

BRITISH RIDER ADAM YATES RETAINS TOUR OF OMAN TITLE



The 14th Tour of Oman concluded on the iconic climb of Jabal Akhdar on Wednesday. After an entertaining battle with French duo David Gaudu (Groupama-FDJ) and Valentin Paret-Peintre (left) of Soudal Quick-Step, UAE Team Emirates-XRG's Adam Yates finished second behind Paret-Peintre on the fifth and final stage of the Tour of Oman atop Jabal Akhdhar. With the result, Briton Yates moved into the leader's jersey and successfully retained his Tour of Oman title

Jordan, Egypt push for unified stance on Gaza

Amman, Jordan - An Arab, Egyptian and Palestinian plan is in place to rebuild Gaza without displacing its residents, Jordan's prime minister said.

Jaafar Hassan said, "Our position is clear and firm regarding displacement. No settlement, no displacement, and no solutions at the expense of Jordan... The solution to the Palestinian issue remains in Palestine."

Hassan added that Jordan is working with Egypt and Arab brothers to formulate a unified Arab position regarding the reconstruction of Gaza, and will not act unilaterally on issues related to the future of Palestine and the region.

Ayman Safadi, Jordan's foreign minister, stressed that Jordan's position is based on the principle that "Jordan is for Jordanians, and Palestine is for Palestinians".

"We have our vision and Trump has his," Safadi said. "We believe Gaza can be rebuilt without displacing its residents."

He stressed that Jordan's position was clear, "work toward a just and comprehensive peace without displacing Palestinians".

Egypt has said it is working on a 'comprehensive vision' for the reconstruction of the war-torn Gaza Strip that guarantees Palestinians the right to stay on their land, unlike the proposal put forward by US President Donald Trump.

The Egyptian foreign ministry said it hoped to co-operate with the Trump administration to reach "a just settlement of the Palestinian cause".

"Egypt affirms its intention to present a comprehensive vision for the reconstruction of the Gaza Strip, in a manner that ensures the Palestinian people stay on their land, and in line with the



\$53bn needed to rebuild Gaza Strip: UN

New York, US - A United Nations report has estimated that rebuilding the Gaza Strip, devastated by the ongoing war between Israel and Hamas, will require US\$53.1bn. Of this, US\$20.5bn will be essential in the first three years to address urgent recovery and reconstruction needs.

The report, requested by the UN General Assembly, outlines a phased approach for reconstruction, covering short, medium, and long-term goals. It highlights that over 60% of Gaza's housing has been destroyed since the conflict erupted in October 2023. The housing sector alone accounts for US\$15.2bn, or 30% of the total estimated costs.

Critical areas requiring funding include trade and industry (US\$6.9bn), healthcare (US\$6.9bn), agriculture (US\$4.2bn), and education (US\$2.6bn). Additionally, US\$1.9bn is allocated for environmental cleanup, addressing hazards such as unexploded ordnance and asbestos in the rubble.

H M receives messages from Kyrgyz President, PM

Muscat - His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has received two written messages from President Sadyr Japarov of the Kyrgyz Republic and Adylbek Kasyimiyev, Prime Minister of Kyrgyzstan dealing with the bilateral relations with that country.

The messages were received by Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al-Busaidi, Foreign Minister, when he received at the Foreign Ministry on Wednesday Jeenbek Kulubaev, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Kyrgyzstan.

During the meeting, the two sides discussed the bilateral relations between them and ways to enhance them in all areas of common interest, especially in the fields of mining, renewable energy, food security, as well as investment sector.

The two ministers discussed the latest regional and international developments. They underlined the consensus of their countries' positions calling for the adoption of peaceful solutions to issues and conflicts in a manner that can enhance security and stability and spread the values of harmony among countries.

Oman explores refuse-derived fuel to reduce its carbon footprint

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman Environmental Services Holding Company (be'ah) has signed a memorandum of cooperation with Raysut Cement Company and Germany's MVW Lechtenberg & Partner to explore the feasibility of producing refuse-derived fuel (RDF) in the sultanate.

The project aims to develop a sustainable business model for all stakeholders, promote alternative

energy in heavy industries, reduce waste, and support Oman's environmental sustainability goals. The agreement was signed under the patronage of Dr Mansour bin Talib al Hinai, Chairman of the Authority for Public Services Regulation.

Kamil bin Ahmed al Lawati, Vice President of Business Development at be'ah, stated that the initiative represents a strategic move towards sustainability in Oman's cement sector.

"This project will help reduce



reliance on fossil fuels and lower the sector's carbon footprint, enhancing its competitiveness locally and regionally," he said.

Hilal bin Saif al Dhamri, CEO of Raysut Cement, highlighted the collaboration's importance. "This project underscores the partnership between be'ah and Raysut Cement in advancing the circular economy and supporting Oman's efforts to achieve carbon neutrality," he noted.

Dirk Lechtenberg, CEO of MVW Lechtenberg & Partner, which specialises in alternative fuels for the cement and related industries, emphasised the innovative approach of the initiative.

"The project offers a modern model for waste utilisation by converting it into clean energy sources, aligning with global trends towards a low-carbon economy," he said.

The RDF project is expected to revolutionise waste management in Oman, transforming it into a key driver of environmental sustainability and economic development. By leveraging waste as an energy resource, the initiative reflects Oman's commitment to reducing its carbon footprint.

Indian Ocean Conference on Sunday

Muscat - The eighth edition of the Indian Ocean Conference (IOC) will begin under the theme 'Voyage to New Horizons of Maritime Partnership', in Muscat on Sunday.

The two-day event, to be organised by Oman's Foreign Ministry and India Foundation, will bring together ministers and officials from 60 countries and international organisations linked to the Indian Ocean.

During a press conference, H E Sheikh Khalifa bin Ali al Harthy, Undersecretary for Political Affairs in the Foreign Ministry, highlighted the conference's focus on enhancing economic and security cooperation among Indian Ocean nations and other countries with interests in the region. He emphasised Oman's prominent role in regional maritime issues, adding "Oman has been a founding member of the Indian Ocean Community since its establishment in 1997 and has hosted numerous conferences on maritime security and the blue economy."

The conference aims to foster partnerships, improve trade routes, sustain ocean resources, and strengthen maritime security. Oman will showcase its advanced port infrastructure and capabilities to attract global investment.

Oman seeks Unesco recognition for Arabian horse breeding



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Wakan Village in full bloom, MHT invites visitors



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Masterclasses on French culinary techniques at NHI

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman is working on a joint submission to include Arabian horse breeding on Unesco's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, a step aimed at safeguarding this centuries-old tradition.

The Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Youth hosted a workshop titled 'Arabian Horse Breeding: Authentic Legacy and Sustainable Vision' on Wednesday. The event brought together researchers, practitioners, and representatives from government and private sectors to discuss the cultural significance and future of Arabian horse breeding



in Oman. Attendees also reviewed the draft file to be submitted to Unesco.

Sheikh Hamad bin Salem al Balushi, Board Member of the Oman Equestrian Federation,

opened the discussions with a presentation on the historical roots of Arabian horses in Oman. He highlighted their deep connection to the region's heritage, including the celebrated Zad al Rikib, a renowned ancestral horse of Oman. Sheikh Hamad also spoke about Oman's tradition of gifting Arabian horses to other nations, which has helped preserve this cultural legacy.

Suleiman bin Ali al Hattali from the Royal Cavalry underscored the importance of maintaining purebred Arabian horse lineages. He discussed efforts to document these breeds, promote breeding culture, and support preservation through publications and initiatives led by the

Royal Cavalry.

Dr Sand bin Saif al Sunaidi concluded the session by addressing the cultural and social role of Arabian horses in Oman. "Arabian horses are symbols of pride, courage, and community," he said, emphasising their significance as sources of income and cohesion in Omani society. He also spoke about practical aspects of horse care, training, and building trust between horse and owner. The workshop marked a key milestone in Oman's efforts to gain Unesco recognition for Arabian horse breeding. If successful, the listing will highlight the global importance of this tradition and ensure its preservation for generations to come.



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Development Bank supports SMEs with RO6.1mn in loans

Our Correspondent
Musandam

The Development Bank has reinforced its role in fostering entrepreneurship and small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Musandam, contributing to Oman Vision 2040's goals of economic diversification and strengthening local economies.

By the end of 2024, the bank had provided over RO6.1mn in financing across 1,192 loans, prioritising projects that leverage Musandam's unique resources and competitive advantages.

According to the bank, the fisheries sector received the largest share of financing, with RO4.9mn disbursed through 1,032 loans. The tourism sector followed with RO412,900 allocated to 23 loans, while the agriculture and livestock sector secured RO345,000 for 29 loans.

The service sector received RO222,000 for 26 loans, and the



manufacturing sector was allocated RO192,000 for 76 loans. The education sector, though a smaller focus, received RO59,000 through six loans.

During a meeting at the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry's (OCCI) Musandam branch on Wednesday, the bank reviewed its lending activities for 2024. The session, chaired by

Mahmoud bin Abdullah al Awini, Secretary-General of the Ministry of Finance and Chairman of the Development Bank's Board, and attended by the bank's CEO, Hussein bin Ali al Lawati, provided a platform for local business owners and entrepreneurs to share feedback and discuss financing needs.

Raed bin Mohammed al

Shehi, a member of the OCCI Board and head of its Musandam branch, highlighted the bank's pivotal role in financing economic projects that support self-sufficiency and job creation for citizens. "The Development Bank encourages entrepreneurs to launch their projects while contributing to the local economy. Discussions during the meeting

focused on enhancing development lending to meet future requirements and offering greater support to SMEs," he said.

The Development Bank's efforts aim to sustain and grow Musandam's economy by aligning its initiatives with the needs of entrepreneurs and SMEs, paving the way for long-term development.

Study highlights decline of Steppe Eagle in Oman

Our Correspondent
Salalah

A study by the Environment Authority (EA) has revealed a concerning decline in the population of the endangered Steppe Eagle (*Aquila nipalensis*), citing habitat loss, poaching, pollution, poisoning, and electrocution from power lines as key threats.

The research, conducted by EA's Office for Conservation of Environment, focused on challenges faced by the species in Oman, particularly in Dhofar governorate, a key migration route for the Steppe Eagle.

Mohammed bin



disposal sites and evaluated the risks posed by their dependence on these areas. Researchers assessed three waste disposal sites in Dhofar, noting a peak of 1,122 Steppe Eagles in 2019. However, data collected during the winter seasons between 2018 and 2022 showed a decline in their numbers, raising concerns about their future in the region.

The findings underscore the urgent need for conservation strategies, including better waste management practices, measures to reduce poisoning and electrocution risks, and efforts to mitigate environmental pollution.

The Environment Authority hopes the study will guide the development of policies to protect the Steppe Eagle and other endangered species in Oman. "Strengthening conservation policies and addressing environmental challenges are critical steps to ensuring the survival of this majestic bird," said Habis.

