

Oman, Saudi work on closer ties, economic integration

Our Correspondent
Muscat

H E Qais Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, received Khalil Ibrahim Ibn Salamah, Deputy Minister for Industry Affairs of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, on Wednesday to explore ways of strengthening industrial integration and trade relations between Oman and Saudi Arabia.

The meeting, which was attended by H E Dr Saleh Said Masan, Undersecretary for Commerce and Industry in the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP), and H E Ibrahim Saad Bishan, Ambassador of Saudi Arabia to Oman, focused on enhancing trade exchange and in-



H E Qais Mohammed al Yousef with Saudi Minister Khalil Ibrahim Ibn Salamah on Wednesday

dustrial collaboration. The two sides discussed ways to facilitate exports, improve supply chains and address challenges faced by exporters in both countries.

Discussions also emphasised the importance of creating an environment conducive to economic cooperation and strategic integration between Oman and Saudi Arabia.

In a related initiative, MoCIIP, in collaboration with the Saudi Ministry of Industry and Mineral Resources and Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry, will organise a

workshop on Thursday aimed at identifying opportunities to enhance trade and industrial integration, streamline exports, and address challenges faced by exporters in both nations. It will also focus on advancing industrial initiatives in alignment with Oman Vision 2040 and Saudi Vision 2030.

Data released by National Centre for Statistics and Information shows a significant rise in trade between the two nations. Omani non-oil exports to Saudi Arabia have doubled since 2020, reaching over RO1bn at the end of 2023. This increase is attributed to growth in exports of mineral products, machinery, electrical equipment and food products. Non-oil imports from Saudi Arabia have also risen, valued at RO1.8bn at the end of 2023.

Decrees ratify 3 air services agreements

Muscat - His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik issued three Royal Decrees on Wednesday reading as follows:

Royal Decree No 67/2024 ratifies an air services agreement between the Government of the Sultanate of Oman and the Government of the Republic of Suriname signed on October 23, 2024 in Kuala Lumpur.

Article 1 ratifies the aforementioned agreement in accordance with the version attached to this decree.

Article 2 states that this decree will be published in the Official Gazette and enforced from its date of issue.

Royal Decree No 68/2024 ratifies an air services agreement between the Government of the Sultanate of Oman and the Government of the Republic of Uganda signed on October 23, 2024 in Kuala Lumpur.

Article 1 ratifies the aforementioned agreement in accordance with the version attached to this decree.

Article 2 states that this decree will be published in the Official Gazette and enforced from its date of issue.

Royal Decree No 69/2024 ratifies an air services agreement between the Government of the Sultanate of Oman and the Government of the Republic of Seychelles signed on October 23, 2024 in Kuala Lumpur.

Article 1 ratifies the aforementioned agreement in accordance with the version attached to this decree.

Article 2 states that this decree will be published in the Official Gazette and enforced from its date of issue.

Pacts worth RO14.5mn signed to boost Nizwa development

Our Correspondent
Muscat

A major step towards enhancing tourism and economic development in Nizwa was taken on Wednesday, as Sheikh Hilal bin Saeed al Hajri, Governor of Dakhliyah, signed agreements worth over RO14.5mn. Central to these agreements is the highly anticipated Dakhliyah Boulevard project.

A statement confirmed that Dakhliyah is making significant progress in its diverse development initiatives. The agreements, which include a mix of infrastructure, tourism and service projects, underscore the governorate's commitment to



The Dakhliyah Boulevard project embodies the governorate's vision for sustainable development

SHEIKH HILAL AL HAJRI



strengthening its economic and tourism sectors.

The Dakhliyah Boulevard project is set to become a key land-

mark in Nizwa, combining investment, tourism, culture and environmental aspects to create a vibrant and sustainable space.

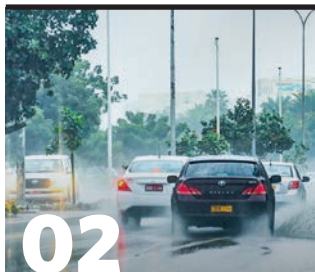
The project will feature a 3,985m main walkway surrounded by green spaces, a 1,650m cycle track, fountains and an

80,000sqm open area. It will feature a children's play zone, restaurants, kiosks, retail outlets and a market supporting 60 productive families. The boulevard is projected to attract approximately 944,000 visitors annually, generating RO500,000 in annual revenue, with a 5% growth forecast. The project is expected to create 340 permanent and temporary jobs while supporting local economic activity through 50 usufruct contracts and ten diverse investment sites.

According to Governor Hajri, the Dakhliyah Boulevard project embodies the governorate's ambitious vision for sustainable development and commitment to creating an environment that

serves the community's needs. The boulevard will be a major open-air hub for festivals and cultural events, enhancing Nizwa's appeal as a tourist destination.

In addition to Dakhliyah Boulevard, the agreements included development of several infrastructure projects in key wilayats - construction of internal roads in Bidbid, Manah and Jabal Akhdar, as well as design and implementation of roads in industrial areas like Shafa in Izki, Al Handali in Adam and Thamid in Bidbid. The projects aim to improve transportation, enhance accessibility and boost the governorate's overall economic potential.



02 Remote learning in four wilayats today



13 Sami al Hanai's lens on heritage



Voting for Oman's Promotional Brand

www.omanbrand.om

What is the campaign?

The Sultanate's country-wide Oman Promotional Visual Identity. Voting Campaign is dedicated to selecting a visual identity for the long-term nation brand strategy aimed at showcasing Oman's inspiring story to the world.

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A photograph of the two men seated in ornate chairs, facing each other, with a table of flowers between them. The man on the left is wearing a pink suit and a black and white patterned scarf. The man on the right is wearing a white thobe and a white ghutra with a black and white patterned band. They are in a room with a red and gold patterned wall and a white floor.

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Real estate transactions in North Batinah surge 157% in Q3 2024

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Real estate trading in North Batinah witnessed significant growth in the third quarter of 2024, recording a 157% increase, according to Ali bin Ahmed al Maashani, Director General of Housing and Urban Planning in the governorate.

Maashani stated that the Directorate of Housing and Urban Planning is undertaking quality housing projects designed to meet the needs of citizens and promote social stability. The directorate collaborates closely with various government and private entities for housing and planning initiatives, exploring ways to accelerate the implementation of joint projects. These efforts aim to contribute to the sustainable development of North Batinah.

Maashani added that real es-



Housing assistance provided to eligible residents of the governorate included 139 housing units worth over RO4mn

ALI BIN AHMED AL MAASHANI

tate trading in the governorate saw remarkable growth during the third quarter of the current year with total value reaching approximately RO184mn. Of this, RO162mn was attributed to real



(Supplied photos)

estate mortgages and RO21mn to sales contracts. The total figure for Q3 2024 marked a 157% increase compared to the second quarter, which registered a total of RO71mn in trading.

According to Maashani, Liwa led in mortgage trading, accounting for 65% of the total, while Suhar recorded the highest number of sales contracts at 32%. He highlighted an increase in

foreign and Gulf real estate trading, with foreign trading growing 1.7% and Gulf trading 2.2%. This growth underscores the attractiveness of the real estate market in North Batinah and its

appeal to investors both within and outside the sultanate. Maashani informed that in line with efforts to promote sustainable communities, work is underway on the Hey al Majd project in

the Muwailih area of Suhar. Covering an area of over 370,000sqm, the project will feature 1,057 diverse housing units with an investment value of RO50mn. The development is envisioned as a model for integrated residential neighbourhoods, combining housing with essential services to offer a modern living environment.

Additionally, the ministry has provided housing assistance to eligible residents of the governorate, distributing 139 housing units worth over RO4mn to promote social stability.

The directorate recorded significant activity in the area of usufruct contracts, with 115 contracts signed in the current year, including 68 industrial contracts, 29 agricultural contracts, and 18 residential and commercial contracts. The total fees collected from these contracts exceeded RO91,000.

Experts warn of risks to hikers following recent accidents

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Despite ongoing efforts by authorities to promote safety measures, including the importance of researching hiking trails and registering on the Nidaa app, accidents involving falls from mountain tops remain a continuing concern.

A report released by Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority (CDAA) revealed that at least three individuals were recently injured after falling from mountain tops while hiking in different locations in the sultanate.

On December 23, rescue and ambulance teams of the authority in Muscat governorate responded to a report of an individual being injured while hiking in the wilayat of Muscat. The teams swiftly reached the site, provided emergency medical care and transferred the person with moderate injuries to hospital.

On December 20, rescue teams of CDAA in Muscat responded to an incident in which a citizen fell from a rocky cliff in the Fins area of the wilayat of Quriyat. The teams reached the location, provided emergency medical care and transferred the person in critical condition to hospital.

On December 13, a man fell from a mountain in the Dima Wa Al Taien area in North Sharqiyah. CDAA teams successfully rescued the individual, who was later transferred to hospital with critical injuries.



(Supplied photo)

The authority also thanked citizens for cooperating with the rescue teams.

Following these recent hiking accidents, experts have stressed the importance of taking proper precautions to ensure safety during outdoor activities.

Khalid al Wahaibi, an adventure expert, emphasised the fact that hikers should be physically fit and have adequate endurance before embarking on hikes. "It's important for everyone to start small and choose a trail suited to their fitness level. Once a trail is selected, hikers should obtain a map of the area, read reviews and gather reliable information. It's best to hike in a group with proper sportswear and gear," he advised.

Wahaibi also highlighted the need for properly marked hiking routes to reduce risk of accidents. Mountaineering enthusiast

Suleiman al Naabi acknowledged that favourable winter weather encourages more people to go camping and hiking. However, he stressed the importance of being well-rested and free of chronic conditions before heading out. "In the days leading up to your hike, and a few hours before starting, ensure you check your safety equipment and inform your family of your destination. A hiker must be physically and mentally prepared before setting out."

CDAA further urged hikers to register the location and participants on the Nidaa app before starting their adventures. "This ensures the arrival of rescue teams faster in case of emergencies," the authority stated. The app is designed to help emergency teams respond more quickly during urgent situations, and adventurers are encouraged to take advantage of this service.

ONCECS meeting highlights efforts for advancements in education, science

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman National Commission for Education, Culture and Science (ONCECS) held its inaugural meeting on Tuesday, chaired by H E Dr Madiha bint Ahmed al Shaibani, Minister of Education and Chairperson of the commission.

The meeting focused on strategies to highlight the sultanate's contributions in the fields of education, culture and science on the international stage. It underscored the importance of representing Oman at global conferences and forums related to educational, cultural and scientific organisations.

The meeting was attended by H H Sayyida Dr Mona bint Fahd al Said, Assistant Vice-Chancellor for International Cooperation at Sultan Qaboos University, and H E Dr Abdullah bin Khamis Ambusaidi, Undersecretary for Education in the Ministry of Education.

H E Madiha informed that ONCECS serves as a crucial link between Oman and regional and international organisations in various fields, including information. The commission's role is to strengthen cooperation and partnerships with these organisations to implement programmes and initiatives that contribute to achieving sustainable development goals and support national priorities.

H E Dr Madiha further high-



(Supplied photo)

lighted the commission's notable achievements, such as registration of five sites for tangible cultural heritage, listing of 15 cultural elements, and recognition of seven Omani figures and a significant historical event. Additionally, ONCECS has established nine research chairs at

partnerships with international organisations, promoting scientific research and encouraging innovation.

H E Madiha said she is hopeful of continuing the enhancement of quality of education and ensuring its sustainability through innovative initiatives. These will focus

on digital learning, developing future skills, aligning curricula with the labour market, and expanding partnerships with international organisations to exchange knowledge and implement joint projects that will benefit both the local and global communities.

During the meeting, Dr Mahmoud bin Abdullah al Abri, Secretary of ONCECS, made a visual presentation showcasing Oman's rich cultural and civilisational heritage. He highlighted the country's ongoing development efforts within international organisations and emphasised the importance of fostering effective cooperation to achieve the goals of Oman Vision 2040 and Sustainable Development Goals.

Abri also provided an overview of the commission's history, its organisational structure, and its key specialisations and roles in collaborating with international organisations.

The meeting served as a platform for advancing Oman's strategic goals in education, culture and science, reinforcing the country's commitment to fostering international collaboration and driving progress in alignment with both Oman Vision 2040 and Sustainable Development Goals.

ONCECS serves as a crucial link between Oman and regional and international organisations in various fields, including information

H E DR MADIHA BINT AHMED AL SHAIIBANI



various public and private universities in Oman and hosted numerous international conferences, programmes and forums, including the recent Islamic World Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization Conference of Ministers of Education. The commission has made significant strides in fostering

on digital learning, developing future skills, aligning curricula with the labour market, and expanding partnerships with international organisations to exchange knowledge and implement joint projects that will benefit both the local and global communities.

During the meeting, Dr Mahmoud bin Abdullah al Abri, Sec-

MARKET WATCH	
MSX30	4,479.95
SENSEX	78,472.87
FOREX RATES (RO1 equals)	
India	222.40
Pakistan	724.67
Bangladesh	310.68
Philippines	152.77
Sri Lanka	766.27
*Rates as on December 25 Source: xe.com	

BRIEFS
Russia sees oil demand rising in 2025
Russia expects growth of global oil demand in 2025 to reach from 1mn barrels per day (bpd) to 1.5mn bpd, Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak said in an interview with the Rossiya-24 TV channel.
"Overall we expect this year's demand on global markets to increase by 1.2mn bpd to 104.4mn bpd," he said, adding that next year's "growth is estimated roughly at the same level - from 1 to 1.5mn bpd." The situation on the global energy market is normal and stable despite the events in the Middle East, Novak added.
"We believe that this is a rational decision, which will allow development of the situation on the oil market in a balanced way," Novak concluded.

Oman's oil output falls 5.1% in 2024, exports hold steady

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman's oil production has experienced a notable decline, with total output falling by 5.1% to 332.7mn barrels in the first 11 months of 2024, down from 350.5mn barrels in the same period last year, according to data released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).
The figures show a 6.5% year-on-year decrease in crude oil production, which dropped to 254.6mn barrels in the January-November period this year, compared with 272.4mn barrels during the same period in 2023. However, condensate production remained stable at 78mn barrels, the same as last year.
Oman's average daily oil output during January - November period was recorded at 993,100 barrels per day (bpd), reflecting a 5.4% decline from 1.049mn bpd during the corresponding period in 2023. November's production averaged 984,800 bpd, marking the lowest monthly output in nearly two years. The decline in crude production is primarily attributed to Oman's adherence to OPEC+ production



As a result of lower oil production this year, Oman's hydrocarbon GDP contracted by 2.8% during the first nine months of 2024, while non-hydrocarbon GDP grew by 4.2% over the same period

cut agreements.
In early 2024, Oman and fellow OPEC+ members agreed to extend voluntary production cuts into the second quarter. Oman implemented an additional voluntary reduction of 42,000 bpd, effective until the end of June 2024, on top of a previously announced cut of 40,000 bpd.
As a result of lower oil production this year, Oman's hydrocarbon GDP contracted by 2.8% during the first nine months of 2024, while non-hydrocarbon GDP grew by 4.2% over the same period. Within the hydrocarbon sector, oil activity declined by 4.1%, whereas natural gas activity rose by 4.7%.
The sultanate's overall real

GDP - gross domestic product at constant prices - grew by 1.9% in the first nine months of 2024.

