost all intercepted by the air defence systems of Israel and its allies - the US, France and the UK.

US destroys Houthi targets

The US destroyed Houthi targets in Yemen, the United States Central Command (CENTCOM) said on Tuesday.

"Between 10:50am and 11:30am (Sanaa time) on April 16, U.S. Central Command (US-CENTCOM) forces successfully engaged two unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) in Iranian-backed Houthi-controlled areas in Yemen," CENTCOM said on X.

There were no injuries or damage reported by US, coalition or commercial ships, it said, adding it determined that the UAVs presented an 'imminent 'hreat" to vessels in the region.

Yemen's Houthi group has been targeting cargo ships in the Red Sea owned or operated by Israeli companies or transporting goods to and from Israel in solidarity with the Gaza Strip, which has been under an Israeli onslaught since October 7 last year.

The Red Sea is one of the world's most frequently used sea routes for shipment of oil and fuel.

Anadolu Agency

Denmark announces $313mn aid package for Ukraine

London, UK - The Danish government will provide Ukraine with a new 2.2bn kroner (US$313mn) military aid package, local media reported on Wednesday.

The funds will ensure the development of the maritime capabilities of the Ukrainian Armed Forces, shells, drones, and the production of missile parts in cooperation with the Netherlands and the Czech Republic. "In March, I visited a number of Ukrainian defence companies in Kyiv, and it became clear that there is great potential for future cooperation that can supply the necessary equipment to Ukraine, which will help change the situation on the battlefield," Defence Minister Troels Lund Poulsen said in a press release published on Tuesday.

He pointed out that direct investment in Kyiv's defence industry is a new initiative that would enable Ukraine to produce more military equipment itself.

Anadolu Agency

US, Chinese defence chiefs hold 1st talks since 2022, discuss security

Washington, D.C., US - United States Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin and and his Chinese counterpart Dong Jun held talks in nearly 18 months and discussed US-China defence relations and regional and global security issues, the Pentagon said.

In the meeting held via video-conference on Tuesday, Austin stressed the importance of keeping military-to-military communication lines between the US and China open, it said.

It is the first time since November 2022 that Austin has held talks with his Chinese counterpart when he spoke with the then defence minister of China Wei Fenghe in Cambodia. Dong was appointed China's Defence minister in December. China then named General Li Shangfu as its defence minister.

In 2018, the US sanctioned Li under the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA) when he headed the Equipment Development Department of the Chinese military. The sanctions were related to China's purchase of ten SU-35 combat aircrafts in 2017 and S-400 surface-to-air missile system-related equipment in 2018, according to the State Department, according to a Voice of America report.

Austin and Dong on Tuesday discussed the situations in the South China Sea and around the Taiwan Strait, as well as Russia-Ukraine conflict and North Korea's weapons development programme, according to the Pentagon.

Austin 'underscored the importance of respect for high seas freedom of navigation guaranteed under international law - especially in the South China Sea - and reiterated that the United States will continue to fly, sail and operate safely and responsibly, wherever international law allows', Pentagon Press Secretary Air Force Maj Gen Pat Ryder said during a briefing.

The US secretary reiterated that the US remains committed to its One China Policy, which is guided by the Three Joint Communiques, the Taiwan Relations Act and the Six Assurances. The video teleconference took place following an agreement between President Joe Biden and his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping last year in November near San Francisco to reopen direct military-to-military talks at several levels.

In January this year, senior US and Chinese defence officials gathered for two days at the Pentagon to discuss defence relations between the two countries.

Earlier this month, US and Chinese officials held talks aimed at ensuring professional and safe interactions between the two countries' air and naval forces.

High-level military communication channels had been closed since Beijing shut them down to protest the 2022 visit to Taiwan by the then-US House of Representatives Speaker Nancy Pelosi.

China has laid claim on the South China sea while Brunei, Malaysia, the Philippines and Vietnam claim the areas around their coasts.

An international court ruled in 2016 that China's nine-dash line, on which Beijing bases its claim, was without merit.

In his Tuesday meeting with the Chinese defence minister, Austin 'underscored the importance of respect for high seas freedom of navigation guaranteed under international law, especially in the South China Sea', the Pentagon said.



In a video conference, US Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin stressed the importance of keeping military-to-military communication lines between the US and China open

The teleconference took place after an agreement between US President Joe Biden and his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping

ANI


The main intention of redirecting funds is to make the Australian Defence Force more amphibious

Australia to boost defence budget by $32bn over the next decade

Canberra, Australia - Australia announced Wednesday it is increasing its defence budget by AU$50bn (US$32bn) over the next decade and will also rethink AU$72.8bn in planned spending.

Under a new defence strategy, the government defence budget is expected to reach AU$330bn in the next 10 years, which also includes the initial coast for nuclear-powered subs under the AUKUS partnership - including the US, UK, and Australia - ABC News reported.

With new investment, Australia's total defence spending will reach 2.4 per cent of GDP within the next 10 years.

Announcing the strategy, Defence Minister Richard Marles said the changes are designed to ensure that peace, security, and prosperity are maintained in the region.

"The inaugural National Defence Strategy sets out a clear and priority-driven approach to protecting against threats to Australia and our interests," the broadcaster quoted Marles as saying.

He added that the main objective of acquiring nuclear-powered submarines under the AUKUS partnership is to protect trade routes.

The main intention of redirecting funds is to make the Australian Defence Force 'more amphibious', including by spending on the AUKUS submarine programme (AU$53-$63bn over the next decade) and on new long-range strike and targeting missiles, including Tomahawk missiles (AU$28-$35bn over the next decade)," said Marles.

Last month, Australia entered its largest single defence export deal to date of over AU$1bn (US$664.5mn) with Germany to supply armoured vehicles.

Earlier, Australia also announced it was building the biggest navy since World War II while spending over US$7bn to double the size of its fleets of major warships and modernise its navy.

In 2021, the US, UK and Australia announced the formation of AUKUS, a trilateral security treaty for the Indo-Pacific region. It is primarily aimed at boosting deterrence against China, which they say is growing more assertive in the region.

Anadolu Agency

7 jurors chosen on Day 2 of Trump's trial

Houston, US - Day two of Donald Trump's hush money trial in the state of New York saw seven jurors sworn in as part of the jury that will weigh the first criminal charges ever against a former US president.

The panel of seven jurors was selected on Tuesday out of a pool of 96 prospective members during a somewhat contentious process that prompted New York Supreme Court Judge Juan Merchan to sternly admonish Trump for what he called 'hostile' behaviour toward one of the jurors questioned about her social media activity, according to media outlets. "He was gesturing, and he was speaking in (their) direction," said Merchan. "I won't tolerate that. I will not have any jurors intimidated in this courtroom."



The judge has already expanded his gag order in the case, barring Trump from speaking about witnesses as well as family and staff of both the district attorney's office and the court.

Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg is asking the judge to sanction the former president for violating that gag order. A separate hearing is scheduled next Tuesday in which Trump could be slapped with fines and the potential of jail time for future gag order violations.

The former president is facing 34 criminal charges related to his alleged efforts to influence the 2016 presidential election by paying hush money through his then-attorney and handler, Michael Cohen, to silence stories of his sexual trysts with several women, including porn star Stormy Daniels and former Playboy model Karen McDougal. Trump has pleaded not guilty to all charges, which include falsifying business records to make those hush money payments.

Jury selection will resume on Thursday with a new panel of 96 prospective jurors on deck who could end up on the panel for the trial, which is expected to last about six weeks.

A total of 12 jurors and six alternates will ultimately be selected for the jury.

The judge has ruled that all jurors will remain anonymous to the public and their addresses will remain unknown to the defendant for safety reasons.