The study serves as a call for action to safeguard the region's biodiversity.

Oman to host 41st Gulf Club Handball Championship

Muscat - The 41st Gulf Club Handball Championship will commence on Saturday in Muscat, with the opening ceremony taking place under the patronage of H H Sayyid Mohammed bin Salim al Said.

The opening ceremony will feature attendance of distinguished guests, including Moosa al Balushi, Chairman of the Oman Handball Association (OHA), and Jihad al Shaikh, chairman of the organising committee, alongside other officials.

Sheikh said, "Preparations for the tournament have been ongoing, with all logistical arrangements such as hotel bookings, transportation, and stadium preparations finalised."

As the tournament approaches, Oman and Seeb clubs



are wrapping up their final preparations. Oman Club recently concluded an external training camp in Bahrain, securing two victories against Al Ahli Bahrain (32-25) and Al Dair Bahrain (33-30). These matches provided head coach Ibrahim Bouderbali with a key opportunity to evaluate his squad, test different strategies, and fine-tune tactics ahead of

the competition.

"Our goal is to represent Oman in the best possible way and give our maximum effort in every match. Despite some injuries, we have a talented squad ready to step up when needed. Our focus is on maintaining high morale and delivering strong performances," said Bouderbali.

Oman Club boosted their

squad by signing three professional players - Ali bin Abdullah (Bahrain), Qam bin Mohammed (Bahrain) and Mohamed Ihab Brouis (Algeria).

Meanwhile, Seeb Club has intensified its training schedule with a rigorous two-session daily programme, overseen by national coach Nabil al Balushi. The team aims to build on its strong

domestic league form, where it currently holds second place.

Seeb has also reinforced its squad with the signings of Bahraini player Ahmed Redha and Muhannad Al Zarafi from Ahli Sidab.

The championship will have eight teams, divided into two groups. Group A features Al Rayyan (Qatar), Al Najma (Bahrain), Al Noor (Saudi Arabia) and Seeb (Oman) while group B comprises Oman Club (Oman), Kuwait SC (Kuwait), Dibba al Hisn (UAE) and Al Arab (Qatar).

The official technical meeting ahead of the championship is scheduled on Friday. The session will finalise tournament regulations, team rosters, and jersey colours in preparation for the competition.

Central blood bank calls for blood, plasma donations

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Department of Blood Bank Services (DBBS) issued an urgent appeal for blood and plasma donors, emphasising the critical need for specific blood types.

In a statement, the blood bank said that 140 blood donors are needed daily to maintain adequate supply levels. Due to a seasonal decline in donations, there is a shortage of plasma from

donors with A+ and AB+ blood types. "We urge A+ and AB+ donors to step forward and donate plasma. Your contribution can save lives in just a few minutes," the statement reads.

The Central Blood Bank in Bausher is open for blood donations from Saturday to Thursday between 8am and 8pm and on Fridays from 8am to 2pm.

Donors have been urged to visit and make a life-saving impact today.

MHT invites visitors to explore S Batinah's Wakan Village in full bloom

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MHT) has invited citizens and residents to visit Wakan Village in South Batinah to witness the beauty of the apricot blossom season, which runs from mid-February to March.

This period offers visitors a chance to experience the village



at its most vibrant, with apricot trees in full bloom.

Apricot flowers mark the start of the season, followed by a two-week harvest period. Fresh apricots are sold at Nakhal souq and other local markets in South Batinah.

In a statement, the ministry said that Wakan Village, now in full bloom, provides visitors with a unique opportunity to capture the scenic beauty and enjoy its

serene atmosphere.

Wakan Village has gained increasing popularity as a tourist destination, welcoming over 32,000 visitors in 2023 from diverse nationalities. Known for its cool climate, similar to that of Jabal Akhdar, and stunning mountain landscapes, the village remains favourite for domestic and international tourists, particularly during the winter months.

The village is home to a vari-

ety of seasonal crops, including grapes, garlic, pomegranates, figs, bergamot oranges, peaches, and berries. Its agricultural bounty is sustained by the Falaj al Aqar, Falaj al Mafra, and Falaj al Wasta'a irrigation systems, which originate from the surrounding mountain tops.

Nearby Wadi Mistal, in the wilayat of Nakhal, also attracts visitors with its lush green oases and abundant agricultural pro-

duce, including apricots and mountain berries. Villages such as Al Qoura, Al Hajjar, Misfat Al Qoura, Al Shis, and Al Aqar contribute to the region's agricultural charm and are popular among tourists seeking authentic rural experiences.

With its cool weather, breathtaking natural beauty, and vibrant agricultural life, Wakan Village is one of Oman's must-visit destinations.

76 tonnes of abalone caught in ten days

Our Correspondent
Salalah

The 2024 Abalone Stock Survey conducted by the Fisheries Research Centre at the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources (MAFWR) has revealed encouraging signs of recovery in the size and abundance of the mollusk in the sultanate.

For the first time, drones were deployed to monitor and guide abalone fisheries, a step towards digital transformation that also streamlined the licence application process for the 2024 season.

During the 2024 abalone season, 76 tonnes of abalone were harvested over ten fishing days in November, compared to 149



tonnes harvested over 30 days during the 2011 season. The ministry had temporarily lifted a four-year ban on abalone fishing to allow for this limited harvest.

With abalone stocks under pressure, the ministry periodically imposes ban to protect the resource. Fishing and trading were prohibited from 2020 to 2023, after a two-year ban that had been lifted briefly in 2019.

In 2024, 2,369 fishing licences were issued, a significant reduction from the 4,418 licences issued in 2011.

Eng Muslim Salem Rafeet, Assistant Director General of Fisheries in Dhofar, informed that the wilayat of Sadah accounted for the bulk of the production, contributing 93.5% of the total output, with Mirbat

producing the remaining 6.5%.

To ensure sustainable practices, the ministry regulates fishing sizes, restricts fishing seasons, and sets stringent guidelines for obtaining licences. Awareness campaigns on social media have also been running to encourage conservation across all age groups.

A total of 2,459 fishermen met the ministry's requirements for diving, and 2,475 licences were issued for the 2024 season. Among these, Mirbat led with 47% of the licences, followed by Sadah with 42%, Salalah with 7%, and Taqah with 1%. Other regions, including Shalim, Al Halaniyat Islands, Dhalkhout, and Rakhyyut, accounted for the remaining 1.1%.

In addition, 106 licences were

issued for the preparation, storage, and trading of abalone, with 11 approved centres facilitating trade during the season.

Omani abalone, unique to the southern coastline of Oman, is the only species of its kind in the Middle East. It plays a significant role in the local economy, providing livelihoods for many and serving as a valuable export.

Locally, abalone fetches an average price of RO45 per kilogram, while globally it can command prices as high as RO200/kg (as of 2019).

The ministry remains committed to safeguarding this valuable resource, balancing conservation efforts with economic benefits to ensure long-term sustainability in abalone fisheries.

OCCI unveils 14 initiatives to boost businesses, economic diversification

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) announced 14 initiatives on Wednesday aimed at enhancing the business environment and promoting economic diversification across the governorates, in line with Oman Vision 2040.

The initiatives were developed in collaboration with the Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up Unit as part of a strategic development cycle. The announcement was made during the closing ceremony of a three-day workshop on integrated economic development attended by senior government officials, OCCI board members, and sectoral committee heads.

The initiatives focus on three key pillars: Improving the business environment, fostering economic partnerships in the governorates, and broadening the scope of economic diversification. Six initiatives fall under the first pillar, while the second and third pillars each include four initiatives.



The initiatives focus on 3 key pillars: Improving the business environment, fostering partnerships, and broadening the scope of economic diversification

Zakaria bin Abdullah al Saadi, CEO of OCCI, stated that a detailed implementation plan has been developed in coordination with the Oman Vision 2040 Follow-up Unit to ensure these initiatives deliver the desired impact. "This structured approach is aimed at strengthening the chamber's role in supporting the private sector," he said.

Faisal bin Abdullah al Rawas, Chairman of the OCCI Board of

Directors, emphasised the chamber's commitment to reinforcing the private sector's role in the national economy.

"These initiatives reflect a collaborative effort involving experts, business owners, and stakeholders to align with Oman Vision 2040's sustainable economic growth targets," he said.

Saadi added that the development cycle introduced a new collaborative framework between

the public and private sectors. He noted that the initiatives were crafted to prioritise national economic growth and sustainability, ensuring alignment with Oman's strategic goals.

The OCCI's efforts aim to foster stronger partnerships and provide a supportive environment for businesses to thrive, further contributing to the diversification and resilience of Oman's economy.

TRA to conduct field visits for telecom service assessments

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA) has announced its plan to conduct extensive field visits in 2025 as part of its efforts to improve the quality of telecommunications services in Oman.

The visits will evaluate key performance indicators such as signal strength, network coverage, data speed, voice call quality, and the performance of social media applications.

TRA's assessment plan includes visits to centres in all governorates, five major tourist destinations - Jabal al Sharqi (Hat), Al Ashkhara, Harat al Aqar, Jabal Shams, and Dhofar - as well as 15 key roads such as the Muscat Expressway, Quriyat-Sur Road, and Nizwa-Ibri Road. Airports in Muscat, Suhar and Duqm, along with industrial cities in Sur and Ibri, will also be assessed.

Among the parameters to be reviewed are video streaming speed, quality, and access time



for popular applications, data upload/download speeds, voice call clarity, and 4G/5G signal coverage. The percentage of failed calls will also be monitored.

Field visits by the TRA have seen a significant rise in recent years, with a 172% increase recorded in 2024 compared to 2023. A further 197% increase in such visits is anticipated in 2025.

The results of these assessments will be made public through the TRA's social media platforms and its official website, ensuring transparency and fostering improvements in the telecom sector.

Oman to host regional summit on higher education partnerships

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman will host the second edition of the ICEF Middle East Scholarship and Partnership Summit 2025, showcasing the country's commitment to advancing higher education and fostering regional and international collaboration.

The two-day event, organised by the Ministry of Higher Education, Scientific Research and Innovation (MoHERI), begins on February 16 and aims to strengthen academic ties across the Gulf and beyond.

The summit will bring together officials, decision-makers, and stakeholders from Gulf Cooperation Council countries, along with representatives from over 60 universities and international organisations. The discussions will focus on enhancing scholarship programmes, student exchange initiatives, and research partnerships while addressing the challenges faced by higher education institutions in aligning their programmes with the demands of the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

Yahya bin Salam al Mandhari, Director General of Scholarships at MoHERI, said the forum provides a valuable opportunity to



exchange experiences and ideas. "This international forum will address challenges in training and qualifying national cadres, developing sustainable scholarship programmes, and strengthening knowledge and scientific relations between educational authorities in the Gulf, Arab, and international countries."

The summit will also promote sustainable partnerships between government funding bodies and academic institutions aiming to attract international students. Discussions will emphasise the importance of international accreditation for universities and encourage collaboration with policymakers to improve scholarship initiatives.