Exports reach 282mn barrels

Despite the drop in crude oil output, Oman's oil exports have remained relatively stable. Total oil exports fell slightly by 0.4% to 282.2mn barrels in the first 11 months of 2024, compared with 283.4mn barrels during the same period last year, according to NCSI data.
Oman sold its crude oil at an average price of \$81.80 per barrel during the January-November period, marking a marginal increase of 0.1% from the average of \$81.60 per barrel in the same period in 2023.
Exports to China, Oman's largest customer for crude oil, rose by 1.5% to 264.4mn barrels, compared with 260.6mn barrels a year earlier. The world's second-largest economy accounted for 93.7% of Oman's total oil export volume during the January-November period of 2024.
In contrast, exports to Japan saw a sharp decline of nearly 50%, falling to just 4.46mn barrels from 8.89mn barrels in the same period last year.



Shell Oman in talks for sale of storage tanks, supply facilities

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Shell Oman Marketing Company is currently engaged in discussions with multiple parties regarding the potential sale of its petroleum products storage and supply facilities in Mina Al Fahal, Muscat.
This move is part of the company's broader strategy to optimise its asset portfolio and enhance returns for its shareholders, Shell Oman stated in a disclosure to the Muscat Stock Exchange. It further noted that these discussions have reached an advanced stage this week.
'These fixed assets include various petroleum products storage tanks, a Single Buoy Mooring (SBM), undersea pipelines, above-ground integrated

pipelines, an 8-bay gantry, and other associated facilities,' the company explained in its disclosure.
Shell Oman Marketing Company emphasised that this direction is consistent with the company's commitment to disciplined capital allocation and long-term value creation.
'Moreover, it will bolster Shell Oman's future growth plans, which are centred on energy transition, sustainable development, and the company's key role in the sector, in alignment with Oman Vision 2040,' the company added.
Shell Oman confirmed that it would issue further updates as necessary, particularly upon the signing of a binding sales and purchase agreement, or should all discussions be concluded.

INTERVIEW

HIRIYANNA NARAYANASWAMY, CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER, AL MAHA PETROLEUM PRODUCTS MARKETING COMPANY

Driving transformation in oil marketing sector

Our Correspondent
Muscat

In this interview, Hiriyanna Narayanaswamy, Chief Financial Officer of Al Maha Petroleum Products Marketing Company, discusses the key drivers of business transformation in the oil marketing sector, including energy transition, economic diversification, and digitalisation. He also shares insights on the role of emerging technologies in finance function, the industry's financial risks, and offers advice for aspiring CFOs in Oman.

What are the key drivers of business transformation in the oil marketing sector, and how does the finance function contribute to this transformation?

The downstream oil marketing sector is undergoing significant transformation, driven by three main factors: energy transition, economic diversification, and digitalisation.
The energy transition is at the forefront of this change. The global shift towards renewable energy and carbon neutrality is reshaping the traditional oil marketing business. Companies are increasingly investing in cleaner fuels, alternative energy sources, and reducing their carbon footprints across the supply chain. Oman is committed to achieving net-zero carbon emissions by 2050, with growing opportunities in green investments.
Regarding economic diversification, Oman's economy has historically relied on oil revenues, but the drive towards diversification is presenting both challenges and opportunities. While navigating oil price volatility, it's crucial to explore participation in growing non-oil sectors such as tourism, logistics, manufacturing, and technology.
Global trends in digitalisation are also reshaping the sector. Implementing new technologies such as AI, automation, and data analytics is essential for staying competitive, but

it requires significant investment and focus on addressing concerns around cybersecurity.
The finance function plays a key role in driving these changes, acting as a 'strategic enabler'. Finance ensures that investments, innovations, and operations align with the organisation's long-term vision for sustainable growth and resilience in this rapidly changing energy landscape. As sustainability becomes a core focus, the finance function will also ensure transparent reporting and accurate tracking of Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) metrics, building trust with stakeholders and investors.

How are emerging tech, such as AI, transforming the finance function in your organisation, and what challenges do you face in integrating these technologies?

Emerging technologies, particularly artificial intelligence (AI) and business intelligence (BI) tools, are revolutionising the finance function by improving accuracy, efficiency, and strategic decision-making.
These advancements are transforming finance from a 'traditional support function' to a 'strategic enabler of business growth'. For example, Robotic Process Automation (RPA), combined with AI, automates repetitive tasks such as invoice processing, reconciliation, and financial reporting. This allows the finance team to focus on more value-added activities like strategic planning and advisory roles.
AI-powered tools enable us to analyse vast amounts of financial and operational data, improving the accuracy of forecasting and scenario planning. Predictive analytics help us identify market trends, demand shifts, and cost-saving opportunities with greater precision.
Machine learning models optimise resource allocation by analysing historical spending patterns and projected needs, ensuring that budgets are used efficiently.



Downstream oil marketing sector is undergoing significant transformation, driven by three main factors: energy transition, economic diversification, and digitalisation

HIRIYANNA NARAYANASWAMY

Furthermore, AI-driven dashboards and visualisation tools provide real-time insights into key financial metrics, facilitating proactive decision-making. Advanced algorithms are also being used for fraud detection and compliance monitoring, minimising risks and ensuring regulatory compliance.
The integration of AI and other technologies into the finance function is an ongoing journey that requires careful strategic planning and operational commitment. While challenges remain, the long-term benefits - such as improved efficiency, deeper insights, and better decision-making - far outweigh the obstacles. Our organisation is committed to leveraging these innovations to remain competitive in a rapidly evolving market.

What are the key financial risks and challenges in the oil marketing industry, and how do you mitigate them?

Oil marketing companies often operate in a challenging risk environment. Although fossil fuels are expected to remain the dominant source of energy for the foreseeable future, renewable energy is projected to account for the majority of energy growth. As demand for renewable energy increases, oil and gas companies may need to adjust their investments to align with carbon-neutral and climate-related goals.
On the pricing front, global crude oil prices are highly volatile, subject to frequent and unpredictable fluctuations

due to geopolitical tensions, supply-demand imbalances, and macroeconomic factors. This volatility impacts procurement costs, pricing strategies, and profit margins. Additionally, climate regulations, subsidy reforms, and taxation policies can significantly affect pricing structures, operating costs, and overall profitability.
Other challenges include economic slowdowns, the rise of alternative energy, and shifting consumer behaviour, all of which contribute to demand uncertainty and can affect sales and revenue.
To mitigate these risks, we have implemented several strategies. Expanding into non-fuel businesses, such as convenience stores and lubricant sales, helps offset the risks associated with fuel price fluctuations. Investing in renewable energy projects ensures we remain relevant in the energy transition. Understanding and adhering to regulations, while collaborating with policymakers on the role of the industry in new energy initiatives, further helps mitigate risks.
Furthermore, maintaining a balanced capital structure through prudent debt management supports liquidity during difficult periods. By remaining agile and forward-thinking, we aim to drive sustainable growth in a rapidly evolving energy landscape.

What advice would you give to aspiring CFOs in Oman? What should be their key focus areas?

Aspiring CFOs in Oman have a unique opportunity to influence the future of finance in the region. To succeed, they must focus on continuous learning, embracing technology, and developing strong strategic and leadership skills. Future CFOs will need to excel not only in financial expertise but also in driving innovation, sustainability, and business growth within their organisations.
My advice to aspiring CFOs in Oman would be to master the fundamentals of finance, including accounting, financial planning, treasury, risk management, regulatory compliance, and tax laws - particularly within

Oman's evolving economic landscape. Pursuing certifications such as CFA, CMA, or CPA will also help enhance their technical knowledge and credibility.
Strategic thinking is essential. The role of the CFO is not just about managing numbers; it's about aligning financial strategies with broader business goals. Aspiring CFOs should develop the ability to anticipate market trends, identify growth opportunities, and influence business decisions.
In addition, leadership and collaboration skills are crucial. Being able to work effectively with diverse teams, communicate clearly with stakeholders, and inspire confidence across the organisation is key. Building a strong network with peers, mentors, and industry leaders can provide valuable insights, opportunities, and guidance. Engaging with forums, industry associations, and local finance communities in Oman will help aspiring CFOs stay informed and connected.

What skills will be essential for future CFOs?

The essential skills for future CFOs will include technological proficiency in areas such as AI, data analytics, and ERP systems. Adaptability and agility will also be crucial, as CFOs will need to adjust strategies quickly in response to changing circumstances.
Strategic leadership will be key in navigating periods of uncertainty, ensuring resilience and growth. Strong communication skills are essential for influencing decisions at the C-suite level, building consensus, and maintaining financial discipline across the organisation.
Future CFOs must also develop a global mindset. Understanding international markets, cross-border regulations, and global economic trends will be critical. In addition, team-building and leadership will be vital. Future CFOs will be responsible for building and leading high-performing finance teams. Mentoring, coaching, and fostering an innovative culture will be important for attracting and retaining top talent.

Tesla hits \$1.5tn valuation after Trump's re-election

ZeroHedge

Tesla shares just reached a new all-time high following Trump's victory in the 2024 presidential election, propelling the company to a massive \$1.5tn valuation.

Tesla accounts for nearly half of the market capitalisation among global carmakers. Its valuation surpasses the combined value of the next 29 automakers.

Trailing far behind Tesla, the four other top automakers on the list are Toyota (\$231bn), BYD (\$107bn), Xiaomi (\$98bn), and Ferrari (\$81bn).

Investors believe Elon Musk's close relationship with Trump, along with Musk's growing role in government, will serve as a powerful catalyst for Tesla.

Additionally, some of the stock's recent gains hinge on expectations that Trump's planned corporate tax cuts will benefit US manufacturers, including Tesla.

Tesla's stock has also re-



Elon Musk

Investors believe Elon Musk's close relationship with Trump, along with Musk's growing role in government, will serve as a powerful catalyst for Tesla

Tesla's success has further extended Elon Musk's lead as the richest person on Earth. Musk's net worth currently stands above \$450bn, far ahead of Jeff Bezos in second place at \$243bn.

On December 18, Elon Musk's reached a record high of \$500bn, becoming the first person in history to achieve such wealth, according to the Bloomberg Billionaires Index. (Source: Oilprice.com)

gained popularity due to investor expectations that its Robotaxi and Full Self-Driving (FSD) technology will drive a new phase of growth. Year-to-date, Tesla's stock is up 57%.

However, Tesla's massive market cap is not reflected in its production numbers. In 2023, Tesla sold 1.8mn vehicles, while Toyota sold 11.2mn vehicles during the same period.



Kuwaiti Cabinet approves bill imposing 15% tax on multinational companies

Kuwait City, Kuwait - The Kuwaiti Cabinet endorsed on Tuesday a draft resolution on issuing a law imposing a 15% tax on multinational entities, which have business in more than one country or a state.

This move was taken during

the Cabinet's weekly meeting held at Bayan Palace under chairmanship of Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah al Ahmad al Sabah. The law, which is in line with global taxes' standards, aims to curb tax evasion and prevent sending tax revenues to other

countries. It will come into effect as of January 1, 2025, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Shereeda al Mousherji said in a statement after the meeting, according to the Kuwait News Agency. WAM

China to ramp up fiscal spending, bond issuance in 2025

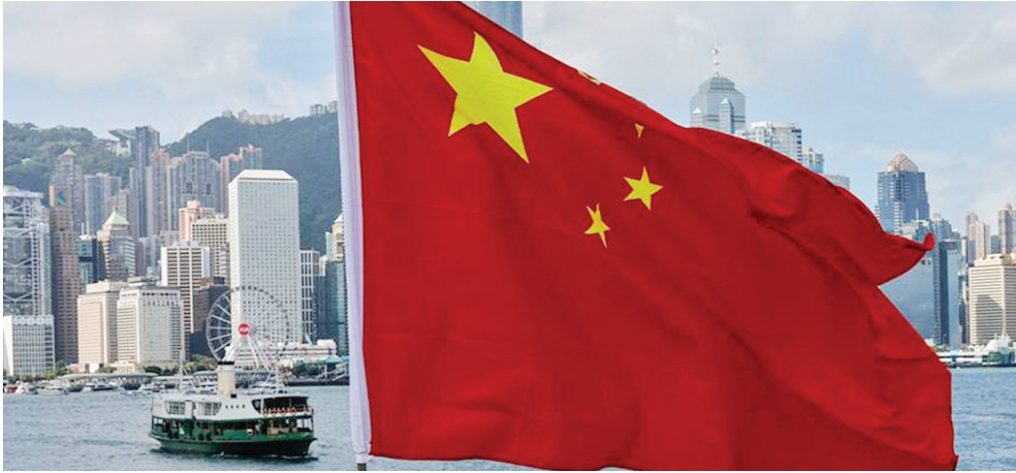
Beijing, China - China's Finance Ministry vowed to step up fiscal spending and government bond issuance in 2025, providing stronger support to bolster economic stability.

The country will adopt a more proactive fiscal policy next year and ensure the fiscal policy is continuously forceful and impactful, Chinese Finance Minister Lan Fo'an made the remarks during a two-day national fiscal work conference.

The fiscal policy stance aligns

with the announcements made at the recent tone-setting Central Economic Work Conference. During the conference, policymakers decided to implement a "moderately loose" monetary policy in 2025, a significant departure from the "prudent" policy of the past 14 years, Xinhua News Agency reported.

Lan said the country will set a higher deficit-to-GDP ratio in 2025, increase the intensity of fiscal spending, ensure faster deployment of funds, and optimize



the structure of fiscal spending, with more focus on improving people's well-being, promoting consumption and sustaining growth momentum.

According to a statement released after the fiscal work conference, the country's key fiscal priorities next year will include boosting domestic demand, building a modernized industrial system, improving people's well-being, supporting urban-rural integrated development, building an ecological civilization, and

promoting high-standard opening up.

The country will work continuously to prevent and defuse risks in key sectors and continue to increase transfer payments to local governments, Lan said.