Anadolu Agency

Displaced Sudanese strive to rebuild lives in Egypt

Cairo, Egypt - Sami Mahmoud, a Sudanese obstetrician and gynaecologist, lived a comfortable life in Khartoum, the capital of Sudan, before the outbreak of the armed conflict between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) on April 15, 2023.

With a big house, three cars, four household helpers, and everything, Mahmoud said his wife 'was living like a queen in Sudan'.

However, their fate took a dramatic turn after the conflict. After over 60 hours of bus trips, the family of seven members made it to Egypt with 10 pieces of luggage.

"Now, my wife is like a handyman for the family," Mahmoud told Xinhua near his rented apartment in Easy Life Compound in New Cairo, east of the Egyptian capital Cairo.

Displaced by the civil war in Sudan a year ago, asylum-seeking Sudanese citizens have been trying to rebuild their lives in neighbouring Egypt, but the task is by no means easy. "We could not withdraw any deposit from the banks before we left, so we started over in this apartment with money from better-off friends and relatives in other countries," Mahmoud said, recalling the gloomy days in the new home upon their arrival.

This file photo shows people fleeing from Sudan at a bus station in Aswan, Egypt, on April 25, 2023 (Xinhua)

Displaced by the civil war in Sudan a year ago, asylum-seeking Sudanese citizens have been trying to rebuild their lives in neighbouring Egypt, but the task is by no means easy

Life began to improve after he resumed his cooperation with the Chinese medical device provider Mindray. In Sudan, he had been offering consultancy services and providing training for young doctors through the partnership for several years.

Retaining the job in Egypt, which provided him with income to support his family, Mahmoud expressed confidence that 'life will be back on the right track'.

Since the outbreak of the conflict a year ago, more than 500,000 Sudanese have fled to Egypt, according to figures released by the Egyptian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in March.

Despite the challenges they face, Sudanese refugees in Egypt have formed resilient bonds, with those who are more financially secure providing assistance to those in need.

Xinhua



China's telescope detects over 900 pulsars

Guiyang, China - China's Five-hundred-metre Aperture Spherical Radio Telescope (FAST), the world's largest single-dish radio telescope, has identified more than 900 new pulsars since its launch in 2016, its operator said on Wednesday.

Pulsars, or fast-spinning neutron stars, originate from the imploded cores of massive dying stars through supernova explosions. Han Jinlin, a scientist with the National Astronomical Observatories under the Chinese Academy of Sciences (NAOC), said that the pulsars included over 120 binary pulsars, more than 170 millisecond pulsars, and 80 faint and intermittent pulsars.

Han added that over the past 50-plus years since the discovery of the first pulsar, less than 3,000 pulsars were discovered worldwide, and the number of new pulsars discovered by FAST is more than three times the total number of pulsars found by foreign telescopes during the same period.

"The study has important implications for understanding the dense remnants of dead stars in the Milky Way and their radiation characteristics," Han said.

Pulsar observation is an important task for FAST, which can be used to confirm the existence of gravitational radiation and black holes, and help find answers to many other major questions in physics.

Jiang Peng, chief engineer of the FAST, said that all staff members make every effort to improve the performance of the telescope. At present, the annual observation time of the telescope is about 5,300 hours, and it plays an important role in the continuous output of scientific research achievements.

Located in a deep and round karst depression in southwest China's Guizhou Province, FAST started formal operation in January 2020. It is believed to be the world's most sensitive radio telescope.

Meanwhile, the combination of the Shenzhou-18 crewed spaceship and a Long March-2F carrier rocket has been transferred to the launching area, the China Manned Space Agency (CMSA) said on Wednesday.

According to the CMSA, the facilities and equipment at the launch site in Jiuquan Satellite Launch Centre in northwest China are in good condition, and various pre-launch function checks and joint tests will be carried out as planned.

Xinhua

Colombian president suspends meeting with Ecuadorian leader

Bogota, Colombia - Colombian President Gustavo Petro suspended a planned meeting with Ecuadorian President Daniel Noboa, in response to an Ecuadorian police raid on Mexico's Embassy in the capital Quito earlier this month.

"The bilateral Cabinet meeting planned during the previous term of President Guillermo Lasso has been suspended. I believe the events at the Mexican Embassy are very serious. If we want world peace, it is imperative to rebuild international law," Petro said.

Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador called for Ecuador to be expelled from the UN due to the raid on its embassy in Ecuador's capital.

Speaking at the extraordinary meeting of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) via video conference, Lopez Obrador said: "We appreciate the solidarity shown by the governments of Latin America and the Caribbean."

"If you deem it appropriate and feasible, we invite you to join us by signing the complaint to the International Court of Justice," he added.



Colombian President Gustavo Petro

During the meeting, the presidents of Colombia, Brazil, and Cuba again condemned Ecuador's raid on the Mexican Embassy. Participating in the meeting via video conference, Petro said: "Ecuador and Israel hold hands in the competition of barbarism. I invite you to deepen the human rights system."

Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, for his part, said that the attack on the Mexican Embassy was 'unacceptable', noting that such events occur during dictatorships.

> *I believe the events at the Mexican Embassy are very serious. If we want world peace, it is imperative to rebuild international law*
>
> **GUSTAVO PETRO**

Cuban President Miguel Diaz-Canel also stressed that the raid on the embassy was an 'unacceptable mistake' and expressed his support for Mexico.

The statements came in response to the April 6 raid by Ecuadorian police at the Mexican diplomatic headquarters in Quito to arrest former Ecuadorian Vice President Jorge Glas, who requested asylum at the embassy.

The 54-year-old politician had been taking refuge in the embassy since seeking political asylum in December.

Anadolu Agency



Strike by doctors in Kenya enters second month

Nairobi, Kenya - A strike by doctors in Kenya entered a second month this week and there were no signs on Tuesday of resolution.

Hundreds of medical practitioners paraded through the streets of the Kenyan capital, causing a traffic gridlock.

The demonstration, organised by health care workers, demanded better working conditions and improved remuneration. It saw doctors, nurses and other medical staff marching with placards and chanting slogans.

"Doctors remain resolute: We won't resume work until our concerns are resolved," Secretary-General of the Kenya Medical Practitioners, Pharmacists and Dentists Union (KMPDU), Davji Bhimji, told reporters.

Public hospitals remain severely understaffed, leaving patients struggling to access essential care.

Monica Kamau, a businesswoman, was stranded outside Mbagathi Hospital in Nairobi.

"I've been waiting for hours, but there are no doctors available, there are some activities but it is very slow, many people are suffering even more than I am around here," Kamau told Anadolu.

The stalemate between the KMPDU and the government began with a strike on March 14 and centres around a 2017 collective bargaining agreement that the doctors claim has not been fully implemented.

Key points of contention include salary increases, improved working conditions and the hiring of additional medical personnel.

Health Minister Susan Nakhumicha said on Tuesday that a government-union agreement was imminent.

"If not tomorrow, in the next few days we are going to reach an agreement," Nakhumicha told reporters. "I want to remind the doctors that we serve a common patient and ask them to come to the table and consider what the government has offered."

Government officials have accused the KMPDU of being unreasonable, while the union maintains that it is fighting for the basic rights of health care workers. The consequences of the strike are devastating as patients with critical conditions are being turned away from hospitals all across the country and many are forced to seek expensive treatment at private facilities or resort to traditional healers.

Anadolu Agency

Pakistan: PTI to stage sit-in for Imran Khan's release

Islamabad, Pakistan - A prominent leader of Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), Sher Afzal Marwat, has announced the party's intention to hold a sit-in demanding the release of its founder from jail, ARY News reported.