Key activities include dialogue sessions, bilateral meetings, and workshops aimed at sharing

global best practices in higher education, science, and technology.

Officials from MoHERI, along with representatives from local and international institutions, will meet to discuss strategies for capacity building and cooperation.

The forum's agenda also aligns with Oman's broader goals of developing human capital and preparing national cadres to meet future challenges. It seeks to foster collaboration with higher education institutions worldwide, including through discussions linked to the NAFSA Global Conference.

The ICEF Middle East Summit underscores Oman's pivotal role in shaping the regional higher education landscape, enhancing academic ties, and preparing its workforce for global challenges.

TENDER NOTICE



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Tender No.	Tender Title	Tender Document Sales Start Date	Tender Document Sales End Date	Bid Submission Closing	Companies that are eligible to participate	Tender Document fee (R.O)
62/2025/MAFWR /HQ-9	Providing agricultural services on the Ministry's farms in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate	Monday 3/2/2025	Sunday 23/2/2025	Sunday 16/3/2025	Specialized companies registered with, Excellent, First Second, Third, fourth grades	(25/-) Omani riyals for local companies (10/-) Omani riyals for SMEs
69/2025/MAFWR /HQ-10	Construction of protection wall in the Al Shariyah (Al Aqah) area in Dibba Wilayat, Musandam Governorate	Tuesday 4/2/2025	Monday 24/2/2025	Sunday 16/3/2025	Specialized companies registered with fourth grades	(25/-) Omani riyals for local companies (10/-) Omani riyals for SMEs
74/2025/MAFWR /HQ-11	Construction of Recharge Dam at Dar Aljnoz at Jabal Alsorah in Wilayat Ibri, AL-Dhahirah Governorate	Wednesday 5/2/2025	Tuesday 25/2/2025	Monday 17/3/2025	Specialized companies registered with fourth grades	(25/-) Omani riyals for local companies (10/-) Omani riyals for SMEs

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TENDERS COMMITTEE
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INTERVIEW

MICHAEL EYLEY, DIRECTOR OF TRADE AND INVESTMENT, BRITISH EMBASSY MUSCAT

UK investment in Oman tops \$35bn, diversifying beyond oil and gas

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The United Kingdom remains the largest investor in Oman, accounting for over 50% of all Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) stock in the sultanate, according to the latest statistics from the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI). In an exclusive interview with *Muscat Daily*, Michael Eyley, Director of Trade and Investment at the British Embassy in Muscat, discusses the increasingly diversified nature of UK investment, how it is generating jobs across Oman, and its role in supporting Oman Vision 2040. This comes against the backdrop of ongoing UK-GCC Free Trade Agreement negotiations.

What are the current trends in the UK's investment in Oman, which sectors are seeing the most growth, and how does this align with Oman Vision 2040?

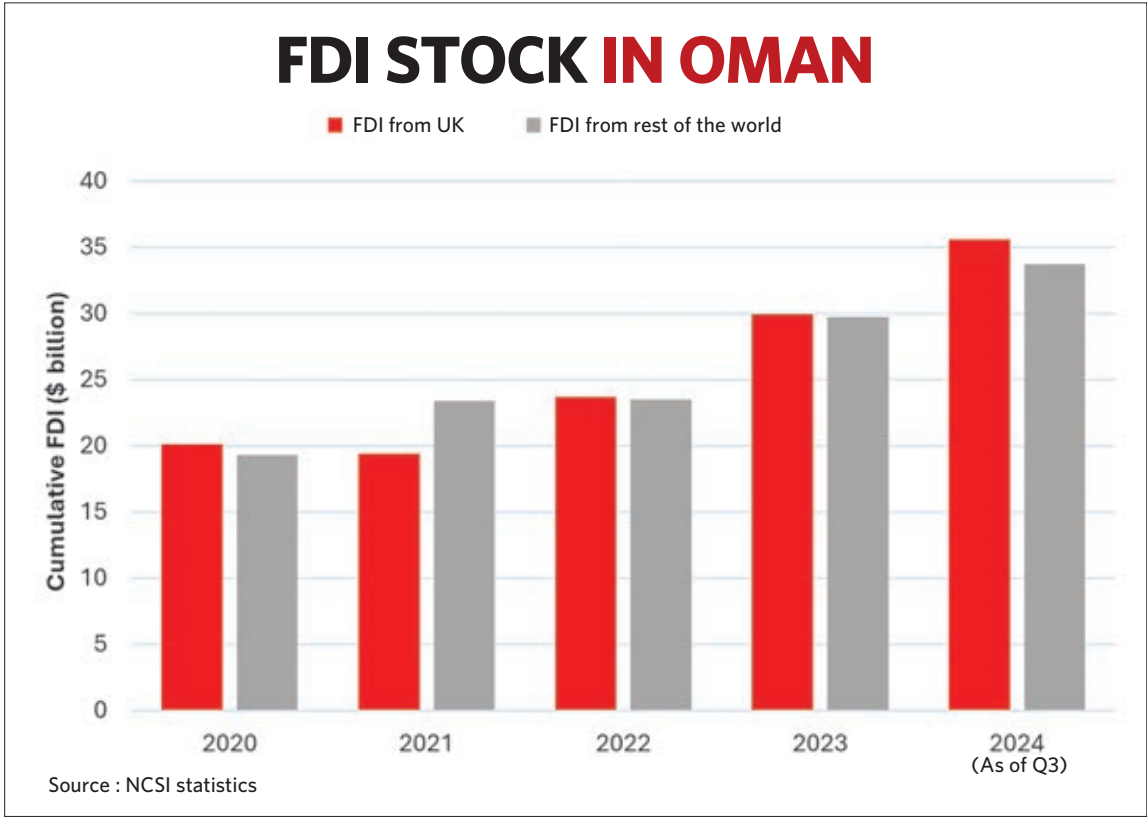
Firstly, thank you for giving me the opportunity to talk about how central investment, growth and jobs are to the UK-Oman relationship. It has been a personal privilege to experience Oman's traditions and growth over the last few years – and our shared prosperity has never been stronger. The key business statistic that I always start with is that the UK is the largest investor in Oman, accounting for over 50% of all FDI stock in the sultanate: the UK invests more in Oman than the rest of the world combined. This is now worth over \$35bn. Both statistics are huge – but I feel they do not communicate the full impact. There are three key trends I want to unpack: this investment is growing rapidly; it is diversifying away from oil and gas; and it is generating jobs across Oman in dynamic growth sectors.

On the first trend – investment growth – there is often a perception that UK investment in Oman is legacy oil and gas investment; but the latest Omani figures prove otherwise. UK FDI grew by \$5bn in the 12 months to September 2024; and since the UK and Oman signed a Sovereign Investment Partnership (SIP) in January 2022, UK FDI has grown by \$12bn, rising from \$23bn to the \$35bn. These are huge numbers: put another way, 17% of the total, all-time global FDI in Oman has come from just the UK in the last three years.



UK FDI in Oman grew by \$5bn in the 12 months to September 2024. Since the UK and Oman signed a Sovereign Investment Partnership in January 2022, UK FDI has grown by \$12bn, rising from \$23bn to \$35bn

Michael Eyley



to be fully implemented as projects scale up, but jobs were created before the first rial was invested. So even though current UK statistics look great – the future pipeline looks even better.

Beyond the investment areas you mention above, where else are UK companies showing interest in Oman?

For me this comes down to two areas: growing our people-to-people links, and supporting Oman's competitive advantages.

On people-to-people links, booming education and tourism are great examples. Everyone in Muscat will have seen the surge in British-branded schools opening in Oman post-COVID, often through partnerships between Omani entities and UK educational institutions. This builds on the significant, long-standing vocational and technical qualification links between Omani and UK institutions – including the presence of the British Council in Oman. On tourism, the UK is consistently amongst the top two or three sources of tourists to the sultanate – and the UK's tourism ecosystem is working with Oman's to develop new areas, particularly heritage and adventure tourism. The latter is attracting new Brits to visit Oman. This is critical, as a huge number of UK business leaders that I meet during their trips to Oman – often at Oman Convention and Exhi-

bition Centre (OCEC) business conferences – mention that their first experience of Oman was as a tourist on holiday. This crafts their first impression: one of hospitality, tradition, purpose, and – of course – unbelievable natural beauty.

On competitive advantages, I am referring to the areas where Oman's hard assets stand out within the GCC to UK businesses. There is no permanent list, but three key super sectors pop up repeatedly: green energy – backed by scientific data priming Oman as one of the world's best locations for green hydrogen (plus the excellent Hydrom orchestrating developments); freezones and green manufacturing – backed by excellent deep-sea ports, structures, and proximity to future green hydrogen hubs; and advanced tech – backed by world-class data and energy infrastructure, and geographical conditions for space launches.

UK companies are now heavily involved in all three areas, generating new jobs across the sultanate. Another aspect that stands out for these areas is the maturity and strength of the regulatory frameworks – something which the UK is proud to have been supporting for several years, as part of our government economic dialogue (Strategic Advisory Group) where UK expertise (and the lessons we have learned from our own attempts) are shared directly with the Omani government.

How do Omani investors perceive investment opportunities in the UK market, and in what ways are they currently investing in the UK?

The UK has always been a key market for Omani investors seeking to diversify their portfolios. Historically, Omani investment in the UK focused on real estate, but in recent years, there has been growing interest in strategic investments that maximise the UK's research capabilities. The UK is home to four of the world's top 10 Universities. A great example is the Oman Investment Authority's investment in Oxford Science Enterprises, an incubator linked to Oxford University. This investment is maturing, with the incubator now producing high-tech intellectual property (IP) which Oman owns a share of. The potential for these companies to establish manufacturing operations in Oman and bring their innovations back home is significant. In future, we expect future Omani investment into the UK to support Oman's supply chain and ecosystem planning for major new industries, like green hydrogen and space; particularly into the UK's leading early-stage, world-class research and development capabilities.

Could you provide an overview of bilateral trade between the UK and Oman? What were the figures at the end of 2024, and how have trade trends evolved since COVID-19?

We have long surpassed pre-pandemic levels of bilateral trade. The total value for bilateral trade for the year ending September 2024 was \$2bn – with the UK exporting \$1.5bn and Oman exporting \$0.5bn. Only a tiny percentage of this is oil and gas – with broadly a 50-50 split between goods and services, demonstrating the dynamism of our trade. The growth in Omani exports to the UK is super exciting: it represents 25% of bilateral trade, which is huge, given the UK's population is over 15 times larger. Omani Chips are popping up across shops all over the UK – and underneath the surface, Omani-made cabling is literally keeping our lights on! One of the historic drivers of UK-Oman trade has been the UK's fantastic export credit agency, UK Export Finance (UKEF). They retain a country allocation of almost \$5bn for Oman – one of the largest in their global network.

How do you see the UK-GCC FTA impacting Oman-UK bilateral trade?