He noted that the country will also step up efforts to contain new increases in local governments' "hidden debts," and move faster to reform and transform local government financing platforms. ONA



TENDERS ADVERTISEMENT

Oman Electricity Transmission Company (OETC) announces the following tenders:

SR. NO.	TENDER NO.	TENDER NAME	LAST DATE FOR OBTAINING THE DOCUMENTS	BID SUBMISSION DATE	REQUIREMENTS FROM PARTICIPATORS	TENDER DOCUMENT'S FEES (INCLUDING VAT) (RO)
1	137/2024	Supply, Installation, and Maintenance of LED Screens in OETC Meeting Rooms.	08/01/2025	04/02/2025	Local Companies with Experience in the Same Field, Have A Valid Commercial Registration.	26/250
2	138/2024	Reinforcement of IT Critical Infrastructure (phase 2).	08/01/2025	04/02/2025	Local Companies with Experience in the Same Field, Have A Valid Commercial Registration.	525/-

Participation	Interested Companies may obtain Tender Document with the necessity Apply on E-tendering
Buying the Tender	By E-Tendering System.
Fees	Against non-refundable payment as mentioned above against each set of document. (Payment Through Bank Transfer), SMEs are exempted from tender's fees.
The deadline for clarification	Before (21) Days from bid submission date.
Submission	The submission of hard copy will be only for Bid Bond & other documents by E-Tendering
Terms and conditions	- Specifying the name of the Company or whatever refers to in the Bid Guarantee Envelope. - The bid should be valid for not less than (90) days from bid submission date. - The Tenderers should enclose a bank guarantee issued by any bank in the Sultanate of Oman for the value of 1% of the bid value and should be valid for (90) days from bid submission date, addressed to Oman Electricity Transmission Company (SAOC). Small & Medium Enterprises are exempted from the submission of 1% of the bid bond. - Any bid not comply with the required guarantee will not be accepted. - OETC is not bound to accept the lowest or any other offers.
Offer	The bid bond should be submitted in Tender Box No. (1) at the company's building before 11:00 am on the assigned date for submission of the Tenders.
Company Address	Muscat - Al Mawaleh Road No: 2153 - Building No. 423 0 Block No: 321 Contact Details: 91777378, 93515198
Email Website	tenders@omangrid.com / link of E-Tendering System www.omangrid.com / https://www.omangrid.com/en/Pages/Services.aspx



إعلان طرح مناقصات

تعلن الشركة العُمانية لنقل الكهرباء عن طرح المناقصات التالية:

رقم المناقصة	عنوان المناقصة	آخر موعد للحصول على مستندات المناقصة	آخر موعد لتقديم العطاءات	الدرجة	ثمن الوثيقة (شامل ضريبة القيمة المضافة) (ر.ع.)
137/2024	توريد وتركيب وصيانة شاشات LED لغرف الاجتماعات فيالشركة العُمانية لنقل الكهرباء.	08/01/2025	04/02/2025	الشركات المحلية العاملة في هذا المجال ولديها سجل تجاري ساري المفعول.	26/250
138/2024	تعزيز البنية التحتية الحيوية لتكنولوجيا المعلومات (المرحلة الثانية).	08/01/2025	04/02/2025	الشركات المحلية العاملة في هذا المجال ولديها سجل تجاري ساري المفعول.	525/-

الاشتراك الإلكتروني	يمكن للشركات والمؤسسات المتخصصة الحصول على مستندات المناقصة بعد تقديم الطلب عن طريق نظام التنافس الإلكتروني.
طريقة الشراء	من خلال نظام التنافس الإلكتروني.
الرسوم	مقابل دفع المبلغ المحدد أعلاه للنسخة الواحدة . لا ترد. (الدفع عن طريق التحويل البنكي)، تُعفى المؤسسات الصغيرة والمتوسطة من دفع ثمن الوثيقة.
آخر موعد للاستفسارات	قبل (٢١) يوم من تاريخ آخر موعد لتقديم العطاءات
تقديم العرض	يتم تسليم النسخة الأصلية فقط من الضمان البنكي للعطاء في الصندوق، أما العرض فيتم تسليمه من خلال نظام التنافس الإلكتروني.
الشروط والضمانات	- تحديد اسم صاحب العطاء أو ما يشير إليه على المظروف. - أن تكون العروض سارية المفعول لمدة لا تقل عن (٩٠) يوما من تاريخ تقديم العطاء. - إرفاق تأمين في صورة ضمان مصرفي من أحد البنوك العاملة في البلاد قدره (1٪) من قيمة العطاء ساري لمدة (٩٠) يوما من تاريخ تقديم العطاء، ومعنونا باسم الشركة العُمانية لنقل الكهرباء، تُعفى المؤسسات الصغيرة والمتوسطة من تسليم الضمان المصرفي. - كل عطاء لا يستوفي التأمين المطلوب لن ينظر فيه. - الشركة العُمانية لنقل الكهرباء غير مقيدة بقبول أقل العروض أو أي عطاء آخر.
العرض المقدم	يجب وضع الضمان البنكي للعطاء فقط في صندوق المناقصات رقم (١) بمبنى الشركة قبل الساعة ١١ صباحاً من التاريخ المحدد لتقديم العطاءات
عنوان الشركة	عنوان الشركة: محافظة مسقط - الموالج رقم السكة ٢١٥٣، مبنى رقم ٤٢٣، رقم التواصل: ٩٣٥١٥١٩٨، ٩١٧٧٧٣٧٨
البريد الإلكتروني والموقع الإلكتروني	tenders@omangrid.com / link of E-Tendering System www.omangrid.com / https://www.omangrid.com/en/Pages/Services.aspx



Al Mouj Golf celebrates 8th consecutive win

Al Mouj Golf has once again been named ‘Oman’s Best Golf Course’ for the year 2024 by the World Golf Awards. This marks the eighth consecutive win and the tenth overall, reaffirming Al Mouj Golf’s standing as Oman’s leading golfing destination beyond compare.

“Receiving this award for the tenth time is a tremendous honor for us,” said Nasser al Sheibani, CEO of Al Mouj Muscat. “It reflects our unwavering dedication to providing an exceptional golfing experience. This recognition not only celebrates our team’s hard work but also highlights the unique appeal of our course. We are excited to

continue enhancing our facilities and services to attract golfers from around the world.”

Al Mouj Golf is renowned for its exceptional facilities, including a stunning seaside links-style course designed by legendary golfer Greg Norman. The first of its kind in Oman, Al Mouj Golf offers a challenging and sustainable golfing experience that attracts players from around the globe. The course’s unique design and breathtaking ocean views have significantly contributed to Oman’s reputation as a burgeoning golfing and tourism hub.

Beyond the greens, Al Mouj Golf is a haven for over 170 bird species, with natural water lakes

and efficient irrigation systems highlighting its green credentials and commitment to sustainability. This eco-conscious approach has earned multiple environmental accreditations, underscoring the course’s role in conserving the environment.

“We invite golfers and tourists worldwide to discover the beauty and challenge that Al Mouj Golf offers,” added Al Sheibani. “Our goal is to showcase the best of Omani hospitality and elevate the country’s standing as a must-visit destination for golf enthusiasts. This award motivates us to continue setting new standards of excellence.”

Being the only course in Oman

to win this prestigious title eight years in a row, Al Mouj Golf continues to set the benchmark for golfing excellence in the region. The consistent recognition by the World Golf Awards underscores the course’s dedication to providing an unparalleled experience that seamlessly blends world-class amenities with the natural beauty of Oman’s coastline.

Al Mouj Golf invites golfers and tourists alike to experience firsthand the exceptional quality of its facilities. Whether you’re a seasoned golfer seeking a new challenge or a visitor looking for a unique leisure experience, Al Mouj Golf promises an unforgettable journey.

11 students graduate from 3rd batch of Genetic Counseling Program

The National Genetic Center of the Royal Hospital marked on Tuesday the graduation of the third cohort of the Integrated Genetic Counseling Academic Program of 2023-24, which featured 11 graduates from various governorates of Oman as well from Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries.

The graduation ceremony was under the auspices of Dr Fatima Mohammed al Ajmi, Executive President of Oman Medical Speciality Board.

The programme was built around the concept of ‘on-the-job training’, designed to empower trainees to apply their theoretical knowledge in practical settings throughout their training period. This hands-on approach played a crucial role in developing real-world experience, equipping participants with the skills needed to address the challenges encountered in providing genetic counseling services. The training was complemented by a range of activities, including interactive workshops, specialized courses, academic lectures, and field training sessions conducted in hospitals and healthcare centers. This comprehensive methodology proved highly effective in preparing trainees to handle complex genetic cases with expertise, ensuring they are capable of offering professional, high-quality genetic counseling.

The Academic Program, which ran for 16 months, was carefully designed to meet both



academic and practical standards in the field of genetic counseling. It consists of (9) specialized modules, structured to align with training needs and job performance requirements. Courses covered Fundamentals of Genetics, Common Genetic Disorders, Communication and Counseling, Diagnosis and Treatment, and Genetic Research.

Between 2015 and 2022, two cohorts successfully graduated from the programme, and genetic counseling clinics were established in various governorates across Oman. This expansion was part of a strategic effort to make genetic health services accessible to all eligible individuals, thus enhancing the prevention and early detection of genetic

diseases.

It is important to highlight that genetic counseling plays a vital role in reducing the rising rates of genetic diseases among the Omani population. It serves as an effective tool for raising awareness among individuals and families about potential genetic risks.

Through specialised counseling based on genetic testing and family medical history, genetic counseling contributes to the early detection of the likelihood of inheriting genetic diseases, enabling families to make informed decisions regarding marriage or childbearing. This preventive approach reduces the risk of having children with genetic disorders and alleviates the health and economic burdens on both families and the wider community.

Record-breaking sales for LG appliances

OTE Group congratulates leading retailer EXTRA on achieving a groundbreaking milestone by recording the highest sales for LG Home Appliances in Oman during 2024.

This outstanding accomplishment not only highlights Team EXTRA’s unwavering commitment to delivering excellence but also sets a benchmark for retail performance in the Sultanate.

The milestone is a testament to EXTRA’s strong retail strategies, customer-focused approach, and successful partnership with OTE and LG. By offering a diverse range of innovative LG Home Appliances, backed by OTE’s extensive distribution network and service excellence, EXTRA has gained the trust of consumers and delivered unparalleled results in the competitive market.

Senior officials from OTE Group and Team EXTRA met to celebrate this achievement. OTE team praised EXTRA for its consistent efforts in promoting LG Home Appliances and driving consumer satisfaction across Oman.

Speaking on the occasion, a senior official from OTE Group said, “This record-breaking milestone by Team EXTRA reflects the strength of our partnership and the shared vision of providing premium home appliance solutions to our customers.”

Rozana Hotel hosts corporate meeting

Rozana Hotel Muscat, a premier destination for business and corporate events, successfully hosted a distinguished corporate gathering on December 4.

The event, which welcomed over 150 guests from corporate, travels and airline, ministry executives, industry leaders, and partners, showcased the hotel’s state-of-the-art conference facilities and its commitment to fostering business growth and collaboration.

Held at Al Luban ballroom, the gathering featured a colourful evening of tastefully prepared menu, live music and good conversation that added to the camaraderie of the event.

“We are honoured to have had the opportunity to host this exceptional event,” said Mohamed Rauf, General Manager, Rozana Hotel. “As a hub for business events, we take great pride in creating an environment that allows companies to engage in meaningful conversations. This



corporate gathering truly exemplified our commitment to the business community.”

He also added future modernisation of lobby and reception area, ballroom and other important area are in pipeline. In addition to the business-focused sessions, guests were treated to a gourmet dinner with menus curated by the hotel’s acclaimed chefs, showcasing the best of

local and international cuisine. Owned by Castle Tourism Management Company LLC, headed by Sheik Abdullah Khamis al Hasni, the hotel is well on its way to being established as a sought-after business hotel in the city.

Rozana Hotel, located in a thriving area of Al Khuwair in Al Maha Street, boasts 198 rooms, in-house restaurant, lobby café, banquet hall, meeting room,

swimming pool and gymnasium. They cater to short as well as long stay clients and regularly update their social media accounts (Facebook and Instagram) with exciting offers for both local and international guests.

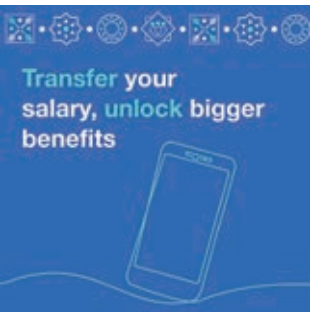
The hotel continues to position itself as a leading venue for corporate events, offering a wide range of customised packages and top-tier services.

Muzn Islamic offers cashback up to 15%

The National Bank of Oman’s (NBO) Muzn Islamic Banking has announced an exclusive cashback up to 15% for its new customers upon their first salary transfer to Muzn.

Valid until December 31, this campaign caters to new customers earning a monthly salary of RO500 or more, adding extra value to their banking experience while adhering to sharia’a-compliant financial solutions.

Commenting on the campaign, Salima Obaid Issa al Marzooqi, Chief Islamic Banking Officer at NBO, said: “It gives us a great delight to provide this exclusive cashback benefit to our new customers who entrust Muzn Islamic Banking with their financial needs. Through this campaign, we aim to grow our community of customers looking for banking solutions based on sharia’a principles and reward



them with financial services that align with their values.”

The campaign aims to attract new customers by encouraging salary transfer to Muzn, enabling individuals to enjoy the bank’s value-driven approach to Islamic banking. Eligible customers will receive cashback up to 15% on their salary credit.

The cashback offer is a unique incentive for new customers, inviting them to experience Muzn’s ethical, customer-centric services.

Oman’s youth step into sporting spotlight at Suhar Festival

With the winter chill setting in, Oman’s North Batinah governorate has become a hub of energy and excitement, thanks to the Suhar Festival’s vibrant sports tournaments.

Organised in collaboration with Jindal Shaded Iron and Steel, these competitions are not only a platform for athletic talent but also a call to the youth to break free from their screens and immerse themselves in the spirit of sport.

Among the highlights is the Jindal Panther Basketball Cup, which tipped off on December 22 at the Al Salam Club - Liwa Branch.

This tournament, open to public and private school stu-



dents from Grades 10 to 12, features a knockout format spanning five thrilling days. A groundbreaking first for the region, the championship includes both boys’ and girls’ categories, underscoring a commitment to inclusivity. With participation from 29 boys’ schools and 24 girls’ schools, the event has drawn over 300 young athletes, igniting passion and camaraderie.

Equally significant is the Jindal Panther Sports Academies Cup, set to begin on December 26, 2024. This football extravaganza is designed for the under-15 age group and welcomes over 900 participants from 32 Oman Football Association-accredited

academies across North Al Batinah.

Speaking about the initiative, Harssha Shetty, CEO of Jindal Shaded Iron and Steel, said, “These tournaments aren’t just about competition; they’re about creating opportunities for our youth through sports. Sports have the power to shape character, instill discipline, and inspire teamwork. Through our partnership with the Suhar Festival, we aim to provide platforms for the youth of Oman to excel both on and off the field. With initiatives like these, North Al Batinah isn’t just building athletes; it’s fostering a generation inspired to aim high, work hard, and realize their potential.”