"I can safely say that the release of Imran Khan will become easy if we could stage a sit-in in Islamabad within a month," Marwat said while speaking during the ARY News.

He disclosed that both the former Prime Minister and the party leadership were in agreement to commence protests after April 21.

Marwat indicated that if the government attempted to suppress protests by PTI workers across cities, the party might escalate by organising a march towards Islamabad.

Regarding party dynamics, Marwat mentioned the possibility of reinstating some leaders who had resigned from PTI following the May 9 riots. While no specific criteria have been established for their reinstatement, Marwat cited Imran Khan's indication that two to three individuals might be readmitted. However, he emphasised that those who had publicly criticised PTI should not be readmitted.

Marwat mentioned Usman Dar among the names considered for reinstatement due to the hardships faced by his family. Additionally, Maleeka Bokhari, Ali Nawaz Awan, and Aon Abbas were also being deliberated for potential reinstatement, he said.

ANI

India's marathon six-week national elections: All you need to know

New Delhi, India - India kicks off its parliamentary elections this Friday, a marathon six-week undertaking that will be the world's largest such democratic exercise.

Hundreds of millions of people will vote across the nation to elect lawmakers and determine who gets to rule the South Asian giant for the next five years.

Mammoth exercise

There are a total of 968.8mn eligible voters in the country of some 1.3bn - 497mn men and 471mn women.

According to the Election Commission of India, that marks an increase of 72.8mn from 896mn in the last elections in 2019.

Votes will be cast at 1.05mn polling stations through more than 5.5mn electronic voting machines. Voters will elect 543 lawmakers to the lower house of India's Parliament, known as the Lok Sabha, while two more are nominated by the president.

> *There are a total of 968.8mn eligible voters among 1.3bn - 497mn men and 471mn women. Votes will be cast at 1.05mn polling stations*

A party or coalition needs to win a minimum of 272 seats to form a government, which will have a five-year term.

Seven-phase polls

Voting will be held in a total of seven phases, just as the last time in 2019.

The first phase on April 19 covers 102 parliamentary constituencies in 21 states, while the second will be on April 26 for 89 seats in 13 states.

The next ones will be on May 7 for 94 seats in 12 states; May 13 - 96 seats in 10 states; May 20 for 49 seats in eight states; May 25 for 57 seats in seven states; and June 1 for 57 constituencies in eight states.

That will be followed by a vote count on June 4.



A vendor sells flags and umbrellas printed with symbols of different policital parties, in Kolkata, India on Monday (ANI)

Main contenders

This election is primarily a battle between the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), and the opposition alliance called INDIA, headed by the Indian National Congress.

Last time, the BJP swept the elections with 303 seats, while the Congress party ended with a paltry 52.

Modi, seeking a record-levelling third consecutive term, has set a target of 370 seats for the BJP and over 400 for the NDA.

The opposition alliance has managed to put up a candidate in many constituencies, but faces challenges in keeping a united front.

One of its key members, the All-India Trinamool Congress that rules eastern West Bengal, has ruled out any seat sharing in the state.

As things stand, most surveys and opinion polls have the BJP as the clear favourite for the 2024 elections.

The BJP and its allies have based their campaign on the claim that Modi, in power since 2014, has changed India's global image in the last decade.

Other strong points they have been highlighting are increased income generation, keeping inflation in check during times of worldwide economic turmoil, and rapid infrastructural development. The INDIA alliance, meanwhile, has countered with criticism focusing on rising unemployment and corruption in the country, while also challenging the government's claims on inflation data.

Anadolu Agency



JOS OF VICTORY!

Buttler's 107* tops Narine's 109 as Royals ace record chase against Knight Riders


Jos Buttler of Rajasthan Royals celebrates after steering his team to victory against Kolkata Knight Riders

Kolkata, India - Jos Buttler started slightly slow as Rajasthan Royals (RR) aimed to travel at more than 11 an over against Kolkata Knight Riders, making only 25 off his first 18 balls. He was at the crease during what seemed like a debilitating mid-innings slowdown, in which Royals scored only 30 from six overs, and lost three wickets in that time.

But although clearly still struggling with the injury that kept him out of the last RR game, and although rapidly running out of batting partners, Buttler stayed the course.

He was there turning down singles in the 18th over, after Rovman Powell got out following a decent cameo. He was there to clobber two sixes and a four off the penultimate over, to get the equation down to nine off the final six balls.

And despite Varun Chakravarthy having bowled three dots in that final over, Buttler was there to heroically hit the winning run off the final ball of the match. Off the first ball of that over, he had also bashed a six down the ground that made RR the clear favourites to get over the line, and in the course of that completed his second century this IPL, to follow the 100 not out he had struck against Royal Challengers Bengaluru only ten days ago.

Buttler's feat meant that Sunil Narine's century, a staggering accomplishment in itself, was overshadowed. As were his figures of 2 for 30 off four overs.

After 16 overs of Royals' innings, they needed 62 runs off 24 balls, six of which were to be bowled by Narine, who had not conceded a boundary up till then.

But Rovman Powell then walloped two sixes and a four off the first three balls of the 17th over, which Narine bowled, and suddenly Royals' challenge didn't seem so sharp. Narine, however, would nail Powell lbw with the fifth ball of that over.

With Powell gone, and no batter he could trust to hand the strike over to, this is where Buttler really shone.

He smashed a six down the ground first ball of Starc's last over, before swivel-pulling him around the corner for four later in the over. Starc did not help himself by bowling five wides soon after, either.

Then, with 28 required off 12, Buttler clobbered three sixes and a four off the next seven balls, never losing strike. With the requirement down to three off five, he bided his time.

He collected two off the penultimate ball, then pierced a packed infield with a leg-side clip last ball to see RR to their sixth win this season, and arguably their most hard-earned one.

ESPNCricinfo

TODAYS MATCH

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MUMBAI INDIANS

INDIAN PREMIER LEAGUE

Windies captain Powell hopes Narine returns for World Cup at home


Sunil Narine of Kolkata Knight Riders plays a shot en route to his century

New Delhi, India - West Indies skipper Rovman Powell said he is trying to persuade all-rounder Sunil Narine to come out of international retirement for the home T20 World Cup in June.

Narine, 35, announced his retirement from international cricket in 2023, four years after playing his last match for West Indies against India.

The spinner remains active in franchise cricket, evolving from a lower-order batter to a flamboyant opener, and his batting prowess was on full display for the Kolkata Knight Riders in the Indian Premier League on Tuesday.

Narine smashed 109 off 56 balls and claimed two wickets, including Powell's, but it was not enough to secure victory, with Jos Buttler leading Rajasthan Royals' successful chase of 224 with an unbeaten hundred.

"For the last 12 months, I've been whispering in his ears, but he's blocked out everyone," Powell said, adding that he had even asked senior players to try to get Narine to change his mind. "Hopefully, before they select the team, they can crack his code."

Narine was cryptic in his response when asked if he would come out of retirement to play in the World Cup, where conditions are expected to be conducive for spinners.

"It is what it is, but let's see what the future holds," Narine said.

Buttler initially struggled for rhythm in this year's IPL but his unbeaten 107 was his second century in three games.

"At times you feel frustrated, or you are questioning yourself," the England captain said at the presentation ceremony. "I was trying to tell myself 'It would be okay, keep going, at some point you'll get your rhythm back'."

Batting until the end allowed him to pace his innings, something Buttler said he learned by watching Indian stalwarts MS Dhoni and Virat Kohli. "Throughout the IPL, you've seen crazy things happen. Guys like Dhoni and Kohli -- they stay till the end and keep believing."