The elephant in the room! The FTA negotiations are ongoing – and although I cannot reveal too much – the prospects are very exciting. The UK government calculations estimate that a successful Free Trade Agreement would increase bilateral trade by 16% – and given the huge impact of the UK-Oman SIP just three years after signing, I am confident that Oman could secure its fair share of the benefits from a successful FTA. Three areas of impacts stand out: firstly, the compatibility between our economies – overlap is minimal, so growth and job creation can be evenly distributed – including more world-class UK products on shop shelves! Secondly, the potential of Oman's freezones from Duqm, Sohar, Salalah and beyond will drive growth in green manufacturing, including downstream applications – particularly if Oman successfully signs further FTAs or CEPAs with markets like India. Thirdly, the potential for the UK's world-class research and advanced manufacturing to support growth and job creation – particularly across the three key super sectors I discussed earlier.

The fact that the UK's Minister for International Trade chose to visit Oman (in September 2024) as part of his first international trip anywhere in role speaks volumes about the future possibilities.

GCC projects market breaks records with \$273bn in contract awards in 2024

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The total value of contracts awarded in the GCC countries reached a new record in 2024. GCC project awards saw a 9.6% year-on-year increase, totalling \$273.2bn, compared to \$249.4bn in 2023, according to a research report from Kamco Investment.

This growth in contract awards was primarily driven by an exceptional increase in project awards in Saudi Arabia, coupled with strong performance from the UAE, despite a year-on-year dip in the value of contract awards in the latter.

The power and oil sectors led the growth in project awards in the GCC during 2024, with \$67bn and \$29.7bn in contract awards, respectively. Within the



renewable energy sector, Saudi Arabia signed contracts for 25 renewable energy projects, spread across various regions, which are collectively generating approximately 23 gigawatts of electricity in 2024.

Meanwhile, the GCC construction sector remained the largest sector, with \$75.4bn in contract awards during 2024.

Growth in GCC contract

awards was broad-based in 2024, with three of the six GCC countries experiencing at least double-digit year-on-year growth in the total value of contracts awarded, while four out of the six countries saw year-on-year increases in the value of projects awarded during the year.

According to Kamco Investment, the outlook for 2025 remains positive for the GCC

projects market, with more than \$120bn worth of projects already in the bid evaluation stage, which would likely translate into awards, according to MEED Projects. The near-term forecast also remains positive for the region, primarily driven by Saudi Arabia's construction and power sectors, mainly related to the NEOM mega projects.

There are many positive factors in the GCC expected to support project market activity in 2025. These include thriving economic activity, governments' resolve to execute projects before deadlines, a supportive and strong banking sector, expected falls in interest rates, stability in the regional geopolitical scenario, elevated oil prices, and supportive government policies for private sector participation, Kamco Investment said.

World Bank forecasts 3.4% growth for GCC economies in 2025

Dubai, UAE – The World Bank projects that the economic growth rate of GCC countries will reach 3.4% in 2025, rising to 4.1% in 2026, compared to an expected 3.3% growth rate for the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region as a whole.

Ousmane Dione, the World Bank's Vice President for the Middle East and North Africa, said that while the region's economic outlook remains positive, growth rates will vary between oil-producing and oil-importing countries.

Speaking to the Emirates News Agency (WAM) on the sidelines of the World Governments Summit 2025 (WGS) in Dubai, Dione highlighted that the GCC countries maintain a strong economic position thanks to their diversification ef-



Ousmane Dione

orts. In contrast, other countries in the region continue to face challenges related to conflicts and instability.

He noted that Gulf economies benefit from substantial investments in non-oil sectors, providing them with a competitive advantage over

countries struggling with geopolitical instability.

In a separate context, Dione discussed the Memorandum of Understanding signed between the World Bank and the Mohamed bin Zayed Water Initiative. He stated that this partnership aims to address water security challenges in the region and beyond.

He also highlighted that the MENA region accounts for approximately 55% of the world's desalinated water production. However, he emphasised the importance of exploring alternative solutions such as water reuse, improved resource management, and integrating artificial intelligence and modern technologies to track leaks and enhance smart irrigation systems for greater efficiency.

WAM

OPEC says it won't budge on oil production cuts

Irina Slav

The Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) has signaled it would not change its production policy despite calls from the US president to bring more oil to market.

"We read the market. We analyse the supply, demand, away from political considerations, purely on technical, sound technical considerations, and we take the decisions that provide stability in the market," OPEC Secretary-General Haitham al-Ghais said, as quoted by Reuters.

Speaking at the India Energy Week, Ghais added "If you look at oil, also last year, oil was probably the least volatile commodity, and I think that's greatly down to the decisions and the clarity that we take it (at) OPEC+. So this is our objective. This is what we will keep doing."

US President Donald Trump has called on OPEC to start unwinding its production cuts in order to bring down global oil prices and hasten the end of the Ukraine war. However, these calls have not met with a positive reaction from either OPEC or, indeed, the US oil industry.

OPEC and its partners in OPEC+ plan to start gradually increasing oil production from April - but only if the price is right, as the producers' group has made clear repeatedly. It



We read the market. We analyse the supply, demand, away from political considerations, purely on technical, sound technical considerations, and we take the decisions that provide stability in the market

OPEC SECRETARY-GENERAL HAITHAM AL-GHAIS

seems, however, that the price may not be right, if the US Energy Information Administration is correct in its latest production forecast.

In the February edition of its monthly Short-Term Energy Outlook, the EIA said it expected global hydrocarbon liquids production to rise by 1.9mn barrels daily this year, including from OPEC as it relaxes its cuts. The rest of the increase will come

from higher production from non-OPEC countries, the EIA said.

On the other hand, the federal agency also predicted that current OPEC+ cuts will keep a cap on global oil inventories through the first quarter of the year, which could lend some support to prices, potentially motivating a relaxation of the production cuts.

One of President Trump's first

orders of business following the initial burst of executive orders was to declare he would ask OPEC to ramp up its oil production to bring down prices.

Trump pledged cheap energy to Americans, and he vowed to put a quick end to the Ukraine war, which, to him, would accomplish lower oil prices. Only OPEC had to agree - and it didn't. It could be Trump's very first reality check this term.

Earlier, speaking at the World Economic Forum in Davos Trump said he was surprised that OPEC producers hadn't taken care of oil prices before the US election in November. "You gotta bring down the oil price," he said. "That will end that war. You could end that war."

(Source: Oilprice.com)

US inflation picks up speed again

Alexandra Canal

New inflation data out Wednesday showed headline consumer prices in the US rose more than forecast in January as core prices reversed last month's easing with the Federal Reserve's path forward in focus.

The latest data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) showed that the Consumer Price Index (CPI) increased 3.0% over the prior year in January, an uptick from December's 2.9% annual gain in prices.

The index rose 0.5% over the previous month, a slight acceleration from the 0.4% increase seen in December and a miss compared to economists' estimates of a 0.3% increase.

Seasonal factors like higher fuel costs and continued stickiness in food inflation kept the headline figures elevated. Notably, the index for eggs increased 15.2%, the largest increase since June 2015. It accounted for about two thirds of the total monthly food at home increase, according to the BLS.

On a "core" basis, which strips out the more volatile costs of food and gas, prices in January climbed 0.4% over the prior month, higher than December's 0.2% monthly gain, and 3.3% over last year. This marked an uptick from the 3.2% seen in December, which was the first time



since July that year-over-year core CPI showed a deceleration in price growth.

Although inflation has been slowing, it has remained above the Federal Reserve's 2% target on an annual basis with economists and Fed officials pointing to a "bumpy" road ahead.

Core inflation has remained stubbornly elevated due to sticky costs for shelter and services like insurance and medical care. Shelter did, however, show some signs of deceleration last month, rising 4.4% on an annual basis, the smallest 12-month increase in three years.

It was a different story for used car prices, which saw another strong uptick for the fourth consecutive month. The index rose 2.2% in January after a 1.2% increase in December and a 2% monthly gain in November.

The ascension of Donald Trump to the presidency has further muddled the inflation outlook, with some economists arguing the US could face another inflation resurgence as Trump commits to a protectionist trade policy. That's likely to complicate the central bank's path forward for interest rates.

On Monday, President Trump announced global 25% tariffs on steel and aluminum imports, which will take effect on March 12. 25% tariffs on Mexico and Canada are set to come next month, while 10% duties on China have already been implemented.

Shortly after the release, traders scaled back expectations of a Fed rate cut, pricing in just one cut from the central bank this year. Stock futures also sold off on the news.

(Source: Yahoo Finance)

European gas prices spike to 2-year highs

Piero Cingari

European gas prices have surged 30% in the past month as colder weather, weak renewables, and supply concerns strain storage levels, now at their lowest since 2022. With refilling costs rising, Germany is weighing subsidies, while markets watch for potential Russian gas flows.

Just as Europe thought it had moved past the worst of its energy crisis, natural gas prices are surging once again, up 30% in the past month amid dwindling storage levels, colder temperatures, and supply uncertainties.

With storage levels at their lowest for this time of year since winter 2022, the big question now is: can Europe refill its reserves in time for next winter?

Natural gas futures on the Dutch Title Transfer Facility (TTF), the European benchmark, rose to 59 euro per megawatt-hour on Tuesday, reaching a two-year high.

Winter has been stubborn, dragging on with colder temperatures that have forced homes



Natural gas prices in Europe have surged by 30% in the past month amid dwindling storage levels, colder temperatures, and supply uncertainties

and businesses to burn through gas supplies faster than anticipated.

Across the European Union, storage levels have dropped to an average of 48.48%, as per Gas Infrastructure Europe data, well below where they should be at this point in the year.

France, a major energy consumer, has the lowest storage rate in the bloc at just 29.85%, while the UK and Ukraine, both outside the EU, are sitting at even lower levels - 25.73% and 9.33%, respectively. In contrast, Portugal's storage is completely full, while Sweden and Spain

have healthier reserves at 88% and 69%, respectively.

"The recent price rally was fuelled by colder-than-average temperatures, reduced renewable power generation, and low inventory levels," said ING commodity analysts Warren Patterson and Ewa Manthey.

Stockpiling getting more expensive

Normally, natural gas traders would start refilling storage during the spring and summer months when demand is lower and prices are more affordable. But this year, the market is making that strategy increasingly costly.

"European gas balances have been much tighter than we expected," said Samantha Dart, a commodity analyst at Goldman Sachs.

"To properly rebuild storage this summer, it's not enough for prices to simply remain above coal generation costs. They'll need to rise even higher to attract more liquefied natural gas (LNG) to Europe."

Goldman Sachs estimates that LNG imports need to be 8% higher than initially expected if Europe wants to get storage levels back to at least 85% by October. So far, February's LNG import data suggests this is possible—if prices hold near 50 euro per megawatt-hour (\$15.10 per million British thermal units).

But there are upside risks to gas prices. If gas demand for power generation remains unusually strong or if Asian buyers ramp up LNG imports, European prices could spike even further—potentially reaching €84 per megawatt-hour, which would be 68% higher than Goldman's base forecast.