At least 24 killed in overnight Israeli strikes on homes and tents in Gaza

Ten people lost their lives when an Israeli fighter jet hit a home in the Maen area in southern city of Khan Younis

Gaza City, Palestine - At least 24 Palestinians were killed in overnight Israeli airstrikes on homes and tents in displacement camps in the Gaza Strip, medical sources said.

Ten people lost their lives when an Israeli fighter jet hit a home in the Maen area in the southern city of Khan Younis, one source said. Two more people were killed in another strike targeting a residential apartment in Al-Manara neighbourhood in southern Khan Younis, he added.

Civil Defence teams retrieved the bodies of two Palestinians after an Israeli strike on a tent for displaced civilians in western Khan Younis, medics said.

A man and his wife were also killed and several people were injured when Israeli forces bombed a house in the Nuseirat refugee camp in central Gaza, another medical source said.

Israeli warplanes also hit a house in the Jabalia Nazla area in northern Gaza, leaving six people dead, he added.

A pregnant woman was killed



Israeli army continued to blow up homes and residential buildings in the northern Gaza Strip amid its ongoing military operations in the area

A pregnant woman was killed in an airstrike on an apartment in Gaza City, while a young man lost his life and 3 people were injured in a strike in the central city of Deir al-Balah

in an airstrike on an apartment in Gaza City, while a young man lost his life and three people were injured in another strike in the central city of Deir al-Balah, according to the same source.

Meanwhile, the Israeli army continued to blow up homes and residential buildings in the northern Gaza Strip amid its ongoing military operations in the area, according to witnesses.

Israeli forces also detonated an explosive-laden robot near the Al-Awda Hospital in northern Gaza for the second time, the hospital said in a statement.

Israel launched a large-scale ground operation in northern Gaza on October 5 to allegedly prevent the Palestinian group Hamas from regrouping. Palestinians, however, accuse Israel of seeking to occupy the area and forcibly displace its residents.

Since then, no sufficient hu-

manitarian aid including food, medicine, and fuel has been allowed into the area, leaving the remaining population on the verge of imminent famine. The onslaught was the latest episode in a brutal Israeli war on the Gaza Strip that has killed over 45,300 people, mostly women and children, since October 7, 2023.

Four killed in West Bank

Four Palestinians were killed by

Israeli army fire in the West Bank city of Tulkarem, taking the death toll from an ongoing military operation in the area to eight, the Health Ministry said early on Wednesday. A ministry statement said that seven more people were injured, including two seriously, in the offensive.

The Israeli army began a large-scale military operation in Tulkarem late on Monday, triggering clashes with angry Palestinian residents, according to

witnesses.

An Israeli military statement said an army commander was injured in a roadside bomb explosion in the city on Wednesday.

The army said the commander suffered moderate injuries after his vehicle hit an explosive device in the area.

Over the past few years, the Israeli military has conducted regular raids in the West Bank, which have escalated with the beginning of the war on Gaza on October 7, 2023. Palestinians have also been violently attacked by illegal Israeli settlers.

At least 832 Palestinians have since been killed and over 6,500 others injured by Israeli army fire in the occupied territory, according to the Health Ministry.

Israel strikes deeper into Lebanon

Meanwhile, the Israeli army launched an airstrike in the Bekaa region in eastern Lebanon on Wednesday, the first such attack since a ceasefire agreement last month, Lebanese media said.

The Israeli strike targeted an area between the towns of Talia and Hizzein in the Baalbek district, the state news agency NNA reported.

No information was yet available about injuries or damage.

Lebanese authorities have reported around 300 Israeli violations since the ceasefire agreement took effect on November 27 to end over 14 months of fighting between the Israeli army and Hezbollah group. Anadolu Agency

Bombing kills 46 in Afghanistan

Karachi, Pakistan - Afghanistan's interim Taliban administration on Wednesday claimed that at least 46 people were killed in a bombing by Pakistani fighter jets in the eastern Paktika province.

Mullah Hamdullah Fitrat, deputy spokesman for the interim Taliban administration, said that Pakistani jets bombed four locations in Paktika's Bar-mal district on Tuesday night, killing 46 people and injuring six, besides destroying houses, the state-run Bakhtar news agency reported. According to Kabul, this is Pakistan's second airstrike inside Afghanistan, after the first in March, which was formally protested by the Taliban administration.

Islamabad is yet to respond to the claims made by Kabul.

However, media reports quoting unnamed Pakistani security officials said the fighter jets targeted camps of the banned mili-



tant group Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). Islamabad has long accused Kabul of failing to crack down on TTP militants, who have reportedly been operating from Afghanistan. Kabul denies the charge.

The TTP has carried out deadly attacks on Pakistani security forces, mainly in border regions, in recent months.

Following the airstrikes, the interim Defence Ministry in Kabul said the Taliban administration 'will not leave this cowardly act unanswered but rather considers the defence of its territory and territory to be its inalienable right'.

Meanwhile, gun salutes, change-of-guards, and seminars marked the 148th birth anniversary of Pakistan's founding leader Muhammad Ali Jinnah on Wednesday.

Commonly known as Quaid-i-Azam or the 'great leader', Jinnah was born on December 25, 1876 in port city of Karachi, and led the movement of the Muslims of united India for creation of an independent homeland.

Anadolu Agency

Several people feared dead in Azerbaijan Airlines plane crash

Aktau, Kazakhstan - An Azerbaijan Airlines passenger plane carrying 67 people has crashed near the Kazakhstani city of Aktau on Wednesday, authorities said.

The office of Azerbaijan's prosecutor general said at least 32 people survived the crash according to preliminary information, and the figure could change.

Kazakhstan's Emergencies Ministry said survivors had been taken to hospitals and Azerbaijan's Foreign Ministry said in a statement that some of them were in critical condition.

The Embraer passenger plane was operated by Azerbaijan's Airlines and was en route from Baku, the capital of Azerbaijan, to Grozny, in Russia's Chechnya region.

But the plane was re-routed due to fog in Grozny, Russian



state news agency TASS reported. A spokesperson for Russia's civil aviation authority, Rosaviatsia, said that preliminary information showed that the pilot had chosen to divert to Aktau after the plane collided with birds.

Azerbaijani Airlines (AZAL)

said the plane made an 'emergency landing' near the city of Aktau.

Russian President Vladimir Putin spoke with his Azerbaijani counterpart Ilham Aliyev to express his condolences, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said. DW

Restoring trust, building institutions to speed up Syria's reconstruction

London/Brussels - Syria's reconstruction and development, expected to cost up to US\$400bn, can be accelerated by restoring the international trust towards the country and establishing institutions, experts say.

The 61-year Baath regime's attacks on the Syrian populace and infrastructure to keep holding onto power left behind a severely damaged economy, while the 13-year-long civil war furthered devastated Syria's development, infrastructure, economy, and its human resources. The civil war wrought destruction to homes, businesses, schools, hospitals, public buildings, sewage systems, telecommunications, and electricity distribution and gener-

ation systems.

The civil war displaced six million people to outside of Syria and seven million internally. Thousands of completely abandoned villages, towns, and neighbourhoods in many cities and regions of the country were the outcome of the civil war, and urgent action is necessary to reconstruct Syria after the fall of the Assad regime in early December.

Housing, large-scale investments to rebuild roads, power plants, and communication lines hold great significance in providing decent life and economic conditions for millions of Syrian refugees returning home. Syria requires financial and technical support from international organ-



People continue to celebrate newfound freedoms in Syria

isations and regional powers in its reconstruction.

Reports show that 60% of the US\$400bn estimated cost of the reconstruction can come from the housing sector. However, many sanctions imposed on Syria, especially by the US and the EU, are still in place and they hinder further development. Experts urge that sanctioning countries should lift their restrictions once their conditions are met.

Syria restarts 'almost from scratch'

Neil Quilliam, associate fellow at the London-based think tank Chatham House, told Anadolu that ensuring security and stability in Syria will be a first step of

the interim government.

"Winning the confidence of the domestic and international business communities will be key, and they will require assurances that the policy environment will be stable and predictable," he said, adding: "That is a tall order after 13 years of conflict."

Quilliam stated that the international community can support Syria's reconstruction in more ways than one but it needs to act with organisation.

"The international community should deploy at speed technical teams to support ministries, government agencies, and local government institutions to manage reconstruction," he said.

Seoul: Yoon fails to comply with summons over martial law

Seoul, South Korea - South Korea's suspended President Yoon Suk Yeol on Wednesday refused to honour a summons from the state's anti-corruption authorities.

South Korea's anti-corruption authorities, along with prosecutors, have launched probes into Yoon over his sudden decision to declare martial law earlier this month.

The martial law declaration drew immediate opposition from politicians, with lawmakers having quickly passed a resolution demanding Yoon lift his order. On December 14, lawmakers voted to impeach the president over his failed attempt to impose military rule.

This means the president has lost his presidential powers. But impeachment does not mean that Yoon can be removed from office immediately.

That decision will have to be reviewed by the Constitutional Court, a process that could take months.

Yoon refuses to respond

Yoon did not appear for ques-



South Korea's suspended President Yoon Suk Yeol

South Korea's anti-corruption authorities, along with prosecutors, have launched probes into suspended President Yoon Suk Yeol over his sudden decision to declare martial law earlier this month

tioning as of 10am (0100 GMT) on Christmas Day as requested by the Corruption Investigation Office for High-ranking Officials.

South Korea's Yonhap news agency reported an official saying the agency would continue waiting for Yoon to show up on Wednesday. It would need to review the case further before seeking an arrest warrant, the official added.

Yoon also did not respond on December 15 to a separate summons by prosecutors who are investigating the martial law declaration, Yonhap said.

Days after his attempt to impose martial law, Yoon apologised saying he would not evade legal and political responsibility over his actions.

But opposition party members have criticised his repeated defiance of the summons and have warned against possible destruction of evidence.

Yoon faces a string of investigations, including potential charges of leading an insurrection, a crime punishable by life imprisonment or even the death penalty.

DW

Outages as Russia hits Ukraine energy sites on Christmas eve

Kyiv, Ukraine - Russia launched a combination of cruise and ballistic missiles at Ukraine's energy infrastructure overnight, Ukrainian officials said on Wednesday.

President Volodymyr Zelensky said the attack on Christmas was not a 'spontaneous decision'. "It is a deliberate choice - not only of targets but also of timing and date," Zelensky wrote online. "Today, Putin deliberately chose Christmas for an attack. What could be more inhumane?"

The strikes

Zelensky said that more than 70 missiles, some of them ballistic, had been fired, as well as more than a hundred attack drones.

"The enemy is again massively attacking the energy sector," Ukrainian Energy Minister German Galushchenko wrote on social media platform Telegram in an earlier alert.

"The transmission system operator is taking the necessary measures to limit consumption to minimise the negative consequences for the energy system," he said.

The Ukrainian military said an air raid alert had been declared across the country, in response to inbound missiles targeting several regions.

Zelensky later said that according to preliminary reports, defensive forces managed to intercept more than 50 missiles and 'a significant number' of the drones.

"Unfortunately, there have been hits. As of now, there are power outages in several regions.



Firefighters in the Dnipropetrovsk region rushed to extinguish the flames after a hit

The Ukrainian military said an air raid alert had been declared across the country, in response to inbound missiles targeting several regions

Power engineers are working to restore power supply as soon as possible," he said.

The governor of the Kherson region reported that one person had been killed and three more were injured over the last 24 hours.

Attacks target Kharkiv, Dnipro

A Russian missile assault targeted Kharkiv in northeastern Ukraine on Wednesday morning, injuring at least six people, regional governor Oleh Syniehubov said. Russia used ballistic mis-

siles, Ukraine's air force added.

Syniehubov said the attack caused 'damages to civilian non-residential infrastructure' in a statement on Telegram.

Meanwhile in Dnipro in central Ukraine, Governor Serhiy Lysak also reported widespread attacks, accusing Moscow of 'trying to destroy the region's power system'. "Stay in a safe place until the air alert is lifted. Take care of yourself!" Lysak told residents facing freezing winter temperatures.

The governor added that a

search and rescue operation following strikes on Christmas Eve found a 43-year-old man who had been killed and 17 others who had been wounded.

DTEK, Ukraine's largest private energy company, said on Wednesday that its power plants were attacked by Russia.

"This year, it is the 13th massive attack on the Ukrainian energy sector and the 10th massive attack on the company's energy facilities," the company said on the Telegram messaging app.

Russia's attacks on Ukraine's

energy infrastructure have intensified since this spring.

Almost half of Ukraine's generating capacity has been battered, causing regular blackouts nationwide.

One of the larger recent missile attacks was on November 17, when Russia launched some 120 missiles and 90 drones.

That attack killed seven and severely damaged the power system, with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky accusing Russia of using cluster munition.

DW

UNGA adopts convention to prevent cybercrime

New York, US - The United Nations General Assembly adopted on Tuesday a new convention to prevent and combat cybercrime, concluding a five-year negotiation process.

The UN Convention against Cybercrime aims to prevent and combat cybercrime more efficiently and effectively, including by strengthening international cooperation and by providing technical assistance and capacity-building support, particularly for developing countries.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres welcomed the adoption of the Convention - the first international criminal justice treaty to have been negotiated in over 20 years.

"This treaty is a demonstration of multilateralism succeeding during difficult times and reflects the collective will of Member States to promote international cooperation to prevent and combat cybercrime," his spokesperson said in a statement.

The statement added that the Convention 'creates an unprecedented platform for collaboration' in the exchange of evidence, protection for victims and prevention, while safeguarding human rights online.

ANI/WAM

Panama: Protesters say 'enemy' Trump must leave canal alone

Panama City, Panama - Demonstrators in Panama on Tuesday protested against US President-elect Donald Trump's suggestion that the US government could retake the Panama Canal.

Trump had complained about what he referred to as 'exorbitant' shipping fees, demanding the canal be 'returned' to US control if they are not reduced.

The protests

Dozens of protesters gathered outside the US embassy in Panama and chanted slogans such as 'Trump, animal, leave the canal alone', carrying banners reading 'Donald Trump, public enemy of Panama'.

The United States largely built the Panama Canal and administered its territory for decades before transferring complete control to Panama in 1999.

"Panama is a sovereign terri-



tory and the canal here is Panamanian," Saul Mendez, the leader of a construction union that jointly organised the protest, was cited by France's AFP news agency as saying.

"Donald Trump and his imperial delusion cannot claim even a single centimetre of land in

Panama," Mendez said.

The protest comes a day after President Jose Raul Mulino said 'every square metre' of the canal belongs to Panama and its status was 'non-negotiable'.

Also on Tuesday, the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA), which is

made up of ten Central and South American countries, denounced Trump's comments and affirmed its support for Panama's 'sovereignty, territorial integrity and self-determination'.

Panama is not a member of the bloc.

DW

US: Donald Trump pledges to reinstate federal executions

Washington, D.C., US - US President-elect Donald Trump vowed on Tuesday to reinstate federal executions as he criticised President Joe Biden's decision to commute the death sentences of 37 federal inmates.