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DORTMUND IN DREAMLAND

German side crush Atletico Madrid in thriller to march into Champions League semifinals

Dortmund, Germany - Borussia Dortmund stormed into the Champions League semi-finals with a rip-roaring 4-2 home win over Atletico Madrid on Tuesday that saw them fight back from a 2-1 defeat in the first leg to win the tie 5-4 on aggregate.

The German side scored twice in the first half and looked to be cruising into the last four, but Atletico bounced back with two goals early in the second half to put Dortmund on the ropes before they dug deep to complete a superb comeback. The German side will now take on Paris St Germain, who came back from 4-2 down to beat Barcelona 6-4 on aggregate, in the semi-finals.

> *We played a great first half, it took us five or 10 minutes (to get going) in the second half, we have to accept that, but the answer to that (the Atletico goals) was sensational*
>
> **JULIAN BRANDT**

"We played an incredibly good first half, then there was the extremely unfortunate goal conceded, (but) how we came back, wow," delighted Dortmund coach Edin Terzic said in a TV interview.

The game got off to a flying start, and midfielder Marcel Sabitzer was only prevented from putting the home side ahead in the third minute by a last-ditch block from Cesar Azpilicueta as the home side came flying out of the blocks.

Julian Brandt put Dortmund level on aggregate in the 34th minute, latching on to a brilliant pass from Mats Hummels and firing home, and five minutes later Dortmund took the lead in the quarter-final tie as Ian Maatsen cut in from the left and drilled a perfectly-placed shot in at the foot of the far post.

Brandt could scarcely believe that his side had made it through to the last four after taking a two goal-lead, conceding two goals, and then scoring twice more.

"It was a crazy game for the fans and for us. A great game for us, for our fans and for all football fans around the world," he said after receiving his man-of-the-match award.



Borussia Dortmund's Marcel Sabitzer celebrates with teammates after scoring against Atletico Madrid

Atletico coach Diego Simeone made a triple substitution at the break and it paid dividends almost immediately as Dortmund defender Hummels turned the ball into his own net in the 49th minute, and substitute Angel Correa put the Spaniards back in the lead in the tie in the 64th, scoring at the second attempt.

However, the home side struck back and striker Niclas Fuellkrug made it 4-4 on aggregate with a brilliant glancing header from Sabitzer's cross in the 74th minute. The home fans had barely retaken their seats following that goal when Sabitzer popped up on the edge of the box, steadying himself with an excellent first touch before drilling home the winner in front of an ecstatic crowd three minutes later. "It was a great game for everyone . We played a great first half, it took us five or 10 minutes (to get going) in the second half, we have to accept that, but the answer to that (the Atletico goals) was sensational," Brandt added.

Oman drub Kuwait to storm into semifinals

Muscat - Oman stormed into the semi-finals of the ACC Men's Premier T20I Cup on Wednesday with a commanding 46-run win over Kuwait in a Group B match at the Oman Cricket Academy ground.

Oman's victory propelled them into the semi-finals with an impeccable record of four consecutive wins, accumulating a maximum of eight points in the group stage. All-round display by skipper Zeeshan Maqsood (4/29 and 35) and Aqib Ilyas (3/14 and 34) and a record seventh-wicket stand between Ayaan Khan (45) and Rafiullah (23*) powered Oman's march into the semi-finals where they will take on Hong Kong on Friday.



Zeeshan Maqsood scored 35 runs and took four wickets for 29 runs to star for Oman

Chasing 201 to win after Oman had put up a challenging total of 200/9, Kuwait were off to a flyer as Clinto Anto and Ravija Sandaruwan shared a 45-run stand in just 4 overs. Shakeel Ahmed got the breakthrough as he cleaned up Sandaruwan for 23 before Fayyaz Butt had Anto caught by wicketkeeper Pratik Athavale in the next over to stem the run flow. Anto departed after a quickfire 34 off 15 balls that included three fours and three sixes. Ilyas struck off the first ball after powerplay as he had Adnan Idrees leg before and Maqsood picked his first of the four victims in the tenth over as Kuwait slumped from 61/2 to 88/4.

Ilyas got the key wicket of Meet Bhavsar in the 12th over to trigger a collapse as Kuwait batters went back in procession except for Bilal Tahir who stayed unbeaten on 33.

Captain Maqsood removed his counterpart Mohammed Aslam and Sayed Monib in the same over and then bowled Nimish Lathief in his final over to have Kuwait down to 143/9 as they ended up at 154/9.

Besides Maqsood and Ilyas, Fayyaz Butt and Shakeel Ahmed took a wicket apiece.

Nadal eyes fitness build-up after making winning return

Barcelona, Spain - Rafa Nadal said it was a challenge to hold himself back on his return to the ATP Tour after three months on the sidelines but the fiercely-competitive Spaniard expects to continue with the controlled approach in Barcelona.



Rafael Nadal celebrates his win against Flavio Cobolli

Nadal had made a comeback to the tour in January at Brisbane after almost a year out with a hip injury that needed surgery but a muscle tear forced him to skip the Australian Open as well as tournaments in Doha, Indian Wells and Monte Carlo.

Playing his first match on clay since his triumphant 2022 French Open campaign, Nadal defeated Italian Flavio Cobolli 6-2, 6-3 in Barcelona on Tuesday, and the 37-year-old said he made an effort to play within himself.

"It's difficult to manage all this and do logical things when you're competing and when you're competing in places that are special, emotionally," the 22-times Grand Slam champion told reporters.

"It was difficult to manage the conditions, but I was able to because I was more or less in control. I didn't have to make an amazing effort in terms of physical demands. Let's see if I'm able to keep managing that the proper way."



Coco Gauff

Gauff looking to end trophy drought in clay

Stuttgart, Germany - World number three Coco Gauff is full of optimism heading into the claycourt season as she targets a first French Open crown but the American said her immediate focus was on ending her trophy drought on the surface over the coming weeks.

Gauff last won a title on clay at the Emilia-Romagna Open in 2021, a year before losing in the Roland Garros final to Iga Swiatek.

The 20-year-old will have the chance to end that barren run in Stuttgart this week, with tournaments in Madrid and Rome also on the horizon before the second Grand Slam of the year.

"For the clay season this year, I'm really optimistic," she told reporters ahead of her match against fellow American Sachia Vickery later on Wednesday.

"Obviously the goal is to win the French Open, but that's every season for any top player. Your goals should be to try to win the big tournaments.

"But I'm not looking at French Open right now. I'm focused on Stuttgart. I want to try to win Madrid or Rome or here ... I just want to get a recent clay title under my belt."





REDEMPTION SONG

PSG bounce back from one-goal deficit in first leg against 10-man Barca to reach Champions League semis



Paris St Germain's Kylian Mbappe celebrates after scoring against Barcelona

Barcelona, Spain - Paris St Germain's Kylian Mbappe scored twice in the second half to help his side to a 4-1 comeback win at 10-man Barcelona in their Champions League quarter-final, second leg to wrap up a 6-4 aggregate victory on Tuesday.

After winning 3-2 in Paris and taking a 1-0 lead with an early Raphinha goal in the return, Barca collapsed after going down to 10 men just before the half-hour when last man Ronald Araujo was red-carded for fouling Bradley Barcola.

Former Barcelona forward Ousmane Dembele equalised for the visitors just before the break while Vitinha and Mbappe finished the job in the second half, with PSG facing Borussia Dortmund in the semi-finals after the Germans beat Atletico Madrid.

Having failed to get past the round of 16 in the last two seasons and being pinned against the ropes by a Barca side who were in the ascendancy, PSG put on a gritty performance to make the most of the home side's mistakes and turn the tie around.