Germany, the EU's biggest economy, is now weighing financial incentives to help gas suppliers refill storage. As reported by Bloomberg on Tuesday, Trading Hub Europe GmbH (THE), which oversees Germany's gas market, is in discussions with policymakers about a potential subsidy scheme to encourage stockpiling.

(Source: Euronews.com)

Oil prices decline on Fed uncertainty, rise in US oil stocks

London, UK - Oil prices fell on Wednesday with reports that the US Federal Reserve would maintain a cautious approach to interest rate cuts, a buildup in US oil inventories and concerns over President Donald Trump's tariff decisions, while ongoing supply concerns stemming from the Russia-Ukraine conflict continued to weigh on the market.

The international benchmark Brent crude fell by 0.7%, trading at \$76.19 per barrel, down from \$76.72 at the close of the previous session. The US benchmark West Texas Intermediate (WTI) decreased by 0.8%, settling at \$72.46 per barrel, compared to its prior session close of \$73.02.

Oil prices continued its downward movement on Wednesday amid uncertainty over Fed's interest rate cut decision.

The Fed Chairman Jerome Powell said on Tuesday that the US Federal Reserve is in no hurry

to adjust its policy stance, during a congressional committee.

"With our policy stance now significantly less restrictive than it had been and the economy remaining strong, we do not need to be in a hurry to adjust our policy stance," Powell told the Senate's Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs Committee.

Powell explained that they will evaluate incoming data, the evolving outlook, and the balance of risks when assessing the scope and timing of additional adjustments to the policy rate.

The bank's cautious approach signals a potential slowdown in economic activity in the world's largest oil-consuming nation, further contributing to the decline in prices.

The downward movement in oil prices was further supported by data suggesting a larger-than-expected rise in US oil stocks, reflecting market concerns about weakening domestic demand.

Anadolu Agency



Tesla Megafactory in Shanghai begins production

Shanghai, China - US carmaker Tesla's new Megafactory in Shanghai, dedicated to manufacturing its energy-storage batteries, known as Megapacks, launched production on Tuesday, marking a significant expansion of the company's presence in China.

With an initial annual production capacity of 10,000 units, or roughly 40 gigawatt-hours of energy storage, this Megafactory is set to significantly contribute to Tesla's global energy storage goals. The company anticipates a year-on-year increase of 50% in energy storage deployments in 2025.

Covering an area of approximately 200,000 square me-



ters, the new Shanghai plant represents a total investment of around \$202mn, according to

the administration of the Lingang Special Area of China (Shanghai) Pilot Free Trade

Zone, where this Tesla facility is located.

Notably, mass production at

the factory commenced just eight months after construction began, serving as a new example of "Tesla speed" in China, with the Shanghai Gigafactory, Tesla's first plant in the country's eastern financial hub, having been built and inaugurated within a year in 2019.

"We've witnessed the incredible speed of Shanghai and Tesla once again. I'm excited to have this factory kick off an exciting year for Tesla," said Mike Snyder, vice president of Tesla, at the launch ceremony on Tuesday, expressing confidence that the new factory will become a cornerstone of Tesla's global production network.

Xinhua



SRI LANKAN COMMUNITY SULTANATE OF OMAN

ANNOUNCEMENT

Dear Members of the Sri Lankan Community in the Sultanate of Oman
The Sri Lankan Community Social Club Annual General Meeting (AGM) will be held on 28TH February 2025, for selection of the New BOD for the new tenure 2025-2027. Venue - Sri Lankan School Muscat premises in Wadi Khabir by 7.00pm. Nomination forms after completion to be submitted to the General Secretary on or before 18th February 2025. All Club Members are welcome.

For any further information please contact the General Secretary - SLSCS Mr. Hisny on 96001652 or Email: slscsmuscat@gmail.com

Muscat International Automobiles unveils luxury ROX brand in Oman

In a momentous event at the luxurious Al Bustan Palace Hotel, Muscat International Automobiles (MIA) unveiled the revolutionary ROX Motors, setting a new benchmark in automotive excellence.

The exclusive gathering of industry leaders, media representatives, and distinguished guests celebrated the arrival of this cutting-edge innovation, a true game-changer for Oman's automotive landscape, a press release said.

The launch event captivated attendees with a dynamic showcase of the ROX 01, New Generation All-Terrain Luxury SUV —a fusion of cutting-edge technology, unparalleled performance, and futuristic design. Engineered for power, efficiency, and sustainability, this groundbreaking vehicle is set to redefine the driving experience for modern motorists.

The full-size range extended EV SUV ROX 01 impresses with its dimensions, which emphasize its status as a powerful and comfortable SUV. With a length of 5295 mm, a width of 1980 mm and a height of 1869 mm, the car provides a spacious interior and excellent manoeuvrability on the



road.

The design of the car was developed by the famous Italian studio Pininfarina, for ultra luxury

sports models. At the same time, the aesthetics of the Celestial Empire are also visible in the details: the inspiration for the de-

sign of the head and rear optics, as well as the front LED Headlights, was the Chinese character 石 (stone), symbolising strength

and durability.

The ROX 01 is equipped with a sequential range extended system that combines high power

and environmental friendliness.

Under the hood is a 1.5ltr turbocharged engine that works in tandem with two electric motors.

Mitsubishi Motors supports Muscat Marathon

Mitsubishi Oman is proud to announce its official partnerships with two of Oman's most celebrated sporting events - the Muscat Marathon and the Governorates Marathon - joining both as the Official Automotive Partner.

These collaborations underscore Mitsubishi's unwavering commitment to promoting health, fitness, and community engagement across the sultanate, a press release said.

The Muscat Marathon has grown exponentially since its inception in 2012, evolving into a global event that attracts thousands of participants from around the world. Meanwhile, the Governorates Marathon shines a spotlight on Oman's diverse regions, uniting participants from across the country in a display of athleticism.

Together, these events represent the best of Oman's culture, and Mitsubishi Oman is honoured to support them.

be'ah collaborates with Insight for Cybersecurity Services

In a strategic move to bolster its cybersecurity infrastructure, Oman Environmental Services Holding Company 'Be'ah' signed a Memorandum of Collaboration (MoC) with Insight Information Security, a leading provider of cybersecurity solutions.

The signing ceremony took place at Be'ah's headquarters in Muscat, where the agreement was signed by Eng Ahmed Mohamed al Aamri, GM - Digital Transformation and Cyber Security at Be'ah, and Eng Rashid Salim al Salmi, managing director of Insight, a press release said.

This agreement represents a key step in enhancing Be'ah's cybersecurity framework and protecting its digital assets from growing cyber threats. It also plays a crucial role in securing valuable data and safeguarding strategic projects, such as the



digital waste management platform and Customer Relations Management, which contribute to strengthening the national economy.

Aamri said, "This collaboration with Insight marks a pivotal milestone in Be'ah's digital transformation journey. By strength-

ening our cybersecurity measures, we aim to protect our assets, maintain customer trust, and ensure the stability of our operations. Through this partnership, we will focus on establishing and managing a comprehensive Security Operations Center (SOC).

Lexus RX redefines luxury and experiences in the sultanate

The Lexus RX delivers a confidence-inspiring drive for those who seek perfection on the road. With its intuitive technologies and high-performance capabilities, the RX appeals to both families and corporates, making it one of Lexus' best-selling utility vehicles.

At first glance, the RX makes a bold statement on the road with its outclass rear and bumper design seamlessly blending into the L-shaped combination lamps and LED headlamps. Diving deeper under the hood, the RX is available in three fuel-efficient trims: the gasoline-powered RX350, the hybrid-electric RX350h, and the RX500h F Sport, a press release said.

The RX350 is powered by a 4-cylinder, 2.4ltr turbocharged engine that produces 275HP and



430Nm of torque and is paired to a new 8-speed direct-shift automatic transmission.

Whereas, the RX350h features a hybrid-electric system combining a 2.5ltr petrol engine

and electric motor to produce 247 hp paired to an electronically controlled continuously variable transmission delivering an impressive fuel consumption of 20.7kmpl

Similarly, the RX500h F Sport version runs on a hybrid-electric system, pairing a powerful 2.4ltr turbocharged engine with an electric motor generating a combined power of 366HP.

Bank Muscat offers career ops at SQU Career Fair

Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman, will be participating in the 25th Career Fair organised by Sultan Qaboos University from February 17 - 19.

The annual event will witness the participation of different private and public institutions representing a wide range of sectors in Oman. Students and graduates interested in exploring the diverse career and training opportunities offered by the Bank are invited to visit its dedicated stall at SQU Cultural Center in the Grand Hall, a press release said.

The annual fair serves as a link between university students and labour sectors. It allows the participating institutions to learn about the academic level, skills and abilities of students. At the same time, it familiarises students and graduates with the



available job and training opportunities and mechanism to apply for them, and raise their professional awareness. The Fair is also an opportunity for the participating institutions to accelerate their Omanisation plans through direct contact with graduates from different majors.

Bank Muscat is keen to participate annually in the Career and Training Fair, as it is an opportunity to meet with students and introduce them to the bank's recruitment policy.



OOC to convene GA Extraordinary meeting

The General Assembly (GA) of Oman Olympic Committee (OOC) will convene its extraordinary meeting for 2025 next Sunday at the JW Marriott Hotel - Al Irfan, under the chairmanship of Khalid Mohammed al Zubair, OOC President.

During the meeting, the electoral committees—comprising the Elections Committee and the Appeals Committee—for the upcoming electoral term (2025-2028) will be formed and approved. Additionally, the revised version of the election reg-

ulations will be adopted, and the date for OOC electoral General Assembly meeting will be set, a press release said.

Meanwhile, OOC Board of Directors will hold its first meeting of the year on Sunday. The agenda includes the approval of

the minutes from the last meeting held on September 11, 2024, the review of the final accounts for the fiscal year ending in 2024, the auditor's report, and the committee's budget for the current year, 2025.

The meeting will also address

the latest updates on Oman's hosting of the 3rd GCC Beach Games, scheduled to take place in Muscat from April 5 to 11, 2025. The selection of the Omani delegation's mission director for the event will also be discussed.

Efforts on to salvage Gaza ceasefire

Egypt and Qatar are ramping up diplomatic efforts to salvage the Gaza ceasefire agreement

Cairo/Gaza City - Egypt and Qatar are ramping up diplomatic efforts to salvage the Gaza ceasefire agreement between Israel and Hamas, an Egyptian source said on Wednesday.

“Cairo and Doha are urging all parties to adhere to the agreement, despite political and on-the-ground complexities that are making the process increasingly difficult,” the state-affiliated Al-Qahera News channel said, citing the source.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu threatened on Tuesday evening to end the Gaza ceasefire deal if Hamas failed to release captives by Saturday noon.

The threat came one day after Hamas said that it would delay the next hostage release in response to Israeli violations of the ceasefire agreement.