Trump made the pledge on his social media platform, Truth Social, stating: "As soon as I am inaugurated, I will direct the Justice Department to vigorously pursue the death penalty to protect American families and children from violent rapists, murderers, and monsters. We will be a Nation of Law and Order again!"

It was in response to Biden's announcement earlier this week to commute the sentences of 37 of 40 federal death row inmates to life imprisonment without parole, a move the administration described as a step toward a more humane criminal justice



US President-elect Donald Trump

system.

The commutations have sparked a national debate about the death penalty's morality and the balance between justice for victims' families and the ethics of state-sanctioned executions.

Biden signs 50 bills

Meanwhile, Biden on Thursday signed 50 bills into law, addressing issues ranging from the protection of vulnerable youth to ethics in public office and cam-

pus safety. One of the newly enacted laws, spearheaded by celebrity Paris Hilton, is the Stop Institutional Child Abuse Act.

This legislation establishes a federal working group to oversee the health, safety, care, treatment, and placement of minors in youth residential programmes, including rehabilitation facilities.

Hilton, who has publicly testified about the abuse she endured in such facilities as a teenager, played a central role in advocating for this measure, which passed both the House and Senate last week.

Another measure prevents members of Congress convicted of crimes involving public corruption from receiving their retirement benefits. Previously, lawmakers could continue collecting pensions until all appeals were exhausted.

Anadolu Agency

Japanese FM visits China, seeks 'positive directions'

Beijing, China - Japanese Foreign Minister Takeshi Iwaya visited Beijing on Wednesday, holding several hours of talks with his counterpart Wang Yi and with China's premier, Li Qiang.

Both sides were cautiously welcoming of recent improvements in bilateral relations between the regional rivals with typically complicated relations.

"It is important for both Japan and China to fulfil responsibilities and move forward together in pursuit of the peace and prosperity of this region and the international community," Iwaya said at the start of his meeting with Wang.

China's premier Li Qiang, meanwhile, said bilateral ties were 'at a critical period of improvement and development', echoing comments from President Xi Jinping last month amid talks with Japan's new prime minister, Shigeru Ishiba.

Iwaya is the first Japanese minister to visit China since April last year, on the back of the bilateral talks in Peru on the sidelines of an Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) meeting.

'Serious concerns' on military activity

However, Iwaya had also struck a note of caution prior to his departure, saying 'there are various possibilities but also multiple challenges and concerns' in what he said was one of the most important bilateral relationships for Tokyo.

Japan's Foreign Ministry on Wednesday said that Iwaya had 'expressed serious concerns over the East China Sea situation, including around the Senkaku Islands (and) China's increasing military activity'.



Japanese Foreign Minister Takeshi Iwaya made his first trip to Beijing since taking office in October, meeting his counterpart Wang Yi

It is important for both Japan and China to fulfil responsibilities and move forward together in pursuit of peace and prosperity of this region and the international community

TAKESHI IWAYA

The Senkaku Islands are five uninhabited spits of land in the East China Sea known as the Diaoyu Islands in China, located to the northeast of Taiwan, the east of mainland China, and the west of Japan's Okinawa island.

Japan protested strongly in August when a Chinese military aircraft staged the first confirmed excursion into the country's airspace; it also bristled at a rare Chinese test launch of an in-

tercontinental ballistic missile into the Pacific Ocean in late September. In October, it sent a warship into the Taiwan Strait for the first time.

More broadly, Japan has also altered a largely pacifist defence policy doctrine set up in the aftermath of defeat in World War II, boosting military spending and moving away from a principle of self-defence.

The government in Tokyo said

Iwaya had called for the 'swift release' of jailed Japanese nationals, saying 'opaqueness surrounding the anti-espionage laws is causing Japanese people to think twice about visiting China'.

But the two ministers also agreed to work towards Wang also visiting Japan 'at the earliest possible timing next year', and agreed the two governments would hold a bilateral security dialogue in 2025.

Seafood trade restrictions

The two sides were also expected to discuss Chinese trade restrictions on Japanese seafood, imposed by Beijing amid the release of treated radioactive

water from the Fukushima nuclear plant into the sea last year.

China, a key export market for Japan, imposed a full ban last August.

Japan argues that the wastewater discharged from the stricken Fukushima plant is adequately monitored, treated, and diluted to levels much safer than international standards. China however has called the water contaminated and called for international sampling and monitoring.

Although progress was not expected on Wednesday, the two countries in September agreed in principle to a path towards normalising seafood trade again. DW

African leaders call for peace on Christmas Day

Lusaka, Zambia - African leaders on Wednesday urged peace and unity as believers across nations of the continent marked Christmas Day.

"May the season of love, unity, reconciliation and peace set the tone for the year ahead," Zambia's President Hakainde Hichilema said in a televised address to the nation.

On the eve of the holiday for the Christian community, Hichilema on Tuesday pardoned 759 prisoners and commuted the sentences of 17 others.

Salva Kiir Mayardit, the president of South Sudan, urged all people to embrace peace and unity during the festive season.

"Let this holiday be a time when we come together in a shared commitment to a peaceful, prosperous, and united South Sudan," he said.

"As we celebrate this Christmas, may we carry the message of peace and hope in our hearts into the New Year," said Kiir in an address to the nation.

The government is 'committed to ensuring a peaceful and secure environment, not only during the festive season but throughout the year', he pledged.

Namibia's President Nangolo Mbumba urged the nation to share and care under the banner 'one Namibia, one nation'.

"While many of us enjoy a well-deserved break, let us not forget those who continue to work tirelessly to keep our nation safe and functioning," he said.

"Our essential workers across various sectors and the brave men and women in uniform who protect our peace day and night, to them, I extend my deepest gratitude for their unwavering dedication and selflessness," said Mbumba.



On the eve of the holiday for the Christian community, Zambia's President Hakainde Hichilema pardoned 759 prisoners and commuted the sentences of 17

In Mozambique, hit by violence in the wake of disputed polls, religious leaders appealed for peace to prevail in the country.

In their Christmas messages, the leaders bemoaned the escalating violence in the country and its hindering local Christians from marking the Christmas holiday in a 'normal way'.

At least 151 people have been killed in Mozambique in deadly protests after a winner was declared in the widely disputed October 9 presidential elections.

In Malawi, President Lazarus Chakwera called for unity to prevail in the deeply politically divided Southern African nation.

Anadolu Agency



Vietnam maintains a tight grip on the media

New, restrictive internet law comes into force in Vietnam

Hanoi, Vietnam - A new internet law that gives the Vietnamese government expanded powers over internet services and people using them is set to officially take effect on Wednesday.

Decree 147 expands government control over access to information on the internet for reasons of 'national security' and 'social order'.

The decree requires social media platforms providing services to users in Vietnam to store user data and provide it to authorities on demand.

The government issued the decree this November, and it requires organisations to take down anything the authorities consider 'illegal content' within 24 hours.

Decree 147 has sparked concerns, with researchers and experts tracking the country saying that the decree is part of a grow-

ing crackdown on civil society.

"Because the Vietnamese police treat any criticism of the Communist Party of Vietnam as a national security matter, this decree will provide them with yet another tool to suppress dissent," said Patricia Gossman, associate Asia director at Human Rights Watch.

What to know about the decree

The decree requires tech giants like Facebook and TikTok among other organisations, to verify user accounts using either people's phone numbers or personal identification numbers. It requires the companies to store that data.

Decree 147 also requires organisations to provide search and content-scanning tools to government authorities upon request. It limits certain functions,

like live video streaming, to only verified accounts.

Critics say the tightening of use of internet services stifles free thought and expression. It also deeply affects the large number of people earning a living through social media channels.

Game publishers, for example, are required to limit sessions to one hour at a time and no more than 180 minutes a day for all games.

Activist Dang Thi Hue, who has 28,000 followers on Facebook, wrote: "Decree 147 will be used to publicly suppress those with different viewpoints."

Meanwhile, former political prisoner Le Anh Hung pointed out that this was 'the latest sign of infringement of basic freedoms... with a vague line between what is legal and what is not'.

DW

Germany: A real challenge ahead for 'unpopular' Chancellor Olaf Scholz

Berlin, Germany - In September, Olaf Scholz brushed aside a journalist's question about his legacy.

"I think you should be wary of politicians who think about that before their term in office has ended," he told Berlin's Tagesspiegel newspaper in response to the question of what he hoped would one day be written in the history books about his time in office.

Two months later, following the collapse of his centre-left three-way coalition, he may be beginning to ponder that question. So far, the leadership of the centre-left Social Democratic Party (SPD) is publicly demonstrating support for Scholz as their top candidate for the upcoming election on February 23, 2025.

But with Scholz's low popularity ratings and the election campaign already heating up, calls in the party came up to replace Scholz with 64-year-old Defence Minister Boris Pistorius, who has been Germany's most popular politician in polls for months.

If, as predicted, the centre-right bloc of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and the Christian Social Union (CSU) takes over the chancellorship, Scholz will have had the shortest term of office of any of the four chancellors of the SPD in the history of the Federal Republic of Germany.

But Scholz is determined to win. In view of the current polls, which show the SPD trailing a



Olaf Scholz is known for his dispassionate manner

long way behind the CDU/CSU, this will be a real challenge.

Having said that, Scholz has never lacked self-confidence. Even in seemingly hopeless situations, he has always fervently believed he had everything under control. Critics have accused him of having a distorted perception of reality in such moments.

"You obviously live in your own cosmos, in your own world," said CDU leader Friedrich Merz in response to Scholz's upbeat speech in parliament a week after his coalition collapsed. "You have not understood what is happening out there in the country at the moment."

Most unpopular government

Scholz's political career has been marked by ups and downs. His chancellorship faced several major challenges following

bickering and backstabbing, it had become the most unpopular German government since the end of World War II.

Scholz, however, seems unfazed, pointing to the 2021 election campaign when he managed to buck the trend and win. Three months before the general election, victory for the SPD seemed impossible. The party was far behind in the polls, but Scholz was undeterred, saying again and again: "I will become the chancellor."

His stoic optimism earned him much ridicule at the time, but one month before the vote, CDU candidate Armin Laschet made one mistake too many, and the SPD emerged the surprise winners garnering 25.7% of the vote, 1% ahead of the conservatives.

For Scholz, the 2021 win was the pinnacle of his decadeslong political career. He joined the SPD as a schoolboy in 1975. Before he entered the Bundestag in 1998, he ran his own law firm in Hamburg, held office as Hamburg's senator of the interior, as labour minister in the first 'grand coalition' of the SPD and CDU/CSU under Chancellor Angela Merkel.

Then he was governing mayor of the city-state of Hamburg for many years. "Whoever orders leadership from me, gets it," he famously said when he took office there in 2011. In 2018, he moved back to Berlin as finance minister in another grand coalition under Merkel. DW



TWO TEAMS, ONE MISSION

India need to win the Border-Gavaskar Trophy for WTC while Australia need it more for their legacy

Melbourne, Australia - We have been working on the permutations for the 2023-25 World Test Championship and we still do not have an answer. Australia may make it to the final or they may not, just like India, who are slightly behind them. There is an outside chance of even both making it, but for that they need to rely a lot on Pakistan.

Yes, it is complicated. It is a testimony to this current Indian team that even a 3-0 decimation against New Zealand (and eight points lost at Port of Spain in 2023) have only dented their cause significantly, but not derailed them. In this cycle, they have drawn in South Africa and have held Australia at 1-1 after three Tests.

Before that, they had made it to the final of the 2019-21 and 2021-23 editions.

Since the start of 2015 – in other words, across a week less than a decade – India have won 59 Tests and lost 26. Their win-loss ratio of 2.269 is some distance ahead of the 1.869 of Australia, the next-best team on the list. India are the only side to have won more away Tests (23) than they have lost (17) over this period.

India have won two series in Australia during this stretch, drawn series in England and South Africa, and have been the best side in Asia by some distance. At home, they won 18 consecutive series in a row. Of course, they did not lose a series at home in the 1990s either, but they did not win a single Test out-

side Asia from 33 attempts either.

Never before in their history have India had a 10-year stretch like this. However, that World Test Championship title remains elusive despite their two appearances in the final.

The debates over the WTC as the ultimate Test competition will continue. Every team does not play every opposition here, and the series are of unequal length. The relevance of a one-off final to determine the best side in a two-year competition has also been questioned. However, as long as it is there, the WTC remains a frontier unconquered by this great Indian side – and that is something they will want to change.

They will stand with an equal chance of winning if they make it to the final, but qualification does not seem easy at this point. A lot will hinge on Melbourne and Sydney.

Australia's case is different.

Australia are comfortably the greatest side in the format's history if one applies the same criterion that make India the

most formidable side over the past decade. They are the only team to have won more away Tests (148) than lost (127), and their overall win-loss ratio (1.781) is well clear of second-placed England's 1.219.

It is not a coincidence that they have produced some of the greatest sides in history. The astonishing success of Warwick Armstrong's team of the early 1920s can be attributed to a war-ravaged England in an era when South Africa, the only other side, were even weaker. The success of the next generation makes a more remarkable story: Australia did not lose a single series between 1932-33 and 1953, an absurd phase even if one omits the eight-year phase where they did not play due to the Second World War. England needed

arguably their greatest side in history to end that run, but Australia went unbeaten again between 1956-57 and 1964-65. The West Indies then beat them, then South Africa (Test cricket was no longer an Ashes-and-support cast affair), then England again, but Australia rose again to go undefeated between 1972-73 and 1977.

The West Indian giants ruled the sport between the late 1970s and mid-1990s, a phase that engulfed a phase of transition for Australia. But Australia reclaimed their throne in 1994-95 and continued with the ascent. Their legendary Australian side of the 2000s had two streaks of 16 consecutive Test match wins that remain unmatched in history.

Barring the West Indies under Clive Lloyd and Viv Richards, no side has managed to keep Australia at bay over a sustained period – until the current Indian side. Test cricket has had its share of all-time great sides: what makes the current era unusual is that there are two of them at the same time. Since all sports become more competitive over time, this duopoly was perhaps inevitable – but that discussion is best left for another day.

India and Australia usually beat every other side. However, in bilateral series between them, India have been a clear winner of late. Since that sandpaper-tainted year of 2018, Australia have not lost a Test series to any side, home or away – with the exception of India. Over the past decade, India have played four series against Australia – two in each nation – and won every single time.

A win here will help silence some critics. Since 1969-70, Australia's only win in India has been in 2004-05.



Australia's Head fit for Boxing Day Test

Melbourne, Australia - Australia heaved a major sigh of relief on Wednesday after skipper Pat Cummins declared run-machine Travis Head fit for the Boxing Day test against India at the Melbourne Cricket Ground.

India nemesis Head, the leading scorer of the five-test series for the Border-Gavaskar trophy, suffered a quad strain in Brisbane.