> *I feel very proud, the players showed a lot of character and desire. We showed what we wanted to do here. We conceded a goal but we remained intact in mentality.*
>
> **LUIS ENRIQUE**

"I feel very proud, the players showed a lot of character and desire," PSG manager Luis Enrique told Canal+. "We showed what we wanted to do here. We conceded a goal but we remained intact in mentality. We did everything to be better than Barca."

PSG manager Luis Enrique, who won the treble in charge of Barcelona in 2015, made three changes from the defeat to the Catalans in Paris.

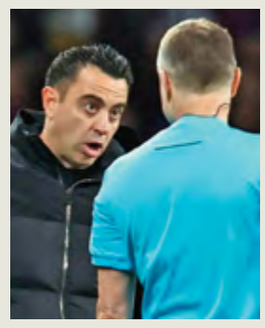
Bringing in Barcola up front was crucial as the France winger was a constant menace to Barca's defence, running up and down the left channel as PSG dominated from the start.

But Barcelona seemed comfortable to sit back and counter attack, with Raphinha giving them the lead in the 12th minute.

Teenager Lamine Yamal took a long pass in his stride before slicing past Nuno Mendes in the right channel and putting the ball on a plate for the Brazilian to score the opener.

Barca then wasted a chance to extend their lead when Robert Lewandowski missed from close range and were down to 10 men just before the half-hour after last man Ronald Araujo was shown a red card for a foul on Barcola just outside the penalty area.

The Uruguay defender and his Barca teammates argued with the referee, saying it was a shoulder charge and Pau Cubarsi was close by and ready to challenge Barcola, but it was in vain and Araujo eventually made his way off the field.



Barcelona manager Xavi Hernandez argues with the assistant referee

Referee was really bad: Xavi furious about Araujo red card

Barcelona, Spain - Barcelona manager Xavi Hernandez berated the referee and said his performance cost Barcelona a chance to fight for a place in the Champions League semi-finals after they lost 4-1 to Paris St Germain and were knocked out of the competition on Tuesday.

After winning 3-2 in Paris and taking a 1-0 lead with an early Raphinha goal in the quarter-final second leg, Barca were down to 10 men just before the half-hour after last man Ronald Araujo was shown a red card for a foul on Bradley Barcola.

Xavi complained bitterly to referee Istvan Kovacs and ended up being shown a red card himself. "The referee was really bad. I told him his performance was a disaster. I don't like to talk about referees, but it had a clear impact in the season and it has to be said," Xavi told Movistar Plus.

'I have the dream of winning Champions League for Paris'

Barcelona, Spain - Paris St Germain's Kylian Mbappe said that helping his hometown club to finally win their first Champions League title is a matter of pride for him, after he scored twice to help guide his side to a 4-1 comeback win at Barcelona and into the semi-finals with a 6-4 aggregate victory on Tuesday.

Mbappe, who is set to leave PSG in the summer with Real Madrid as the biggest favourite to sign him, told reporters that his future is not in his mind and that his focus is totally on bringing glory to the French capital.

"I have the dream of winning the Champions League for Paris," Mbappe told reporters at Barcelona Olympic stadium on Tuesday.

"I'm proud to be at PSG since the first day. It's not because there are good times and bad times that my pride takes a hit. The pride of playing for this club, of representing the club of the capital of my country, it's something special for me who grew up there.

"To experience an evening like this one as a Parisian, it's great. We have one more step to go before we reach the final in Wembley, so we need to stay calm."



Paris St Germain's Kylian Mbappe blasts a penalty past Barcelona goalkeeper Marc-André ter Stegen

After loosing 3-2 in the first leg in Paris, PSG fought back down 1-0 at Barcelona after the locals went down to 10 men just before the half-hour when last man Ronald Araujo was red-carded for fouling Bradley Barcola.

Former Barcelona forward Ousmane Dembele equalised for the visitors just before the break while Vitinha and Mbappe finished the job in the second half, with PSG facing Borussia Dortmund in the semi-finals after the Germans beat Atletico Madrid.

Having failed to get past the round of 16 in the last two seasons and being pinned against the ropes by a Barca side who were in the ascendancy, PSG put on a gritty performance to make the most of the home side's mistakes and turn the tie around.

"We beat a great team this evening, but even if we had lost, I would be proud to be Parisian. Now it's certain that during evenings like this, the pride is even greater," Mbappe said.

"We are very happy, we beat a team that we wanted to beat and to be closer to the final."



Jude Bellingham

Bellingham: People in charge need to take control to tackle racism

Manchester, England - Real Madrid midfielder Jude Bellingham says football authorities "need to do more" to tackle racism, a growing problem in the sport in Spain in recent years.

Bellingham said on Tuesday he had not realised the seriousness of the incidents in Spain's top league, with his teammate Vinicius Jr often the target of abuse.

"In the games where you go away in La Liga especially you get so used to it that I wasn't aware of the incident, which is a massive problem in itself," Bellingham told reporters ahead of Wednesday's Champions League quarter-final second leg against Manchester City.

"It's a terrible way for a player to prepare for a game knowing that he is likely to be racially abused. It's disgusting. It shouldn't be happening.

"The people in charge need to take control. I doubt it will happen," he added.

Vinicius Jr, who broke down in tears last month when talking about the impact of racist insults, was again the target of abuse when Spanish media reported that Barcelona fans had shouted chants against the striker ahead of Tuesday's Champions League match against Paris St Germain.

> *It's a terrible way for a player to prepare for a game knowing that he is likely to be racially abused. It's disgusting.*
>
> **JUDE BELLINGHAM**

Last season, La Liga reported 10 such incidents against the 23-year-old to prosecutors.

Mallorca are investigating after a fan apparently made a racist gesture towards Real Madrid midfielder Aurelien Tchouameni during the teams' league clash on Saturday.

Bremen suspend 'intolerable' Keita for rest of season

Bremen, Germany - Werder Bremen have suspended midfielder Naby Keita until the end of the season and fined the Guinean after he did not travel with the team for their Bundesliga match against Bayer Leverkusen upon learning that he would not be in the starting line-up.

Bremen, who suffered a 5-0 defeat by Leverkusen on Sunday, said the 29-year-old will no longer train with the team or be in the dressing room.



Naby Keita

Keita moved to the German side upon the expiry of his contract at Premier League club Liverpool in 2023 but has made only five appearances for the team.

"Naby's behaviour is intolerable for us as a club," Bremen's Head of Professional Football Clemens Fritz said in a statement on Tuesday.

"With this action, he has let his team down in a tense sporting and personnel situation and put himself above the team. We cannot allow that." the statement continued.

"At this stage of the season, we need to be fully focussed on the upcoming games and have a team that stands very close together. There was therefore no alternative to the measures we took."

Bremen, 12th in the Bundesliga standings, host third-placed VfB Stuttgart on Sunday.

MUSCAT DAILY

THURSDAY, APRIL 18, 2024

weekend



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VENICE INTERNATIONAL ART BIENNALE 2024

'Malath' of Venice

Oman's pavilion at Venice International Art Biennale 2024 will Open tomorrow (April 19). Five accomplished artists - Dr Ali al Jabri, Issa al Mufarji, Adham al Farsi and Sarah al Aulaqi, besides curator Alia al Farsi, are attending the prestigious event, the theme for Oman's pavilion being 'Malath' (haven)

Hubert Vaz

Art from Oman is fast getting noticed on the international art scene as contemporary artists from Oman have been portraying the essence and traditions of the 'Jewel of Arabia' in diverse ways, via diverse media at many prestigious events. And, the 60th International Art Exhibition, which gets underway in Venice this weekend (April 20 – November 24) is one such formidable platform.