Local Palestinian authorities have listed a series of Israeli violations of the deal, including the shooting of civilians and denying access to relief materials, including tents and caravans for displaced civilians in Gaza.

“High-level contacts are underway with the parties (Israel and Hamas) amid mounting US and Israeli pressure to resume military operations if the hostages are not returned by Saturday,” the source said.



People continue their daily life under difficult conditions at Jabalia Refugee Camp, located in the north of the Gaza Strip

Local Palestinian authorities have listed a series of Israeli violations of the deal, including the shooting of civilians and denying access to relief materials, including tents and caravans for displaced civilians

“The Egyptian and Qatari mediation is seeking to find a way-out that ensures the balanced implementation of the agreement and maintains calm to avoid a new escalation that could lead to more losses.”

The source warned that the breakdown of the Gaza ceasefire

deal ‘will lead to a new wave of violence that will have serious regional repercussions’.

“Preserving the ceasefire is in everyone’s interest,” he added.

The three-phase ceasefire deal, mediated by Egypt, Qatar and the US, has been in place in Gaza since January 19, halting Is-

rael’s genocidal war, which has killed more than 48,220 people and left the enclave in ruins.

In phase one of the truce, which runs until early March, 33 Israeli hostages are to be released in exchange for hundreds of Palestinian prisoners.

On Tuesday, Egypt said a pre-

liminary agreement had been reached to hold an emergency ministerial meeting of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) to reject the relocation of Palestinians from the Gaza Strip.

Egyptian Foreign Minister Badr Abdelatty has also held talks with his counterparts from OIC member states, including Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Iran, and Jordan, to address the Palestinian issue.

Trump has repeatedly called for taking over Gaza and resettling Palestinians in neighbouring

countries, including Egypt and Jordan, an idea widely rejected by Palestinian and Arab leaders.

One Palestinian killed in Rafah

Meanwhile, a Palestinian was killed and another injured in an Israeli drone strike in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip on Wednesday despite a ceasefire agreement, a medical source said.

The source said the casualties occurred when a drone hit a group of people in eastern Rafah and they were transferred to the

European Hospital in the southern city of Khan Younis.

According to witnesses, the Israeli drone fired a missile into a group of Palestinians inspecting their homes in the Abu Halawa area in Rafah.

The Israeli army confirmed targeting two Palestinians in southern Gaza for allegedly assembling a drone. Meanwhile, the army blew up several Palestinian homes in Tel al-Sultan neighbourhood in western Rafah, eyewitnesses said.

Anadolu Agency

Syria’s new govt to be formed in March

Damascus, Syria - Syria’s interim Foreign Minister Asaad Al-Shaibani said on Wednesday that a new Syrian government will be formed in March, according to the state news agency SANA.

The new government will represent ‘all segments of the Syrian population’, Al-Shaibani told Kuwaiti journalist Ammar Taqi from Al-Qabas newspaper on the sidelines of the World Government Summit in Dubai, SANA reported.

“All Syrians played a role in this change. We understand the concerns that come with any transformation, and we are working to instil confidence among our people,” he said, adding that a new constitution will serve as the guiding framework for all citizens.

Al-Shaibani urged the international community to support Syria’s new leadership by advocating for the removal of Western sanctions. “Every economic expert understands the crisis we are facing.”

Rebuilding the state and the military will take time, but initial progress has been made, he noted. “Markets have reopened, universities resumed operations, and employees returned to work.”

Anadolu Agency

Libya: Minister survives murder attempt

Tripoli, Libya - Libya’s Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Adel Jumaa survived an assassination attempt on Wednesday in the capital, Tripoli, a Libyan source said.

The minister was injured in the attack after unidentified gunmen opened fire on his vehicle in the Gargour area in Tripoli, the source added.

The source said Jumaa was hospitalised and his condition was ‘not serious’.

The Libyan Government of National Unity strongly condemned the attack, saying in a statement that it ‘will not tolerate any attempt to threaten the security and stability of the state’.

The government said the minister was in ‘stable’ condition and that authorities have launched an



investigation to track down the perpetrators.

The minister’s assassination attempt came amid UN and local efforts to bring Libya to elections to resolve the crisis between two rival governments. One is the Government of National Unity headed by Abdul Hamid Dbeibeh

The minister’s assassination attempt came amid UN and local efforts to bring Libya to elections to resolve the crisis between two rival governments

of the country and most of the south.

Libyans hope the long-awaited elections will bring an end to political and armed conflicts and conclude the transitional periods that have followed the ouster of Muammar Gaddafi’s regime, which ruled from 1969-2011.



French President Emmanuel Macron and Indian PM Narendra Modi (ANI)

France to host Indian startups

Marseille, France - Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi held bilateral talks with President of France Emmanuel Macron in which they reviewed the progress in the areas of defence, space, civil nuclear corporation, health and people to people corporation.

The discussions resulted in France agreeing to host Indian startups at the French Start-up Incubator Station F.

Indian Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri, addressing a press conference on Wednesday, informed that Modi and Macron held discussions in the plane while travelling to Marseille. “These discussions on board the aircraft on several issues continued upon landing in Marseille, where the two leaders were joined by their larger delegations,” Misri added.

“These discussions covered the entire gamut of our deep and diverse strategic partnership. The two leaders reviewed progress in the areas of defence, in the area of space, civil nuclear corporation and in the areas of health as well as people-to-people corporation between the two sides. There is

an outcome document that is being circulated for the details you can refer to that.” Misri said.

Both countries welcomed the inclusion of 10 Indian startups at the French Startup Incubator Station F. They also welcomed the expanded possibilities for using India’s real-time payment system - Unified Payments Interface (UPI) - in France, according to a joint statement.

Vikram Misri emphasised that the bilateral discussions were majorly focused on AI. “Year 2026 has been agreed as the India-France year of innovation,” Misri said. Additionally, both leaders announced the inauguration of the India-France Year of Innovation in New Delhi in March 2026 by launching its Logo.

A letter of Intent was signed between the Department of Science and Technology (DST), Government of India and Institute National de Recherche en Informatique et en Automatique (INRIA) France to establish the Indo-French Centre for the Digital Sciences, according to a release by Indian Ministry of External Affairs (MEA).

ANI

Jordan rejects plans to displace Palestinians

Ankara, Turkey - Jordan’s Prime Minister Jafar Hassan reiterated his country’s rejection on Wednesday of any plan to displace or resettle the Palestinians from the Gaza Strip.

“No resettlement, displacement, or solutions at Jordan’s expense,” he told parliament.

The prime minister stressed that the solution to the Palestinian cause ‘lies in Palestine, which will remain despite the occupation and oppression’.

While hosting Jordan’s King Abdullah at the White House, US President Donald Trump said on Tuesday that he would ‘take’ the Gaza Strip under US authority and redevelop it with hotels, office buildings, and other infrastructure.



“King Abdullah clearly stressed that Jordan’s interest, stability, and the protection of Jordan and Jordanians are above all considerations,” Hassan said.

The Jordanian premier said

Amman ‘is working with Egypt and its Arab brothers to formulate a unified Arab position regarding the reconstruction of Gaza’.

Jordan will not act ‘unilaterally on issues concerning Pales-

tine and the region’, he added.

Despite Trump’s push for Jordan and Egypt to resettle displaced Palestinians, King Abdullah firmly rejected any forced displacement of Gaza’s population.

AP reporter ‘barred from Oval Office’ over ‘Gulf of America’

Washington, D.C., US - The Associated Press (AP) rebuked the White House on Tuesday after one of its reporters was barred from covering an executive order signing in the Oval Office.

“Today we were informed by the White House that if AP did not align its editorial standards with President Donald Trump’s executive order renaming the Gulf of Mexico as the Gulf of America, AP would be barred

from accessing an event in the Oval Office,” Julie Pace, executive editor of the AP, said in a statement. When the AP declined to comply, the reporter was blocked from attending the event, she said.

“It is alarming that the Trump administration would punish AP for its independent journalism,” said Pace. “Limiting our access to the Oval Office based on the content of AP’s speech not only



severely impedes the public’s access to independent news, it plainly violates the First Amendment.” The White House Correspondents’ Association (WHCA) called the decision ‘unacceptable’ and urged the Trump administration to ‘immediately change course’.

“The White House cannot dictate how news organisations report the news, nor should it penalise working journalists be-

cause it is unhappy with their editors’ decisions,” WHCA President Eugene Daniels said in a statement. The White House did not immediately comment on the incident.

Tech firm Google, meanwhile, had officially changed the name of the Gulf of Mexico to the Gulf of America in its Maps app following the change instituted by Trump. Google said that within the US, it follows the US Geolog-

ical Survey’s Geographic Names Information System, which has formally adopted Trump’s name change for the body of water spanning much of Mexico’s east coast and the US South.

Users in the US now see ‘Gulf of America’, while those in Mexico continue to see the original name. Users outside of the two nations will see the original name with Trump’s preferred name in parentheses.

US House set to vote on another immigration bill

Bill is named after Border Patrol Agent Raul Gonzalez, who died in 2022

Washington, D.C., US - The US House of Representatives will vote on another immigration bill, Congresswoman Lisa McClain said on Tuesday.

“Let me be clear: illegal immigrants who flee Border Patrol should never get a green card,” McClain said at a news conference. She said the bill is named after Border Patrol Agent Raul Gonzalez, who died in 2022 in an ATV accident after pursuing migrants who crossed the border illegally into Texas.

“The bill named after him would prevent illegal immigrants who flee Border Patrol from ever being admitted into the United States,” McClain added.

According to the Agent Raul Gonzalez Officer Safety Act, a person who operates a motor vehicle within 100 miles (161km) of the US border while intentionally fleeing US Border Patrol or law enforcement is to be imprisoned, fined and deported. “If you cross the border illegally and cause harm during a high-speed chase, you should never be admitted to the United States or offered asylum.

“This bill sends a message to illegal aliens, drug traffickers and smugglers, the bad guys. You threaten American lives, and you will face the full consequences of the law. We must protect our law enforcement officers,” McClain said.

House Majority Leader Steve Scalise said Senate Majority Leader John Thune will bring the bill to the floor when the House sends it over to him.

“That will have a really good chance of getting to President (Donald) Trump’s desk, like the



The bill will prevent illegal immigrants who flee Border Patrol from ever being admitted into the United States, said Congresswoman Lisa McClain

House Majority Leader Steve Scalise said Senate Majority Leader John Thune will bring the bill to the floor when the House sends it over to him

Laken Riley Act, where the president will be able to sign more legislation just in his first weeks in office to deliver on those promises of securing America’s border,” Scalise said.

Last month, Trump signed into law the Laken Riley Act concerning non-US citizens charged with or convicted of certain crimes, marking his first piece of legislation in his second

presidential term.

Bill to protect USAID

Meanwhile, a group of Democratic US lawmakers unveiled a bill on Tuesday to protect the US Agency for International Development (USAID) from being eliminated by the Trump administration. The Protect U.S. National Security Act reiterates that any reform of USAID

‘should abide by existing laws and not harm American soft power’.