"He ticked off some final things today and yesterday, but no stress, no worries about injury for Trav," Cummins told reporters after training on Wednesday.

"He'll go into the game fully fit. I don't think you'll see too much management of him throughout the game ... maybe around fielding if he's a bit uncomfortable."

Middle order batter Head has tallied 409 runs from five innings in the series, which include two hundreds and a fifty, averaging nearly 82.

Australia have confirmed teenaged opener Sam Konstas will make his debut replacing Nathan McSweeney in front of a sellout Boxing Day crowd at the MCG. Seamer Scott Boland will be coming in for the injured Josh Hazlewood in the other change for the home side in a match when the mercury is forecast to reach 40 degrees Celsius on day one.

Meanwhile, India are considering restoring captain Rohit



He'll (Head) go into the game fully fit. I don't think you'll see too much management of him throughout the game ...

PAT CUMMINS

Sharma to the opener's slot. Captain Rohit missed the opening test to be with his newborn son in Mumbai and KL Rahul, who replaced him as

Yashasvi Jaiswal's partner, retained his place in Adelaide and Brisbane.

An out-of-form Rohit batted in the middle order in the last two tests but his run drought continued as he managed only 19 runs in three innings.

Rahul is likely to drop to number three, Indian media reported.

India are also considering bringing in a second spinner at the expense of pace-bowling all-rounder Nitish Kumar Reddy.

The series is level at 1-1 and India will retain the Border-Gavaskar trophy if they win in Melbourne.

Cummins wants Konstas to play like 'a kid in the backyard'

Melbourne, Australia - Australia captain Pat Cummins has encouraged Sam Konstas to embrace the naivety of youth during his Test debut against India on Boxing Day in front of what could be more than 90,000 spectators on a sweltering Melbourne day.

Cummins was speaking from first-hand experience having made his debut as an 18-year-old against South Africa in 2011, where he became Australia's second youngest men's Test player, with just three first-class matches under his belt. He was named player of the match in Johannesburg as he claimed 6 for 79 and hit the winning runs.

Konstas will slot in at No. 4 on the age list, and be playing his 12th first-class game, when the coin goes up at the MCG, being a few days younger than Clem Hill when he made his debut at Lord's in 1896. He will open alongside Usman Khawaja who is double his age. While Cummins said there is no lesser desire to achieve success purely because of a young age, he recalled his own feelings of there being less pressure given how rapid his debut had been.

"I said this to Sam the other



day; I remember as an 18-year-old I was thinking I've got a lot more leeway because I was young," Cummins said. "I almost felt like if I didn't have a great game it wasn't my fault it was the selectors' fault for picking me. It was like, they're the idiots who picked an 18-year-old. You are so young starting out your career, it's Boxing Day, it doesn't get any better than this so just enjoy the moment.

"I spent a bit of time wondering why or how I was there, how it had happened so quick. I just remember being really excited and it's similar to Sammy this week. There's a level of naivety that you just want to go out and

play like you do when you are a kid in the backyard – take the game on, have fun, and not overthink it. That's the message to Sam. That's definitely how I felt as an 18-year-old, just really excited, and once the game started you go into game mode and it's just like any other game."

Referencing one specific memory from his Johannesburg experience, Cummins added: "In my debut I remember trying to hit Dale Steyn over his head for runs and just thought that made sense at the time, now I look back and it's like 'gee, I'd have been crucified if that hadn't come off', so I think there is some benefit in that naivety."

Pakistan face selection dilemma in Boxing Day Test against SA

Centurion, South Africa - The road crunches under the rubber on the freeway that takes Pakistan from where they're staying in Melrose, a Johannesburg suburb, out to SuperSport Park in Centurion, about a half-hour's drive away.

The oppressive heat over the last fortnight in Johannesburg has made way for a fresh, crisp summer breeze, wispy clouds and blue skies taking turns, as if in a cosmic balancing act to maintain the perfect temperature. The roads are largely empty

thanks to Christmas holidays, and the 40km from accommodation and cricket ground appear to shrink as the team bus races along.

The scene could not be written to portray further distance from Rawalpindi, where it's also cricket season, but in drastically different conditions. The sides stay much closer to the Rawalpindi Cricket Ground, and if it weren't for the side's security details clearing path to the venue the heavy traffic at all times of the year would make it a far

more onerous exercise. The contrast continues once you get into each venue; the build up to Pakistan's last Test here was dominated by how many wedding-style heaters windbreakers, and rakes Pindi could fit in to produce a surface that suited their spinners; here at SuperSport Park, tarpaulin sheets mounted on stilts shaded a surface packed with moisture when the sun became too potent.

And yet, just four months earlier in Rawalpindi, Pakistan faced the same dilemma that currently



Pakistan will be tempted to include spinner Noman Ali in their playing XI for the Boxing Day Test at Centurion

holds them back from announcing their team for Boxing Day. In pursuit of quick, bouncy sur-

faces, perhaps not too dissimilar to the kind Centurion will almost certainly showcase this week,

the grass was left on for the first Test against Bangladesh.

Believing they had prepared the surface they wanted, they made the fateful decision of playing no specialist spinner, hoping to exploit Bangladesh's perceived vulnerability against pace. It would go about as badly as possible. A wet outfield delayed the start with the sun drying the strip out. Bangladesh comfortably dealt with Pakistan's four-pronged seam attack, forcing them into bowling 50 overs of part-time spin. And

then, with a draw looming, Bangladesh's twin spinners took seven wickets to skittle Pakistan on the fifth morning and romped to victory.

Pakistan made a half-hearted attempt to defend that decision, though just about everyone acknowledged it as a tactical misstep, one they do not want to repeat to close out the year. South African captain Temba Bavuma reeled off the starting eleven for South Africa before they had officially announced it; it did not include a spinner.

ALL ABOUT INNOVATION

Ever-evolving sport set for another action-packed year

London, England - As a jam-packed sporting year featuring a much-praised Olympic Games and four continental football tournaments rolls to a close it is tempting to expect that 2025 will be a more sedate one.

But that is not the nature of a sports industry continually evolving to sate the thirst of a demanding public that seemingly can never get enough of their chosen product.

What is becoming increasingly clear is that tradition and maintaining the status quo no longer cuts it in a competitive world intent on wringing every dollar out of sporting endeavour.

Novel ways of delivering sport to a high-tech generation are now paramount and the Christmas decorations will hardly have come down before golf, arguably the most conservative of all sports, welcomes the aptly-named Tomorrow's Golf League (TGL) which kicks off in Palm Beach in January.

Created by Tiger Woods and Rory McIlroy, the new made-for-TV indoor team format featuring state-of-the-art golf simulators and shot clocks resembles a cross between an arcade game and crazy golf. However, the world's best are on board for a venture designed to hook a generation of fans who no longer have the time or patience to watch five-hour rounds.

"The most interesting and fun aspect about TGL is the fact that it is an arena and you get to see us up close and personal," American Wyndham Clark said. "We're mic'd up, you'll see our personalities. It's almost a totally different sport."

Golf ended the year with a



Lionel Messi and Inter Miami will open the revamped 2025 Club World Cup against Egyptian club Al Ahly

contrived Showdown between PGA Tour players and those of the Saudi-backed LIV Golf circuit in Las Vegas. Looking ahead, in September, American Ryder Cup players will, for the first time, be

paid to take on Europe when the bi-annual clash takes place in New York. Other sports will also see big changes in 2025 -- a year lacking the biggest global showpiece events but still busy.

Football, in which its marquee names rarely have time to draw breath, will add to the load with an expanded 32-team FIFA Club World Cup in June and July in the United States. While it has many

critics, it will certainly be a tournament that, unlike previous editions, will be hard to ignore. Tennis, too, is moving into the future at pace with tradition making way for innovation and the

need to capture market share in an increasingly saturated landscape. Who would ever have thought Wimbledon, of all places, would get rid of line judges from its

lawns in favour of Hawkeye technology and computer-generated voices. But that is what fans will witness at the All England Club this year.

In athletics, a blue-riband sport which often struggles to attract eyeballs outside of Olympic years, American great Michael Johnson is launching a lucrative Grand Slam Track league in April with a \$12.6 million prize fund split over four events - but not including any field events.

"We're revolutionizing the track landscape," said four-times Olympic champion Johnson.

While there is no Olympics, the movement faces a pivotal

In athletics, American great Michael Johnson is launching a lucrative Grand Slam Track league in April with a \$12.6 million prize fund split over four events

year all the same as the International Olympic Committee elects a new president to replace Thomas Bach in March.

Whichever of the seven candidates wins will need to steer the Olympic juggernaut into an increasingly fractured world of geopolitics, climate change, gender issues and doping.

Saudi Arabia's insatiable appetite to keep shaping the sporting map is unlikely to diminish any time soon and many will see the kingdom's staging of the inaugural Olympic Esports Games next year as a precursor to a future bid for the real thing.

Tennis kicks things off in 2025 with the Australian Open in January -- a tournament that will unfortunately have to deal with the fallout of anti-doping cases involving men's champion and favourite Jannik Sinner of Italy and Poland's Iga Swiatek.

Nadal, Federer retirements opportunity for new talents, says United Cup chief

Sydney, Australia - The retirements of tennis greats Roger Federer, Rafa Nadal and Serena Williams has made promoting events more difficult but organisers must grab the opportunity to push new talent into the spotlight, the United Cup's tournament director said.

The popular \$10 million mixed team event aims to do just that when it kicks off the new season on Friday, with tournament chief Stephen Farrow confident the sport is in good hands.

"It's true to say that from a promotional standpoint, it's very easy if you've got Roger Federer or Rafa Nadal turning up," Farrow said after the draw for the 18-team tournament was held in Sydney recently.

"You're talking about people who are absolute superstars of the sports arena ... with those guys moving on, it does make it a bit more difficult to promote and tell the story of the athletes playing the event."

"I always see that as a positive, because it's on all of us in tennis to tell the story of this new talent. We've got a lot of them playing the United Cup. They're incredibly exciting and captivating to watch. I'm not worried about the future."

Grand Slam contenders Alexander Zverev, Taylor Fritz,



Roger Federer (R) and Rafael Nadal

Iga Swiatek and Coco Guff will all be in action for their countries at the Dec. 27-Jan. 5 tournament staged in Perth and Sydney as they prepare for the Australian Open starting on Jan. 12.

Farrow also said the United Cup was still building its brand and boosting awareness with fans and players.

"Last year we saw a really big step forward when we moved to a new format with one women's

singles, one men's singles and one mixed doubles. It was incredibly competitive. Now we've established ourselves on the tennis calendar two weeks from the Australian Open. We've seen with the field this year that players want to play this event."

Spain take on Kazakhstan while China meet Brazil on the opening day in Perth.

Bumrah attains historic ICC rating feat

Dubai, UAE - Jasprit Bumrah has attained the joint-highest rating points ever for an Indian bowler on the rankings chart after his 9 for 94 in the third Test against Australia in Brisbane.

The Indian spearhead, who already heads the rankings list for bowlers, further consolidated his position at the top by adding 14 points to his tally taking it to 904 rating points, 48 clear of second-placed Kagiso Rabada (856). The only other Indian bowler to achieve this tally is the recently-retired R Ashwin who got there after the fourth Test against England in Mumbai in December 2016.

Bumrah, who is currently the highest wicket-taker in the five-



Jasprit Bumrah

match Border-Gavaskar Series with 21 scalps in six innings at 10.90, now has a chance to break Ashwin's record when the two teams meet in Melbourne for the Boxing Day Test with the series locked 1-1.

Meanwhile, Travis Head's 152 in the first innings of the Brisbane Test on the back of a century in Adelaide has seen him overtake Yashasvi Jaiswal and move to fourth on the batters' list which is led by Joe Root. Steven Smith

also made his way into the top ten of the charts after his 101 in Brisbane, entering at the tenth position, while Rishabh Pant has moved out of the top ten.

On the ODI front, Heinrich Klaasen's three back-to-back fifties against Pakistan have seen him rise eight spots - from 13th to fifth on the batting table. Opener Saim Ayub, who had a breakthrough series against South Africa, with scores of 109, 25 and 101 as Pakistan clean swept the series 3-0, advanced 57 slots to a career-best 23rd position.

Babar Azam continues to lead the ODI batting list, with Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli in second and third place, respectively.



Ruben Amorim

'We will solve problems step by step'

Manchester, England - Manchester United manager Ruben Amorim said on Tuesday that while dealing with the Premier League club's problems is frustrating, he is confident in his ability to resolve them.

United visit Wolverhampton Wanderers on Boxing Day, looking to bounce back from two straight defeats. Amorim took charge last month with the team sitting 14th. In his six league games in charge, United have had two wins, three losses and one draw.

The Old Trafford side will

spend Christmas Day in 13th place, their lowest position on Dec. 25 since 1986, when they were 15th during Alex Ferguson's second month in charge.

"This is maybe one of the lowest moments in our club. We have to face it and be strong," Amorim told reporters.

Asked why the club haven't made substantial progress, the Portuguese manager said: "If I knew, I would solve all the problems of this club, even this (leaky ceiling)."

"I know what I am going to do. That is so clear for me. I will

not say I am feeling relaxed because I am really frustrated. It is a very difficult moment but we will solve problems step by step and find answers for everything."

"I just want to win. I don't care about Christmas. I'm just focused on we need to win the next match. That's the only thing I care about. We are privileged (in England) we can play on Boxing Day to give some happiness to the fans and we want so bad to win it."

Amorim confirmed defenders Matthijs de Ligt and Victor Lindelof are still sidelined.

EXCEEDING EXPECTATIONS

Chelsea are going great guns but manager Maresca dismisses Premier League title talk



Chelsea manager Enzo Maresca with Reece James during a team training session

London, England - Chelsea are second in the Premier League standings but manager Enzo Maresca played down talk of title pressure and said on Tuesday that he is only focused on areas where his team could improve.

Chelsea are on 35 points, four behind first-placed Liverpool, and they meet Fulham in a West London derby on Thursday.

Maresca's side were denied an opportunity to top the table after a goalless draw with Everton over the weekend which also snapped Chelsea's run of eight straight wins in all competitions and five in a row in the Premier League.

"We are ahead of our expectation in terms of the way we are playing and points. For us, the main focus is to see how we can improve the players and how we can improve the team," Maresca said. "It's the reality for me, not about the pressure (of going for the title). I would like that kind of pressure. I say we are not there because that is the reality for me. The main point is to continue to

improve and to win games."

Chelsea are already eight points ahead of struggling defending champions Manchester City, who are seventh, but Maresca said Pep Guardiola's side could still bounce back in the title race.

"It's almost halfway so the table reflects the teams and where they are. Liverpool are doing fantastic since the first day," Maresca said. "I think Manchester City in the end will be there. They are living something that probably never happened before. They have a new injury at the end of every game. It is a very bad situation." Chelsea have

defenders Wesley Fofana and Benoit Badiashile sidelined with long-term injuries.