Curated by Adriano Pedrosa (of Brazil), the first Latin American to curate the International Art Exhibition, the prestigious event opens many vistas for artists from around the globe, including Oman, to convey not just their varied art forms but also the ideology and inspiration behind them. Pedrosa is currently artistic director of the Museu de Arte de São Paulo Assis Chateaubriand – MASP,

Oman's pavilion at the prestigious biennale opens tomorrow (April 19) when five accomplished artists - Dr Ali al Jabri, Issa al Mufarji, Adham al Farsi and Sarah al Aulaqi, besides curator Alia al Farsi, will showcase the essence of Oman under the theme 'Malath' (haven). The opening ceremony of Oman's pavilion will be held under the auspices of H H Sayyid Kamil bin Fahd al Said, Secretary-General at the Secretariat General of the Council of Ministers.

The title of the current international exhibition is 'Foreigners Everywhere' and the varied activities on the sidelines are slated to continue till November 24. The Venice Biennale has been one of the world's most important international art events which provides an opportunity to every country to showcase its national works of art in its pavilions.

The Oman Pavilion is located near the historic Piazza San Marco, the beating heart of Venice, offering an approximate of 2000 visitors daily an opportunity to come face to face with the Omani artistic and cultural identity and paving the way for future cooperation with other countries. Special programmes and workshops in the field of modern art will also be held here during the biennale.

Alia al Farsi, curator of the Oman Pavilion, said, "This is the second time Oman is taking part in the prestigious Venice Biennale. Our pavilion has chosen the title 'Malath' which means 'haven'. The name and the art reflect Oman's status as a melting pot for people from around the world and how multicultural exchanges over centuries shaped the way we eat, dress, talk and think."

She further said that the participating artists were cherry-picked based on their unique talents and the diversity of the media they use. "As a curator, it is important to show that Oman is rich with great artists, hence, I wanted to feature marble sculpture, clay and fibre work, multi-disciplinary works, video art and other art forms," she said, adding, "Oman has so much to offer, especially in the contemporary art scene. We believe, that our diversity and inclusivity has helped artists to grow and create pieces that would surprise art critiques."

Sayyid Saeed Al Busaidi, Undersecretary for the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth for Culture, said in a statement, "We are delighted to return to this enchanting city for the second time, showcasing the rich artistic heritage of our nation. Our presentation will spotlight a diverse collection of contemporary artworks created by talented Omani artists.

"Additionally, the Ministry is committed to fostering artistic development nationwide through various programmes aligned with the Venice exhibition. The participation of the Sultanate of Oman in the International Art Exhibition holds significant importance within the framework of intercultural dialogue and human interaction diversity. As a platform renowned for its celebration of global artistic expression, the Biennale Arte offers Oman a unique opportunity to showcase its rich cultural heritage and artistic innovation on an international stage."



THE BIG 5

Oman has so much to offer, especially in the contemporary art scene. We believe, that our diversity and inclusivity has helped artists to grow and create pieces that would surprise art critiques

ALIA AL FARSI



Alia al Farsi
Curator of Oman Pavlion, is also founder of Alia Gallery.



Adham al Farsi
(member, Omani Society of Fine Arts) has been exhibiting internationally since 1997.

Sarah al Aulaqi
Founder of Cure8 Art Gallery, pays homage to the rich cultural fabric of Oman.



Ali al Jabri
A sculptor whose works marry together wood and marble in a reflection on relationships.



Issa al Mufarji
Explores Omani heritage and Arabic calligraphy in his work.



The stage is set for the 60th International Art Exhibition which will include a series of events on the sidelines for the next seven months

cook-up

CLAY-POT COOKING

Turkish Beef Stew

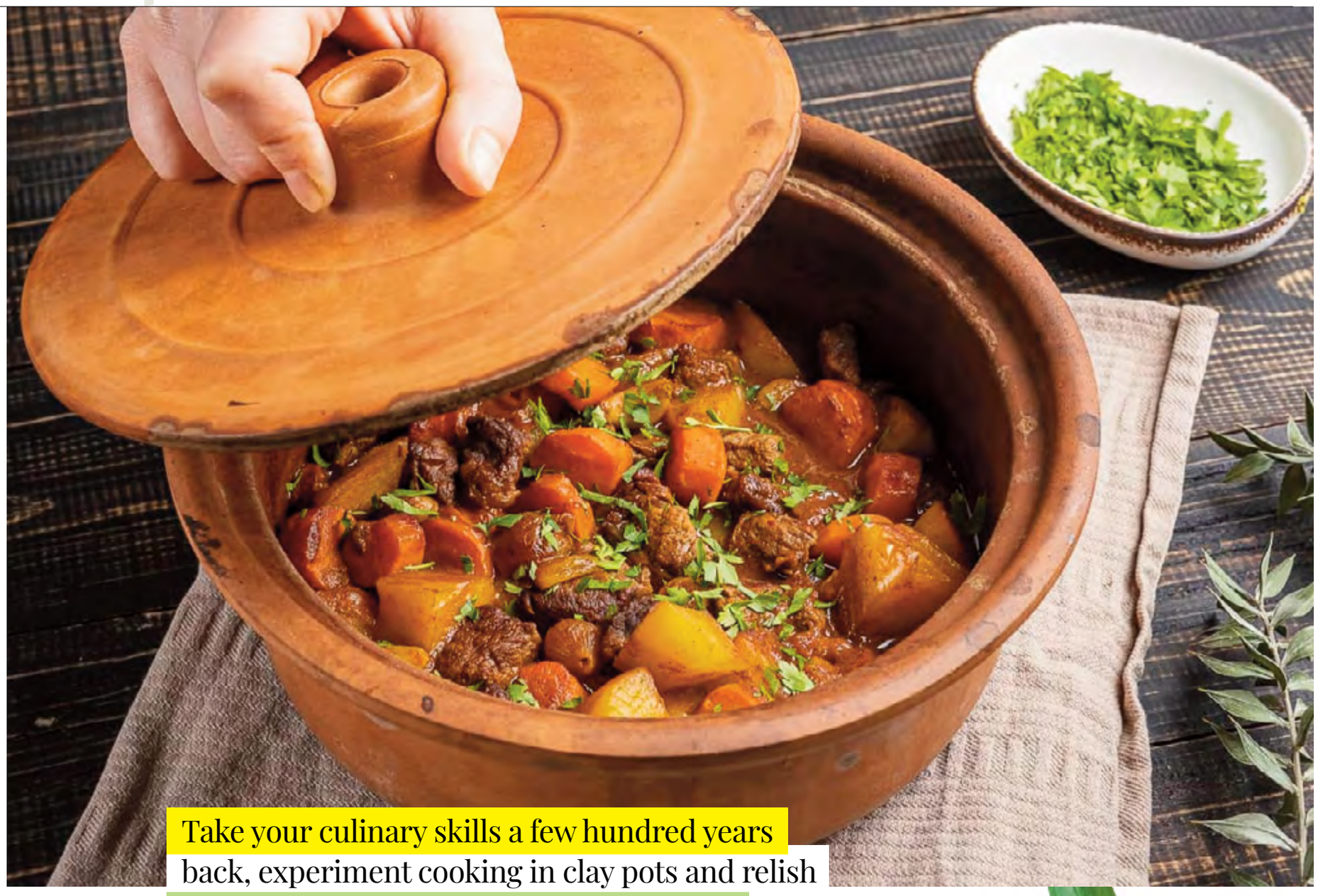
Ingredients

- 4tbsp olive oil
- 1 onion - chopped
- A handful of pearl onions – peeled, not chopped
- 500g diced beef
- 1tbsp tomato paste
- 1tsp salt
- ½tsp black pepper
- ½tsp paprika
- 2 cups hot water - divided
- 2 medium potatoes - cut into chunks
- 2 medium carrots - cut into chunks
- 6 cloves garlic
- Parsley - for garnish

Method

Heat olive oil in a clay pot or in a cast iron pot and saute onions until translucent. Add in the beef pieces and give it a stir. Cook it covered over medium low heat until the meat releases juice and then it absorbs almost all of it.