“Over the past 10 days, Elon Musk and DOGE have shut down USAID’s website, closed its headquarters, placed thousands of staffers on leave, and issued a stop work order on most foreign assistance - including life-saving humanitarian assistance,” said Congresswoman Sara Jacobs, who is leading the bill, which is co-sponsored by 15 other Democrats.

Eliminating USAID will be a ‘death sentence’ for millions of people, Jacobs stressed, adding that billionaire Musk’s elimina-

tion of USAID is ‘completely illegal.’ “That’s why I’m proud to introduce legislation to prohibit the use of any funds to eliminate USAID,” she added.

Following suggestions from Musk, who heads the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE), the Trump administration initiated the shutdown of USAID operations both domestically and internationally, leading to widespread disruptions in global aid programmes and affecting numerous non-governmental organisations and media organisations that relied on USAID funding.

Anadolu Agency



Recep Tayyip Erdogan

Prabowo Subianto

Indonesia and Turkey to have stronger ties

Istanbul, Turkey - Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto expressed his intention to further strengthen ties with Turkey in a joint news conference on Wednesday with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who is paying an official visit.

Meeting at the Bogor Presidential Palace in West Java, Prabowo and Erdogan announced their intent to strengthen bilateral ties through trade and cooperation across many sectors.

“We are determined to strengthen the partnership between Indonesia and Turkey,” said Prabowo, highlighting the importance of collaboration.

Prabowo emphasised the mutual goal of strengthening defence industry ties, stating: “We desire to further support defence industry cooperation efforts between Indonesia and Turkey.”

Prabowo also marked 2050 as a significant milestone, saying: “2050 is important turning point in preparing for the centenary of the Indonesia-Turkey partnership.”

Turkey was one of the first nations to recognise Indonesia’s independence. Diplomatic relations were established in 1950, and the Turkish Embassy in Jakarta opened in 1957.

Meanwhile, Erdogan said Turkey will keep working with Indonesia in efforts to rebuild the Gaza Strip after over 15 months of relentless Israeli attacks.

Praising Jakarta’s stance on the Palestinian issue, Erdogan expressed Ankara’s intent to ‘continue to work with Indonesia in the reconstruction of Gaza’.

He also renewed his call for the establishment of a sovereign Palestinian state, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

“The establishment of a sovereign and territorially intact Palestinian state based on the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, cannot be delayed any further,” he added.

Erdogan asserted that other countries in the region will not be able to achieve stability until Gaza and Palestinians find peace.

“The total damage caused by Israel’s 15-month-long attacks is nearly US\$100bn. According to legal principles, this damage should be collected from the perpetrator,” he said, referring to Israel.

Erdogan and Subianto also announced plans to strengthen relations between their countries through trade and cooperation across many sectors.

Anadolu Agency

Rising tensions: Is Bangladesh plunging into political chaos once again?

Dhaka, Bangladesh - Police in Bangladesh have arrested more than 1,500 people since Saturday amid reports of mob violence across the country and a security crackdown.

The arrests came six months after Bangladesh’s embattled ex-Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina was toppled in a student-led revolution.

The police action was part of Operation Devil Hunt, a joint initiative by army troops and police to target groups behind a series of violent incidents that have taken place in recent months, committed both by groups connected to the ousted premier and groups which opposed her.

On Monday, police took publisher Shatabdi Bhaba into protective custody after dozens of furious Islamist students surrounded his stall at the Amar Ekushey Book Fair in the capital, Dhaka, which was selling works by exiled feminist author Taslima

Nasrin. “They had been campaigning to vandalise the book stall,” said Sanjana Mehran, who alongside Bhaba co-founded Sabyasachi Publishers, according to AFP news agency.

Interim leader condemns chaos

Secretary-general of the country’s powerful opposition Bangladesh National Party (BNP), Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir, met the country’s interim leader, Muhammed Yunus, late on Monday to ‘raise concerns over the incidents that have swept across the country’, reported the AFP.

The Office of the Chief Adviser also condemned the incident and warned of strict action to prevent any kind of chaos.

Home Affairs Adviser Jahangir Chowdhury told reporters that Operation Devil Hunt would continue ‘until the devils are eliminated’.



Six months after ex-PM Sheikh Hasina’s ouster, Bangladesh faces fresh violence and political unrest

Political analyst Dr Zahed Ur Rahman told DW that the interim government only makes statements, rather than preventing attacks or taking further ac-

tion against perpetrators of the attacks.

“This is a huge failure for the Bangladesh government and a message that even after six

months, the government has not been able to ensure good governance,” Rahman said.

Nur Khan Liton, a human rights activist and member of the

Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearances, which was set up by the interim government, believes there may be a special political motive behind these incidents.

“This time,” he told DW, “different forces worked together in the mass uprising.” Khan said, “There were many small forces among them who basically believe in extremism.”

He noted that these factors could impact the country’s journey towards democracy and the upcoming elections.

Rising political tensions

In September, the government initiated a joint operation by the police and army. Although many illegal weapons were recovered and arrests made, human rights concerns have surfaced.

In early February, Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK), a Bangladeshi human rights organisation that

documents attacks on minority communities, reported that 17 people had died in law enforcement custody during the first five months of the interim government. Among them was a leader of the BNP.

Nur Khan believes the crisis is worsening because the army is handling police work.

“The data shows that extrajudicial killings are increasing. This is a gross violation of human rights. We don’t expect this to happen under this government,” he told DW.

Khan added that the army lacks experience in handling civilians, ‘leading to accusations of involvement in crimes such as robbery, kidnapping, house grabbing, and human trafficking’.

In response to the growing concerns, Yunus asserted that the reports of rights violations were widely exaggerated, the AP news agency reported.

DW

‘Solid’ Munich Security Conference now in the shadow of Donald Trump

Berlin, Germany - The traditionally close ties between the US and Europe have defined the Munich Security Conference for decades. Despite some differences, there has always been a solid foundation. Everyone worked well together and respected each other.

But since US President Donald Trump has come into office, such certainty has been crumbling. This is why the conference has also acted as an indicator of how good trans-Atlantic relations are. And now it is set to kick off this coming Friday.

New tensions between US, allies?

One thing is certain: A different wind is now blowing from Washington after the first few weeks of Trump's second term as US president. 'America First' is Trump's unwavering mantra, even if it comes at the expense of his allies. These tensions are likely to shape some of the debates to be held in the conference rooms of the prestigious Munich hotel 'Bayerischer Hof', where politicians, military leaders and experts will meet from February 14 to 16.

Sixty heads of state and government are expected to attend the MSC, which is regarded as the world's most important forum for security policy. From the new US administration, Vice President J D Vance and Secretary of State Marco Rubio have confirmed their attendance, but not the new US secretary of defence, Pete Hegseth.



This file photo shows political and defence leaders around the globe attending the 2024 Munich Security Conference in Munich, Germany, on February 16, 2024

According to Trump, the European NATO partners' insufficient investment in their armies is a thorn in his side. He has also repeatedly criticised Germany on this topic

In addition, conference chair Christoph Heusgen has announced that one of the largest delegations from the US Congress ever to attend the MSC is expected. Among the guests is also the new NATO Secretary-General Mark Rutte.

‘Ripped off’ by Europe

The MSC is an informal meeting at which no decisions are made. That is why the event encourages an open exchange of views, and conflicts are not swept under the carpet.

And Donald Trump has already set a new, sharper tone in trans-Atlantic relations. "We were being ripped off by European nations both on trade and on NATO," read a quote by Trump during his election campaign published in the 'Munich Security Report' to accompany the conference. He went on to say to Europe: "If you don't pay, we're not going to protect you."

According to Trump, the European NATO partners' insufficient investment in their armies is a thorn in his side. He has also

repeatedly criticised Germany on this topic.

Previously, Washington has paid the lion's share of NATO's costs and offered Europe reliable military protection. Trump now wants this to come with conditions: He is demanding that the allies spend 5% of their gross domestic product on defence. Germany is struggling to meet the 2% that is now regarded as a minimum requirement in NATO.

Republican Trump has already proven that he can drastically cut US funds from

international organisations. According to the 'Munich Security Report', Trump's camp has also justified this by arguing that even a global power like the US has only limited resources and must use them for the good of its own country. "Indeed, the notion of 'resource scarcity' has become a central premise of Republican foreign policy thinking," the report states.

Outlines of a peace plan for Ukraine?

This could also have a negative

impact on aid for Ukraine, where the US had previously led the way. There is certainly no shortage of things to talk about for Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky and Trump's Ukraine envoy, Keith Kellogg, who are both expected in Munich.

In the run-up to the conference, rumours have been circulating that Kellogg could present the Trump administration's plan for ending the war in Ukraine at the security conference.

In response, conference chairman Heusgen has remained cautious: "We hope that Munich will be utilised, and we also have indications that it will be used to make progress towards peace in Ukraine." Heusgen expressed the hope that a peace plan could take shape in Munich. The diplomat emphasised, however, that Ukraine's territorial integrity and sovereignty would have to be preserved. Heusgen was previously a foreign policy adviser to German Chancellor Angela Merkel and German ambassador to the UN in New York.

However, representatives of the Russian government have again not been invited to the MSC. The prerequisite for an invitation is 'a willingness for dialogue', stressed Heusgen, 'and as long as President Putin does not recognise the government in Kyiv or Zelensky, I do not think that such a dialogue is possible'. Representatives of the Russian opposition and nongovernmental organisations, however, are welcome in Munich.

DW

Trump gives Musk team more power

Washington, D.C., US - US President Donald Trump has signed an executive order giving billionaire Elon Musk's unofficial Department of Government Efficiency the power to direct federal agencies in cost-reduction efforts.

According to the Tuesday executive order, federal agencies are instructed to work with Musk's team on job cuts and hiring limitations. Each agency must plan for major reductions in staff and limit hiring to 'essential positions', the White House summary said.

Trump, alongside Musk in the Oval Office, praised his work, which has proved controversial with both the public and legal scholars, who have called it unconstitutional. Trump also called on Musk to take on fur-



Elon Musk

ther responsibilities.

Excluding sectors like national security, law enforcement, and immigration, Trump's order is an unprecedented attempt to shrink the nation's 2.2mn federal workforce while bypassing Congress' constitutional 'power of the purse'.

Anadolu Agency

Border controls extended in Germany

Berlin, Germany - German Chancellor Olaf Scholz says temporary controls in place along Germany's borders will be extended for six months after their planned expiry date in March.

The move comes less than two weeks out from Germany's federal election, with the issue of migration playing a key role in the campaign.

Scholz said on Wednesday that Berlin had notified the European Commission, the EU's executive arm, about the decision. The measures were introduced in September last year in a bid to get a handle on irregular migration to the country.

Scholz said there had been 47,000 people turned back at the borders since then, as well as the arrest of 1,900 people smugglers. Asylum applications to Germany also fell by a third in 2024 compared to 2023, he



German Chancellor Olaf Scholz

added.