Maresca said midfielder Romeo Lavia would also miss Thursday's fixture as he is recovering from his thigh injury. Mykhailo Mudryk is suspended after an adverse analytical finding in an anti-doping test. The Ukrainian has denied knowingly taking any banned substance.

For us, the main focus is to see how we can improve the players and improve the team

ENZO MARESCA



Postecoglou urges Johnson to keep working

London, England - Tottenham Hotspur winger Brennan Johnson will eventually return to the starting line-up as coach Ange Postecoglou looks to shuffle his pack during a busy run, the Australian said on Tuesday ahead of a trip to Nottingham Forest.

Johnson, 23, had a promising spell earlier in the season during which he scored six goals in nine Premier League matches, but has fallen out of favour in recent weeks due to the form of teammate Dejan Kulusevski.

"Brennan just needs to keep doing what he's doing. I've had Deki (Kulusevski) there and he's done really well and scoring goals," Postecoglou told reporters ahead of Thursday's match.

It's about the balance of the team. It's about managing that load. We're already overburdening some of the players up there. Brennan will get his minutes

ANGE POSTEOGLOU

"It's about the balance of the team. It's about managing that load. We're already overburdening some of the players up there. Brennan will get his minutes."

Spurs will be looking to bounce back from a disappointing 6-3 loss at home to leaders Liverpool on Sunday, which left the north London outfit 11th in the standings and eight points behind fourth-placed Forest.

With the club struggling in the

league and still involved in both the Europa League and League Cup, Postecoglou said the squad would need to be reinforced in the winter transfer window.

"We will be short in a couple of areas and we are going to need a boost, but January is a bit tricky in terms of what sort of players you can bring in," he added.



Brennan Johnson

"For us, ideally - and for any club I guess - it would be people that are going to make you

stronger. But I think the fact that we're in the League Cup semi-finals, we've still got Europe, we're in the FA Cup, we're in all competitions - it's not like our schedule will ease up at any stage.

"So, it makes sense to try and reinforce but where and what number we will sort of have to wait and see."

Postecoglou also said the Spurs squad had no new absences, adding: "Destiny (Udogie) was on the bench (against Liverpool) but wasn't 100% quite right and should be right. (Rodrigo) Bentancur is available after his suspension. That's kind of it for now."

Fernandez finding his feet at Chelsea



Enzo Fernandez

London, England - Chelsea midfielder Enzo Fernandez struggled to live up to his hefty price tag following his arrival at the club in January last year but the Argentine says his recent upturn in form is down to developing a good understanding with coach Enzo Maresca.

Fernandez, who cost Chelsea 106 million pounds (\$132 million), started six of their first seven league matches this season but failed to impress and was dropped to the bench in place of Romeo Lavia.

"When I arrived it was very difficult, the first year and a half here: change of coaches, the club wasn't doing well, personal injuries," Fernández told ESPN in an interview published on Monday.

Fernández, 23, said he never felt the pressure from the price tag that took him to Chelsea.

"It didn't affect me," he said. "I tried to take it responsibly, with enjoyment, without pressure. I was not satisfied with what I had been showing,

then I got injured, many adverse things happened, I tried to move forward but today I feel very good, as does the team and we hope to continue on this path."

Since his return to the side last month Fernandez has looked revitalised, bagging three goals and four assists in seven Premier League games and helping Chelsea climb to second.

"I learned the position in which I had to play, over time I got the idea of what the coach wanted," Fernandez said. "He (Maresca) explained to me what he wanted and I was getting the concept, reading the games. There is still a long way to go."

"On a personal level I have been feeling very good. The team has shown a very strong character, always working and with humility and showing that great things can be achieved. There is still a long way to go."

Chelsea next host London rivals Fulham on Thursday before travelling to face Ipswich Town on December 30.



Brazilian Oscar returns to Sao Paulo

Sao Paulo, Brazil - Former Chelsea midfielder Oscar will return to his former club Sao Paulo on a three-year contract, the Brazilian Serie A side said on Tuesday.

Oscar, who made 48 appearances for Brazil's national team between 2011 and 2016, spent the last eight seasons with Shanghai Port, winning the Chinese Super League title three times.

"I'm happy to be back in Brazil and to be able to play for Sao Paulo, which is the club where I started out, where I made my base and where I grew up," the 33-year-old said in a statement.

Oscar scored 38 goals for Chelsea and lifted the Premier League, League Cup and Europa League trophies during his four-and-a-half-year spell.

'Haaland not to blame for City's poor run'

Manchester, England - Manchester City's dismal run of form, with one win in eight Premier League games, is down to the whole team and not one player, manager Pep Guardiola said on Tuesday, with struggling striker Erling Haaland not to blame.

City's current streak, which leaves the champions seventh in the standings and 12 points off leaders Liverpool, coincides with Haaland scoring just twice, after the Norwegian netted 10 times in their opening five games.

"It's about us, it's not just about one player," Guardiola told a press conference ahead of



Pep Guardiola (R) with Erling Haaland

Thursday's game with Everton. "So when in the past we scored goals and Erling was so prolific in helping us, it's because

of the team. And when you have problems at the back, in the middle, it's for everyone. If it was just one player, the reason why, it

would be easy. It's not about that. Erling is so important for us, will be so important for us, has been, and we try to do the things better, to use him better."

"The reason why is this one and this one and this one. It is about us, about everyone. The guys are running more than ever. Many little details and big details make us not as good as we were."

Guardiola is still uncertain if John Stones, Matheus Nunes or Ederson will be fit when City host Everton, and while he was unable to pinpoint a single reason for their poor run, he was optimistic of a return to form.

Struggling Valencia appoint Corberan as coach

Valencia, Spain - Valencia have named Carlos Corberan as head coach on a two-and-a-half year deal following the Spaniard's departure from West Bromwich Albion, the struggling LaLiga club said.

Corberan spent three years at Leeds United as their Under-23 coach and a member of Marcelo Bielsa's backroom staff, before becoming Hudders-



Carlos Corberan

field Town manager in 2020. The 41-year-old, who has since coached Olympiakos Piraeus and West Brom, also previously played for Valencia's youth team. "Carlos Corberan becomes the new Valencia CF coach until 2027," Valencia said in a statement on Tuesday. "The club has informed West Bromwich Albion FC of the execution of the exit option stipu-

lated in his contract to leave the English club."

Corberan replaces Ruben Baraja, who was sacked on Monday with Valencia second from bottom in the standings on 12 points with only two wins in 17 league games and four points from the safety zone.

Valencia next play second-placed Real Madrid at home on January 3.



14

APPLES APPEAL

The latest trend of slicing a whole vegetable or fruit has embraced apple



15

IN TOWN

Muscat Nights Festival begins over seven locations for the first time



16

ENTERTAINMENT

A peek into tinsel town, in Hollywood and Bollywood

Mohammed Taha

With a passion for preserving Oman’s cultural identity and promoting its tourism, Sami al Hanai has documented thousands of images that tell the story of the nation’s heritage, breathtaking landscapes, and the vibrant daily lives of its people. His photography stands as a testament to Oman’s rich history, offering viewers a glimpse into its castles, harvest seasons, and natural wonders such as the roses of Green Mountain.

Hanai’s journey into photography began in his childhood, fuelled by an innate curiosity for documenting life and culture.

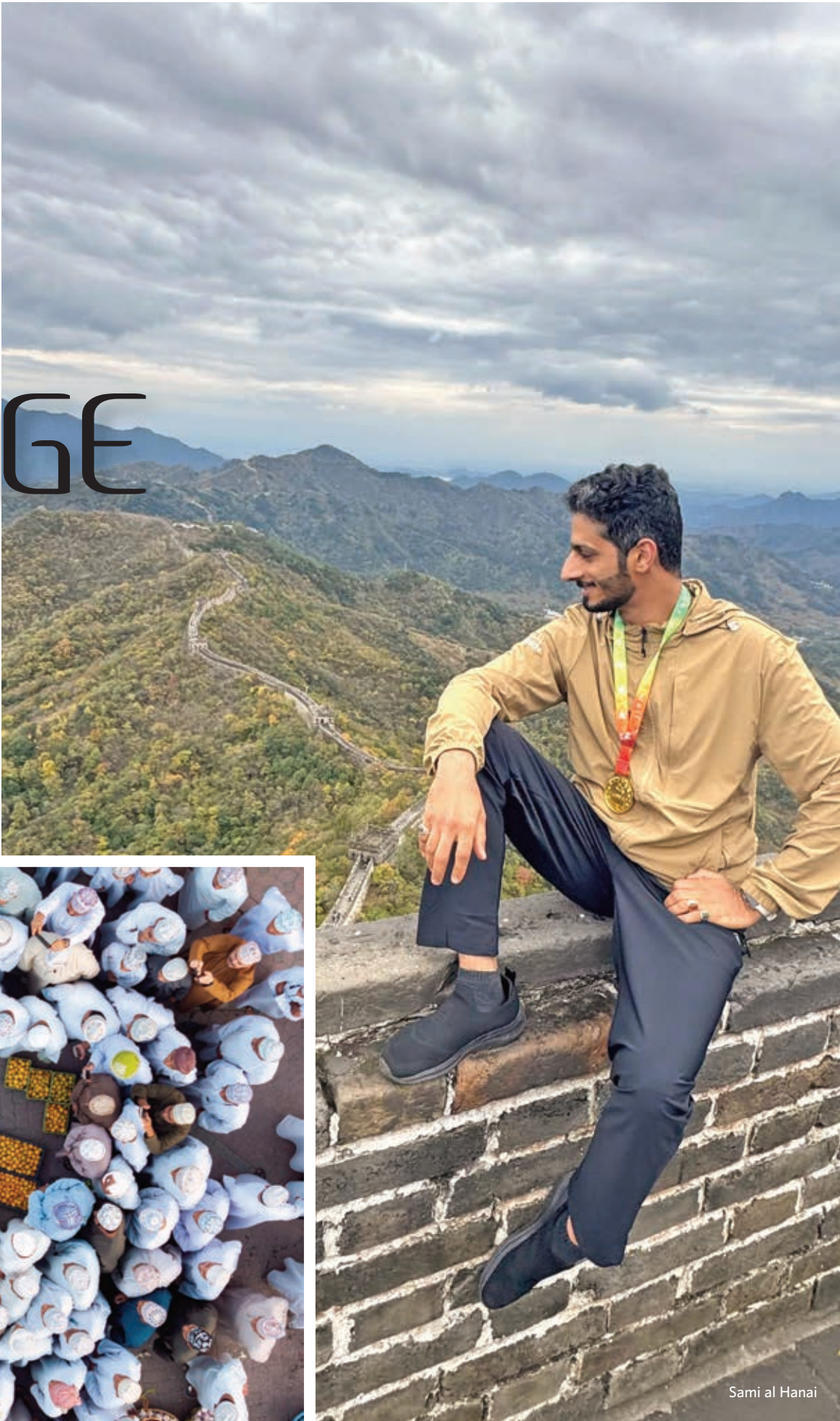
“I have always loved photography,” he shared in an interview with *Muscat Daily*. “Since childhood, I’ve been passionate about documenting people’s lives and culture. I joined the Photographic Society of Oman in 2014, and since then, I’ve focused on capturing images that carry a purposeful message to help society grow and prosper.”

His dedication to his craft has not gone unnoticed. Hanai’s photographs have graced the pages of prestigious publications, including National Geographic Abu Dhabi, where his striking visuals have highlighted Oman’s unique charm. “My photographs reflect the beauty of Oman and its people,” Hanai explained. “It’s my way of promoting Oman’s tourism and showcasing the authenticity of our culture and customs.”

Expanding his creative horizons, Hanai recently ventured into the realm of short video production, achieving a significant milestone by winning the grand prize at the inaugural China-Oman Short

A LENS ON HERITAGE

Omani photographer **Sami al Hanai** has become a prominent figure in showcasing the beauty and traditions of the Sultanate through his lens



Sami al Hanai



My photographs reflect the beauty of Oman and its people. **It’s my way of promoting Omani tourism and showcasing the authenticity of our culture and customs**

Sami al Hanai

Video Competition held in Muscat in December 2024. Organised by BGP Oil and Gas Services in collaboration with the Chinese Arabic Channel, the competition commemorated the 20th anniversary of the China-Arab Cooperation Forum.

It drew participants from Oman and China, with 147 entries submitted across themes such as culture, life, tourism, trade, and economy.

Hanai’s winning entry, titled ‘He Who Has Not Reached the Great Wall of China Is Not Brave’, chronicled his journey to China in October 2024. The short film captured iconic Chinese landmarks, such as the Great Wall, while offering a glimpse into Chinese traditions like tea preparation and the renowned culinary delight, Peking duck. Through this visual narrative, Hanai celebrated the shared cultural ties between Oman and China. “The video is a reflection of my travels, culture, and the shared connections between Oman and China,” he noted.

The 5-minute film not only earned him the top accolade but also underscored the importance of cross-cultural exchange in his artistic journey. “This award is a great incentive for me to keep moving forward in this field. There’s no stopping,” he said with determination.

For Hanai, both photography and filmmaking serve as tools to celebrate Oman’s unparalleled beauty, rich traditions, and cultural diversity. “I use my work to preserve and promote Omani heritage, ensuring that future generations will appreciate the country’s diverse culture and landscapes,” he expressed.

Looking ahead, Hanai remains committed to his mission of supporting Oman through art. “I will continue to take pictures that promote Omani tourism and help support my country,” he affirmed. With his lens as his medium, Sami al Hanai continues to inspire and connect audiences across the world to the heart of Oman.



cook-up

SALAD MANIA

APPLES

Appeal

As far as viral recipes go, the latest trend of slicing a whole vegetable or fruit, adding it to a plastic quart container, tossing in some ingredients, shaking it up, and eating right from the container is the latest trend. But apples make their way in every trend



Goat cheese and apples

“Name a better pair than goat cheese and apples,” Grove writes in the caption of her TikTok video, where she builds an apple salad in a plastic quart container before shaking it up and digging in.

Ingredients

- One peeled and sliced apple
- Crumbled goat cheese
- Chopped honey-roasted pecans
- A handful of dried cranberries
- Raspberry poppyseed dressing

Method

She doesn’t give exact measurements, encouraging viewers to “measure with their hearts.” She then puts the lid on, shakes it up, and digs in.