In a small bowl, mix together tomato paste, salt, black pepper, paprika and 1 cup of hot water. Pour it over the beef in the pot and cook it covered over low heat for 1 hour. Check after 30 minutes if there is too little water left - add some extra water to prevent it from burning. Preheat the oven to 180º C in the last 15 minutes of cooking. When the 1-hour cooking duration is over, remove it from the heat. Add potatoes, carrots and garlic into the pot. Pour the remaining 1 cup hot water. Cover the top of the pot with foil. Bake for 45-50 minutes. Garnish with chopped parsley when serving.



Take your culinary skills a few hundred years back, experiment cooking in clay pots and relish the sheer magic of flavours now forgotten

Earthy and worthy

Vietnamese Braised Fish

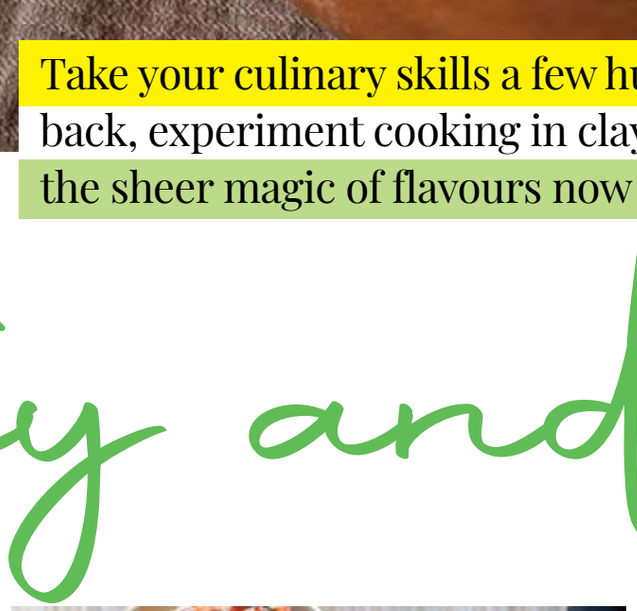
Ingredients

- 400g fish steaks
- 2tbsp fish sauce
- 4tbsp sugar - divided
- 2tbsp minced shallots
- 2tbsp minced garlic
- 2tbsp oil, 3 green onions - sliced
- 1½ cup coconut water
- 1-2 Thai chillies - thinly sliced
- Freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- Salt to taste

Method

Marinate fish with fish sauce, 2tbsp sugar, garlic, and shallots for 10 minutes. In a heavy clay pot, or cast iron pan, heat 2tbsp sugar on medium high and stir until sugar melts and becomes dark, immediately add the oil to stop caramelisation and stir. Add and sear the fish steaks, turning once after it has browned.

Add coconut water, and turn to medium low heat to braise. Cover pot for 3-4 minutes for fish to cook through and then remove cover to reduce the sauce to about half. Season to taste, with fish sauce or sugar if needed. Add chillies and stir into the sauce. Finish with fresh cracked pepper and green onions. Serve immediately with white rice.



Indian Chicken Curry

Ingredients

- 500g chicken with bones
- 2 tomatoes - chopped
- 2 onions - chopped
- 4 green chillies – slit
- 2tbsp ginger garlic paste
- 2 sprigs curry leaves
- Juice of one lime
- 2tsp red chilly powder
- ½tsp turmeric powder
- 2tsp coriander powder
- 1tsp roasted cumin powder
- 4 cloves
- 3cm piece cinnamon
- 2 bay leaves
- 2 black cardamom
- 2tbsp oil
- ¼ cup chopped coriander – for garnish
- Salt, to taste



Method

Heat the clay pot and add the oil. When it starts smoking reduce flame to medium and add the bay leaves and all the whole spices. After 30 seconds, add the curry leaves and chopped onions and saute for 2 minutes. Then add the ginger-garlic paste and cook for 2-3 minutes for the raw smell to go. Then add the chopped tomatoes, all the spice powders, lemon juice and salt to taste (1tsp). Mix well, cover and cook for 2 minutes on high flame, then reduce flame and simmer for 5-6 minutes. Then, add the chicken pieces, mix well, cover and cook for 5-6 minutes. Open and check consistency of gravy – add 1 cup water, if you need more gravy or let the chicken for another 2-3 minutes in the existing juice. Remove from heat, garnish with coriander and enjoy with steamed rice or rotis.



take a break

IN TOWN

EID MILAN




Different wings of the Indian Social Club came together to celebrate Eid Milan last week




Photos: V K Shafeer

Indian School term begins




Indian School Muscat began its new academic term for 2024, welcoming young students to its campus





Photos: V K Shafeer

BOGGLER

A	P	O	R
H	L	R	S
E	O	A	D
R	E	Y	L

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

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

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

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

TRIVIA QUIZ - FOR TEENS

1. Which is the only body part that is fully grown from birth?
A. Ears
B. Hair
C. Eyes
D. Toes

2. What is the only continent with land in all four hemispheres?
A. Africa
B. Asia
C. Antarctica
D. America

3. Which country features a shipwreck on its national flag?



A. Sri Lanka
B. Bermuda
C. Maldives
D. Indonesia

Answers
1. C
2. A
3. B

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE

ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19
You're not one to stay on the surface when it comes to probing the meaning of things around you. Whether you look for answers in beliefs, philosophy, or your own investigation of the world as you see it, you go deep. You're interested in the kernels of things and the complex, sometimes contradictory truths.

TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20
Your unique style inspires quite a few followers from time to time, which is flattering. But does the way you dress give people the wrong impression about who you really are? Your genuine personality will shine through better if you spend more time thinking about how you come across verbally than how you come across sartorially.

GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21
You could be making plenty of social connections today, and each of them could plant a seed in your life. There is strong potential for a new career opportunity, although it may take weeks to come together. The apple of your eye is going to get a lot friendlier, but it might not be for the reason you think. It's important to let your outgoing nature guide you today.

CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22
Ask for what you need today and no one will think the worse of you. Not only is your reputation stronger than you think, but the people who love you enjoy making your life easier (just like you want to make their lives easier). Emotionally, you are on solid ground, so be as needy as you want. Expressing your desires or worries will help you alleviate negative feelings.

LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22
You're a wise person who doesn't bend to the pressure of others. And you need to keep up this independent philosophy today when some coworkers may try some not-so-subtle tactics to sway your opinion. Stay true to your original intentions no matter how much these folks flatter or cajole you. You are the one in the driver's seat, and what you say goes.

VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22
You have the power to ease someone else's tension today. Simply by letting them have a little more control over things, you can cool their increasingly hot temper and kill any combative energy that's swirling around. This angry person needs to feel busy and more useful, so when you give them this power they will respond very well.

LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22
Today, if you ache for a slower pace to your life, you need to seek out more face-to-face communications. Skip the emails and DMs. The technology makes things easier, but it doesn't help you accurately convey what you're really trying to say. And you do need to say something very important to someone.

SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21
Whenever things are not going exactly the way you want them to, you need to start getting creative about your expectations. But you also have to know when to stand your ground and not give an inch. Today, speak up if you just can't go along with what everyone else is saying or doing. Sometimes the only way to get people to listen to you and respect what you say is to force them to.

SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21
If you're working on starting or strengthening a romance today, bear in mind that a whisper will help you get your message across a lot more effectively than a loud yell. Amplifying your voice will not amplify their affection for you. In fact, it could have the opposite effect. If you want to get intimate with someone, you have to get more intimate in your tone and demeanor.

CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19
Little details like names and dates are overwhelming for you today, and you're getting a bit behind on the task of keeping track of them. But do not worry. If you get on the ball and work out an organizational scheme in the morning, you'll get everything done and still have a little bit of time to make sure that you stay sane. Socially, you may have double-booked yourself.

AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18
Be careful not to relax too much today. If you let down your guard too much, you could start falling back into a bad pattern of behaviour. You've worked too hard to get to where you are now, so don't let yourself slide. Self-discipline can be tough when you're on your own, so if you feel yourself succumbing to temptation, try the buddy system.

PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20
The weather will affect your mood greatly today, so keep an eye on the sky. When the sun is shining brightly, all will be well and your confidence will be strong. But when the clouds roll in, you could be in for an unpleasant phase of boredom or general grumpiness. If you expect an argument could be looming, make sure the sun is shining.

entertainment





SALMAN KHAN'S APARTMENT SECURITY BEEFED UP

Security arrangements around Salman Khan's Galaxy Apartment in Bandra, in south-central Mumbai, has been beefed up after unidentified assailants fired shots on the exterior of the building earlier this week. Mumbai Police has been on high alert and investigating the matter.

Maharashtra chief minister Eknath Shinde met actor Salman Khan at his residence in Galaxy Apartments, after the incident and assured him of all measures to nab the culprits and make arrangements to step up security of his family.

Salman Khan, according to a report by the National Investigative Agency (NIA), is one of the top 10 targets of the Bishnoi community led by Lawrence Bishnoi, who is currently in jail. Bishnoi has openly threatened that he will eliminate Salman for killing a black buck some years ago, which had offended the sentiments of the Bishnoi community.

JUSTIN BIEBER DANCES WITH JADEN SMITH

Justin Bieber took some time during his Coachella weekend to dance with his friend Jaden Smith on April 13. The *Peaches* popstar, 30, had a sweet moment with Jaden, 25, while they enjoyed some downtime at the music festival in Indio, California. The two were filmed by an onlooker, who caught the two having fun in the middle of the festival.

Jaden hugged Justin from behind and the two did a short dance while hanging with a few friends. After the dance ended, the *Justice* singer gave his friend a short kiss on the cheek, and they continued talking to their group of friends. Justin sported a white vest over a pale, yellow t-shirt, as well as matching shorts, sneakers, and a backward hat. Jaden rocked a teal puffer vest over a white t-shirt, pastel blue shorts, and sneakers while he enjoyed the festival.

SELENA GOMEZ QUASHES RUMOURS ABOUT AFFAIR WITH JFK'S GRANDSON



Selena Gomez is sick of those same old false rumours, like the one about her and John 'Jack' Schlossberg. In response to claims that she had a relationship with John F Kennedy's grandson, the 31-year-old actress responded in a public comment via social media.

Recently, an Instagram account posted a screenshot of a message that read, "According to a few tabloids, Selena Gomez and John Kennedy Schlossberg had an affair from 2020 to 2021. The grandson of the former US president John Kennedy offered her the White House, and she fell for it."

KEANU REEVES JOINS 'SONIC 3' AS SHADOW

Keanu Reeves is speeding along to another franchise, with the *John Wick* star heading to *Sonic the Hedgehog 3*. He will be voicing the popular character named Shadow, multiple sources disclosed.

The news comes on the heels of a jam-packed CinemaCon presentation from Paramount last week, when the studio debuted the first footage for *Sonic 3*. This included the revelation that Dr Robotnik, played by Jim Carrey, was depressed and out of shape after the events of *Sonic 2*, but gets his groove back thanks to creating *Shadow the Hedgehog*, a character first introduced in the video games in 2001's *Sonic Adventure 2*. The character is in many ways the anti-Sonic - dark and edgy, while mirroring the hero's powers.

COMING SOON

GODZILLA X KONG: THE NEW EMPIRE



An all-new adventure that pits the almighty Kong and the fearsome Godzilla against a colossal undiscovered threat hidden within our world, challenging their very existence—and our own.

Genre: *Action.* Starring: *Dan Stevens, Brian Tyree Henry, Kaylee Hottle, Rebecca Hall*

Language: *English* Release date: *April 18*

ZENDAYA TEASES HER 2024 MET GALA APPEARANCE



The *Euphoria* star - who is co-chairing the 2024 Met Gala in New York on May 6 -is gearing up for fashion's biggest night alongside stylist Law Roach.

"We have some ideas," she exclusively told E! News' Will Marfuggi at the *Challengers* premiere in Los Angeles April 16. "It felt like the right time to try to go back to the Met."

Zendaya, who hasn't attended the Met Gala since her Cinderella moment five years ago, explained that this year's ball will be 'very special'.

She added that cohosting the prestigious event is 'obviously an honour'.

MALAIKA HAS DUMB BIRYANI



Malaika Arora has broken stereotypes with her personal life. She ended her marriage with Arbaaz Khan after a togetherness of 19 years. The 50-year-old actress is dating Arjun Kapoor, who is almost 12 years younger than her. In a new podcast with her son Arhaan Khan, she was spotted discussing marriage, intimacy, and more!

Dumb Biryani is a 6-part limited podcast series hosted by Arhaan Khan and his friends Dev Raiyani and Arush Verma. Their last two episodes with Arbaaz Khan and Orhan Awatramani, aka Orry, created a lot of noise. In an upcoming episode scheduled to release today, Malaika Arora is seen in a spicy, hot conversation with her son about their personal lives.

BOLLYWOOD MOVIE REVIEW:
MAIDAN
Genre: Period drama **Starring:** Ajay Devgn, Priyamani, Gajraj Rao, Rudranil Ghosh

Tearjearking but sluggish sports drama

Tribute to 'golden era' of Indian football

A popular theme among movie lovers has been war on the sports field. It stands as proof of the underdogs determination to win over the privileged. Ranging from *Escape to Victory* to the very own desi *Lagaan, Mary Kom, 83, Dhangal, Chak De India, Bhaag Milkha Bhaag*, the latest addition to the list that stands testimony to the sportsman spirit is *Maidaan*.

Maidaan, the latest release starring Ajay Devgn and Priyamani, is a stirring tribute to India's football legacy and the remarkable coach, Syed Abdul Rahim. Set against the backdrop of post-independence India, the film chronicles Rahim's unwavering determination to elevate Indian football to global prominence. Inspired by true events, *Maidaan* sheds light on a forgotten chapter in Indian sports history, when football was a beacon of hope for Indian youth.

While the film's runtime of 181 minutes feels excessive, *Maidaan* manages to deliver an inspirational narrative despite its flaws. The soccer matches are electrifying, capturing the essence of the sport and Rahim's coaching prowess. However, the film occasionally gets bogged down by unnecessary melodrama that detracts from the main storyline.



As a sports biopic, *Maidaan* successfully celebrates the golden era of Indian football and the pivotal role played by Syed Abdul Rahim. Through meticulous attention to detail, the film recreates the highs and lows of Rahim's coaching journey, from the devastating defeat at the 1952 Olympics to the triumphs of the 1962 Asian Games. The impressive sports choreography, reminiscent of *Chak De! India* and *'83* adds authenticity to the on-field action.

Despite its strengths, *Maidaan* falls short due to its indulgent storytelling. The film's self-importance and penchant for unnecessary dramatisation detract from its overall impact. Nevertheless, *Maidaan* remains a compelling cinematic experience that highlights the power of sports to inspire and unite a nation.

The background scores, however, stir up patriotism.

Rating ★★★☆☆

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