More Apple Salad Combinations

It looks delicious, and what’s even better is that people are leaving suggestions in the comments for other apple and ingredient combinations. Here are a few:

- Granny Smith apple with onions, feta, dried cranberries, and pecans, topped with poppyseed dressing
- Caramel, caramel yogurt, white chocolate chips, and pecans
- Apples, peanut butter, soy sauce, chili crisp, and peanuts
- Pumpkin purée, Greek yogurt, cinnamon, and pecans
- Nutella, pecans, maple syrup, and chocolate chips
- Whipped cream cheese, ricotta, a little sugar, mini chocolate chips, and pistachios
- Salted caramel pretzel yogurt, chocolate chips, and peanuts



Apple Snicker Salad

Ingredients

- 1 (3.4 ounce) package instant butterscotch pudding mix
- 1 cup milk
- 1 (6 ounce) package whipped cream topping (such as Cool Whip®)
- 6 chocolate-coated caramel-peanut nougat candy bars (such as Snickers®), cut into bite-size pieces
- 3 Granny Smith apples - peeled, cored, and cut into bite-size pieces

2 tablespoons holiday jimmy sprinkles, plus extra for sprinkling on top

Method

Whisk butterscotch pudding mix into milk in a bowl until dissolved. Stir whipped cream topping into pudding mixture. Fold the candy bar pieces into the pudding mixture. Fold the apples into the pudding mixture.



Taffy Apple Salad

Ingredients

- 2 ½ cups miniature marshmallows
- 1 (15 ounce) can pineapple chunks - drained with juice reserved
- ½ cup white sugar
- 1 large egg, beaten
- 1 ½ tablespoons distilled white vinegar
- 1 tablespoon all-purpose flour
- 1 ½ cups roasted Spanish peanuts
- 1 (8 ounce) container frozen whipped topping, thawed
- 2 tart apples - peeled, cored and chopped

Method

Combine marshmallows and pineapple chunks in a medium bowl. Cover and refrigerate, 8 hours to overnight. Stir together reserved pineapple juice, sugar, beaten egg, vinegar, and flour in a small saucepan over medium-low heat. Cook and stir until sauce is thickened. Transfer to a second medium bowl; cover and refrigerate, 8 hours to overnight. Combine chilled marshmallow mixture and sauce in a large serving bowl. Stir in peanuts, whipped topping, and apples until well combined. Cover and refrigerate salad until serving time.

CLASSIFIEDS

SITUATION WANTED

Financial Controller/Sr. Accountant ACCA, CA Inter, MS Finance, 12 years Gulf experience seeks new opportunity. Ready to join immediately. NOC & D/L available. Mob # 77258382

Administration Executive, Post Graduate, 14 years experience in relevant field with accounts. Have Oman Driving License. Visa released. Immediately joining. E-mail: joby021@gmail.com Mob: 94415466

GM/Restaurant /Hotel /Outlet Manager; well qualified, 20 years experienced professional with valid Oman driving license seeks suitable job in Oman. Contact: 91989424

Indian, Production Manager 10 years GCC experience in facade industry with valid Oman driving licence looking for job. Immediate joining. Available in Sohar. Mob: 78026010



CLASSIFIED LISTINGS

MUSCAT DAILY offers a variety of classified listings for individuals and establishments:

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take a break

IN TOWN

Muscat Nights Festival 2024 begins in style



Muscat Nights Festival 2024 - organised by Muscat Municipality - began this week with a promise to offer a vibrant array of events and activities till January 21, 2025



Photos: V K Shafeer

Swiss Embassy celebrates ten years of ties



A gala reception was held by the Embassy of Switzerland to celebrate the Swiss National Day and the 10th anniversary of its relations with Oman with the participation of Swiss and Omani musicians



Photos: V K Shafeer

BOGGLER

A	T	S	R
R	A	R	V
K	R	I	E
S	E	F	A

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

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

TRIVIA QUIZ - FOR TEENS

1. What is the title of the Disney movie based on a Disney park ride that was re-released in July 2021?
A Space Mountain
B Jungle Cruise
C It's A Small World
D Big Thunder Mountain

2. Which word means inhaling and exhaling?
A Transpiration
B Perspiration
C Expiration
D Respiration

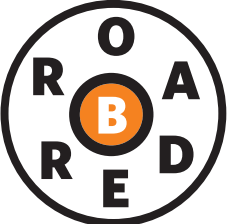
3. What's the name of the smartwatch launched by Apple in September 2018?



A Series 4
B iWrist
C ZenWatch 3
D Fenix 2

Answers
3. A
2. D
1. B

WORD BUILDER



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

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

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER

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

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE

**ARIES** MARCH 21-APRIL 19

The heavens are chock full of unpredictable energies at the moment, which is right up your alley. Does this mean you'll be inspired to be even more impulsive, eager, and enthusiastic than you usually are? Sure does, especially today! This could make it a bit tough for you to concentrate. Better give it a shot, though.

**TAURUS** APRIL 20-MAY 20

Talk about stressed. You've been worried about a loved one for what seems like forever, and you're not ready to quit just yet, especially because they're refusing to take your advice. The advice that they asked for, by the way. Well, you can only do so much. Keep that in mind, and don't feel bad if they do something you know won't help their cause. Either way, you'll know you tried your best.

**GEMINI** MAY 21-JUNE 21

A loved one has recently shared a very special cherished dream with you, and you're beginning to think you can make it happen for them. You're in the mood to pull out all the stops and get it done. Just be sure you are not doing yourself any financial damage. It's not worth the effort if you're going to be the one taking the brunt of the risk.

**CANCER** JUNE 22-JULY 22

Your loved ones probably won't know quite what to do with you today. Your mouth is running on high, and your temper is pretty hot too. This just isn't like you, but you know what? Maybe the notion of the something new has sparked something deep within you. You've been taking a lot of nonsense from a lot of people for far too long.

**LEO** JULY 23-AUGUST 22

You promised yourself and them that you'd never, ever say a word to anyone about it. And now you're tempted. You need to examine your reasons before you spill the beans. Are you doing it to help someone or to hurt them? Or are you just curious about what might happen if you do? If you're not satisfied with your answers, you'd better keep quiet.

**VIRGO** AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

It won't be easy to keep your opinions to yourself. In fact, it will probably be downright impossible. Fortunately, you're so witty to start with that no one will mind much as long as you go easy on the helpful hints. Remember, what you think of as caring could easily come off as critical if you're not careful. You can still say what you mean.

**LIBRA** SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

When was the last time you contemplated what your future was going to look like? Visualizing what you want isn't a waste of time. It's a smart way to plan. Don't assume that because things are going a certain way now that they'll continue in that direction forever. Every day offers you an opportunity to mix things up and move things around, and today presents you with an opportunity.

**SCORPIO** OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

Making a decision isn't always the same thing as coming to a conclusion. A recent choice you made might be coming back to haunt you when new information causes you to doubt your previous sentiment. You need to have the self-confidence to examine this new evidence to determine if you were wrong before. Your opinions are changeable, so you should feel comfortable changing them.

**SAGITTARIUS** NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

A difficult person who used to figure prominently in your life has learned to be a lot more flexible, so if they make overtures to come back into your life, you should seriously consider giving them a second chance. You know from personal experience that people can change, and your generous heart won't let you pass up the chance to see it proven yet again.

**CAPRICORN** DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

Contending with wild mood swings, either yours or other people's, could consume most of your energy, leaving you with little to show at the end of the day. Although stops and starts normally wouldn't bother you so much, you're feeling an intense urgency right now to push forward. Running in place leaves you frustrated and exhausted. Instead of fighting these conflicting forces, take control by making a plan of action.

**AQUARIUS** JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

You may get a call from someone you see infrequently, and it may well be a plea for help. Whether they're after advice, counsel, sympathetic company, or a couple of bucks, you'll definitely want to help, which means you'll definitely find a way to do that.

**PISCES** FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

A person from your past could make a surprise appearance today, and you should welcome them with open arms. No matter how things were left between you two, now they're better. Their ideas could push your ambitious plans forward toward action, so listen to what they want to do and try to help make it happen.



KIERAN CULKIN SAYS DIRECTOR CALLED HIM 'STUPID' DURING FIRST ACTING JOB

Kieran Culkin recalls a director taking extreme measures to get him to method act during his first gig by pelting him with insults. While appearing on the December 23 episode of Jason Bateman, Sean Hayes and Will Arnett's podcast Smartless, Culkin was asked by Arnett what his first professional acting experience was. Culkin shared that he was cast in a commercial at 6 years old but it wasn't a pleasant experience. The Succession alum explained that while he couldn't recall what exactly the ad was for, it involved "something to do with learning disabilities." The concept was, I'm standing in front of a chalkboard with chalk in my hand and I don't know how to solve the easy thing in front of me and the kids in the class are supposed to be calling me dummy and stupid and all that," he said. Culkin added that he has 'a distinct memory' of the director calling 'Action' and "going 'Dummy. Idiot. Stupid.'" "Even then, I'm thinking like, 'You know, I get it. I'm 6. Like, 'Stand here and look sad.' I'm not fucking method, I'm 6. What's wrong with you?," said the Emmy-winning actor. "Wow!," exclaimed Bateman in shock. Arnett also expressed his disbelief.



Amber Heard SPEAKS OUT ON SMEAR CAMPAIGN

Amber Heard is speaking out after Blake Lively filed a lengthy complaint against Justin Baldoni, her It Ends With Us co-star and the film's director, for sexual harassment and an alleged coordinated effort to destroy her reputation. As the complaint noted, and had previously been reported, last summer Baldoni hired Melissa Nathan, a veteran PR crisis manager. Nathan was the same person employed by Heard's ex-husband Johnny Depp during his high-profile defamation trial against the actress in 2022. At the time, she worked at Hiltzik Strategies but in October 2023 left the company and in June 2024 she launched her own firm. Heard gave a statement to NBC News reacting to the allegations.



RICHARD PERRY DIES AT 82

Richard Perry, a hitmaking record producer with a flair for both standards and contemporary sounds whose many successes included Carly Simon's *You're So Vain*, Rod Stewart's *The Great American Songbook* series and a Ringo Starr album featuring all four Beatles, died on Tuesday. He was 82. Perry, a recipient of a Grammys Trustee Award in 2015, died at a Los Angeles hospital after suffering cardiac arrest, friend Daphna Kastner said. "He maximized his time here," said Kastner, who called him a "father friend" and said he was godfather to her son. "He was generous, fun, sweet and made the world a better place. The world is a little less sweeter without him here. But it's a little bit sweeter in heaven." Perry was a onetime drummer, oboist and doo-wop singer who proved at home with a wide variety of musical styles, the rare producer to have No. 1 hits on the pop, R&B, dance and country charts. He was on hand for Harry Nilsson's *Without You* and The Pointer Sisters' *I'm So Excited*, Tiny Tim's novelty smash *Tiptoe Through the Tulips* and the Willie Nelson-Julio Iglesias lounge standard *To All the Girls I've Loved Before*. Perry was widely known as a 'musician's producer, treating artists like peers rather than vehicles for his own tastes.

Kim Kardashian covers 'Santa Baby'

Kim Kardashian released a cover of "Santa Baby" late Sunday night that was accompanied by a bizarre music video. The video finds Kardashian crawling through a house during what appears to be a Christmas party of some sort. Kardashian is wearing a blonde wig, a blue cardigan, pink leg warmers, high heels and beige shapewear (we're guessing that's her Skims brand). Among the many scenes featured include a woman dressed as Mary standing beside a donkey, a man dressed as an elf sitting on a kitchen counter eating out of a bowl, scantily clad women playing Twister, a person trimming a tree nearly bald, a woman swimming in a giant water tank and a man getting a haircut. There is also cash, lots and lots of cash (a man is seen counting money, another scene shows a person vacuuming up



money off the floor, yet another shows two people physically fighting as money is thrown about nearby). It ends with a shot of someone dressed as Santa Claus holding a videocamera in front of his face.

Baldwin's 'Rust' case is officially over

Almost six months after a Santa Fe judge dismissed the involuntary manslaughter case against Alec Baldwin in the Rust tragedy, the case is finally over. On Monday, the Santa Fe District Attorney's Office announced in a press release that special prosecutor Kari Morrissey withdrew the state's notice of appeal filed on Nov. 21. Had it moved forward, the appeal would have challenged the court's decision to dismiss the criminal charges against Baldwin in the death of cinematographer Halyna Hutchins. "Today's decision to dismiss the appeal is the final vindication of what Alec Baldwin and his attorneys have said from the beginning - this was an unspeakable tragedy but Alec Baldwin committed no crime," his attorneys, Luke Nikas and Alex Spiro, said in a joint statement.

WHATS ON

MUFASA: THE LION KING

Simba, having become king of the Pride Lands, is determined for his cub to follow in his paw prints while the origins of his late father Mufasa are explored.



Genre: Animation
Starring: Seth Rogen, Aaron Pierre, Billy Eichner
Language: English/Arabic

G-DRAGON AND HAN SO-HEE DATING RUMORS SHUT DOWN BY AGENCIES

OMG OMG OMG!! Did you hear about the rumors with G-Dragon and Han So-hee?!? Like, I was totally freaking out when I saw it because they are both SO AMAZING!! But then their agencies said it's NOT TRUE! Like, at all!! I mean, the whole thing started because of some photos and this 'Lovestagram' thing—like, people thought they were dropping secret hints. I'll admit, I was kinda curious too! But their agencies were like, "Nope, not even friends." So I guess that clears it up... for now??



Tbh, I'm just SO EXCITED for what they're working on!! GD the GOAT, is gonna be in this new show called 'Good Day,' and I just KNOW he's gonna slay it, like always. And Han So-hee, the Queen that she is, will star in a drama about stealing gold bars with Jeon Jong-seo? ICONIC DUO ALERT. Anyway, I guess the rumors are fun to talk about, but can we just agree that they're both absolute LEGENDS no matter what? Stan forever! What do you think of their pairing?



Why is Squid Game season 2 so highly anticipated?

Squid Game has become a global phenomenon, captivating millions with its unique and shocking concept. A deadly competition disguised as children's games, where contestants gamble their lives for a chance at a better future, is a narrative unlike any other. The show's brutal social commentary on inequality, survival, and human desperation has struck a chord worldwide. It isn't just a show - it's an addictive and thought-provoking experience that blends childhood innocence with horrifying violence, leaving viewers on the edge of their seats. What sets Squid Game apart are its unforgettable characters. From the desperate Seong Gi-hun to the enigmatic Front Man, the emotional depth of each character draws viewers in. The series isn't just about survival; it's about connecting with people, fearing their fate, and hoping for their redemption. Its global appeal has made it more than just a Netflix hit - it's a cultural movement, sparking



conversations and influencing fashion worldwide. Who can forget the iconic moment when BTS V dressed up as a guard of Squid game dressed in red with the mask on? The anticipation for Squid Game 2 is through the roof for several reasons. The cliffhanger ending left key questions unanswered, especially about Gi-hun's fate and the organisation behind the games. Fans are eager to dive deeper into this dark universe,

discovering new twists and expanding the world of Squid Game. The promise of more intense games, shocking revelations, and character development makes the second season a must-watch event. Squid Game 2 has big shoes to fill, but with its immense success, there's no doubt the next season will be just as thrilling, if not more. The world can't wait to see what happens next in this twisted, addictive series.

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