The six-month extension means the controls will remain in place until mid-September this year. Scholz's centre Social Democrats (SPD) have come under fire for their handling of migration following a series of deadly attacks that were

blamed on migrants and asylum seekers.

The party is currently polling in third place on around 16%, putting them on course for their worst-ever election result.

The conservative CDU/CSU bloc, polling in first place, has made cracking down on irregu-

The move comes less than two weeks out from Germany's federal election, with the issue of migration playing a key role in the campaign

lar migration one of their main election pledges.

Weidel in Hungary

Meanwhile, Alice Weidel, the chancellor candidate for the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD), is in the Hungarian capital to meet Prime Minister Viktor Orban.

The two were to hold talks at Orban's official residence in the former Carmelite monastery in Budapest Castle. According to

the Hungarian government, the pair were set to discuss the 'European migration crisis'.

The two politicians share a number of views, including a hardline stance on immigration and a desire to rebuild relations with Russia.

The AfD has seen its popularity grow in recent years and it's currently polling in second place ahead of Germany's federal elections, scheduled for February 23.

Wednesday's visit marks the first time Orban has hosted a politician from the far-right German party.

The Hungarian leader has sought to bring together far-right and right-wing forces in the European Parliament as part of the Patriots for Europe group he helped launch last year. The group does not currently have a German party as a member.

DW



LANTERN FESTIVAL

Local people parade with fish-shaped lanterns on the eve of the Lantern Festival at Hongcun Village, Huangshan City of east China's Anhui Province, on Tuesday (Xinhua)

Greece: Constantine Tassoulas elected as new president

Athens, Greece - Constantine Tassoulas, former speaker of the Greek Parliament, was elected as the country's new president on Wednesday.

Tassoulas, the nominee of the ruling conservative New Democracy (ND) party, secured 160 votes in the fourth round of voting, the same as in the previous rounds. The other three candidates each received fewer than 50 votes.

A total of 276 members of parliament took part in

Wednesday's vote. Under the Greek Constitution, a candidate needs at least 151 votes in the 300-member assembly to win the presidency in the fourth round, a threshold lowered from 180 votes in the third round and 200 votes in the first two rounds held over the past three weeks.

Tassoulas, a seasoned politician from the ND party, served as Minister of Culture and Sports in 2014 and has been elected Speaker of the Greek

Parliament three times by a large majority since 2019.

Tasoulas competed against Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK) candidate Tasos Giannitsis, Radical Left Coalition (SYRIZA) candidate Louka Katseli, and Victory Party candidate Kostas Kyriakou.

Giannitsis received 34 votes, Katseli 29, and Kyriakou 14, while 39 lawmakers abstained.

Having won the election, Tasoulas is set to be sworn in on March 13.

OMAN BACK WITH A BANG

Hosts stun table-toppers USA in ICC World Cup League 2 tri-series

Muscat - Oman roared back into form with a commanding seven-wicket victory over group leaders USA in the ICC Men's Cricket World Cup League 2 at the Oman Cricket Academy ground in Al Amerat on Wednesday.

Bouncing back from their opening defeat against Namibia on Monday, Duleep Mendis' men delivered a spin masterclass to dismantle the USA batting lineup, restricting them to a meagre 151 before skipper Jatinder Singh anchored the chase with a composed, unbeaten 82.

Opting to bowl first, Oman's spin quartet - Shakeel Ahmed (4/26), Jay Odedra (3/23), Samay Shrivastava (2/34), and Wasim Ali (1/7) - left the USA in disarray, skittling them out for 151 in 42.1 overs. Saiteja Mukkamalla fought a lone battle with a resilient 80 off 106 balls, but the rest of the USA lineup crumbled under relentless pressure.

The visitors suffered an early collapse as Shakeel Ahmed ripped through the top order, removing three of the first four batters, including captain Monank Patel, to leave the USA reeling at 36/3 inside the powerplay.

Brief resistance from Milind Kumar (12) and Aaron Jones (15) along with Mukkamalla momentarily steadied the innings, but Odedra and Shrivastava struck crucial blows to trigger another collapse.

The tail offered little resistance, ensuring Oman had a modest target to chase.

In response, Oman's openers, Jatinder Singh and Aamir Kaleem, laid a solid foundation with a measured 63-run partnership.



Jatinder Singh played a composed knock to steer Oman home

Kaleem's patient 28 off 78 balls ended when he was trapped lbw by Harmeet Singh, but Jatinder remained rock-solid. He brought up his fifty off 88 balls, steering Oman's chase with calculated strokes.

Despite losing Hamad Mirza (12) at 97/2, Jatinder and Wasim Ali (18) stitched a crucial 32-run stand to keep Oman in control. Wasim departed in the 41st over, but Jatinder, finishing unbeaten on 82 off 127 deliveries with eight fours and two sixes, alongside Vinayak Shukla (8*), guided Oman home in 45.5 overs.

Jatinder also set a new Oman record by becoming the first to have scored 12 ODI half-centuries, bettering the 11 in the name of former Oman batter Aqib Ilyas. Shakeel Ahmed was adjudged the Player of the Match for his four-wicket spell.

The emphatic victory propelled Oman to third place in the standings with 16 points, trailing only USA (18) and Canada (16), though the latter have played two fewer games. Netherlands (14) edged Scotland (14) on net run rate for fourth spot, with Namibia (12), Nepal (6), and UAE (4) rounding out the table.

Oman will look to build on this momentum when they face Namibia on February 16 before concluding the tri-series with a rematch against the USA on February 18.

Brief scores: USA 151 in 42.1 overs (Saiteja Mukkamalla 80, Aaron Jones 15; Shakeel Ahmed 4/26, Jay Odedra 3/23, Samay Shrivastava 2/34) lost to Oman 152/3 in 45.5 overs (Jatinder Singh 82 n.o., Aamir Kaleem 28; Harmeet Singh 2/20).



Oman Sail's Hood Saad al Nofli won the Silver fleet, teammate Mohammed Ziyad al Qasimi finished fourth while Khamis Nasser al Mashaikhi was ninth in the Gold fleet

Oman Sail squad impress at Admiral's Cup in Thailand

Muscat - Five of Oman Sail's Optimist youth squad joined over 100 sailors from across Asia in Thailand for The Admiral's Cup 2025, with three achieving top 10 finishes in their fleets. Khamis Nasser al Mashaikhi finished in ninth place in the Gold fleet, Hood Saad al Nofli won the Silver fleet and teammate Mohammed Ziyad al Qasimi finished fourth.

Khamis al Mashaikhi started strongly by winning the opening race, and was consistent throughout, also notching a third-place finish in round eight of 11. The top seven places went to local sailors from the Yacht Racing Association of Thailand in a strong showing for the hosts.

Oman's Hadeel Yousuf al Mushaifri finished 35th out of 51 and Tarteel Zaid al Hasani ended the event in 47th. Both have gained valuable experience as they continue to develop as sailors on the international stage.

Hood al Nofli showed remarkable character to recover from a shaky start to achieve six podium finishes from the last seven races - including three



We will look to build on these performances throughout the coming season and have every confidence that the sailors will continue to improve

HASHIM AL RASHDI, TEAM LEADER

wins - to win the Silver fleet competition. Teammate Mohammed al Qasimi narrowly missed out on third but impressed as the regatta progressed, achieving two podium finishes.

Team Leader Hashim al Rashdi and Optimist Coach Sultan al Zadjali led the Omani delegation.

Al Rashdi said: "This was an excellent experience for all five of our sailors. Each sailor is at a different stage of development, so to end the Admiral's Cup with a top-ten finish in the Gold fleet and a winner and fourth place in the Silver fleet is great. We worked on tactics and mentality in training, and it was evident in the performances that the sailors recognised their strengths and can shake off difficulties and approach each race with renewed focus. We will look to build on these performances throughout the coming season and have every confidence that the sailors will continue to improve."

The Admiral's Cup 2025 was organised and hosted by the Royal Varuna Yacht Club in Pattaya, Thailand, from February 6-10.

The team will represent Oman in several regattas throughout the year, including Winter Cup, GCC Beach Games in April, Oman Sailing Championships in August and the 14th edition of Mussanah Race Week in October and IODA in October-November in Oman.

Blow for India as Bumrah ruled out of Champions Trophy

Mumbai, India - India's pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah has been ruled out of the Champions Trophy after failing to recover from a lower back injury in time for the tournament, the Indian cricket board (BCCI) announced on Tuesday.

Bumrah, the highest wicket-taker in the recent test series with Australia which India lost 3-1, had back spasms during the final test in Sydney last month, which also ruled him out of a five-match T20 international series with England.

While Bumrah's latest scans, which he underwent in Bengaluru over the weekend, did not reveal anything severe, he is not entirely ready to return to bowling. There is no confirmation on the timeline of his return. It is likely he will resume running in a couple of weeks and then gradually get back to bowling. His progress will be monitored by the BCCI's medical team in Bengaluru.

His absence will be a major blow to India, with the 31-year-old considered one of the best all-format fast bowlers in the sport.

"Fast bowler Jasprit Bumrah has been ruled out of the 2025 ICC Champions Trophy due to a lower back injury. The men's selection committee has named Harshit Rana as Bumrah's replacement," the BCCI said in a statement.

Rana has played two ODIs, both of which came against England this month, picking up four wickets.

Eyebrows were raised after



the selection panel, led by Ajit Agarkar, in coordination with the Indian team think-tank comprising head coach Gautam Gambhir and captain Rohit Sharma, had picked Rana ahead of the other contenders, including Mohammed Siraj, for the England series. Siraj has been India's third-most senior bowler after Bumrah and Shami and was also part of their dominant run in the 2023 World Cup. However, in January's media briefing while announcing the provisional squad for the Champions Trophy and the England series, Rohit explained that Siraj's "effectiveness comes down a little" if he was not "going to take the new ball".

Rohit had also said that with a question mark over Bumrah's fit-

ness, the decision makers collectively had confidence in Shami controlling the front-end of the innings and left-arm quick Arshdeep Singh capable of handling the death overs.

The BCCI added that spinner Varun Chakaravathy, who took 14 wickets in a five-match Twenty20 series against England in January and February, would replace batter Yashasvi Jaiswal. India squad: Rohit Sharma (captain), Shubman Gill (vice captain), Virat Kohli, Shreyas Iyer, KL Rahul, Hardik Pandya, Axar Patel, Washington Sundar, Kuldeep Yadav, Harshit Rana, Mohammed Shami, Arshdeep Singh, Varun Chakaravathy, Rishabh Pant, Ravindra Jadeja.

Starc pulls out of Champions Trophy

Melbourne, Australia - Australia fast bowler Mitchell Starc has withdrawn from the Champions Trophy for personal reasons, leaving the squad without its three frontline quicks for the ODI tournament in Pakistan and the United Arab Emirates.

Starc's withdrawal comes after pace stalwarts Pat Cummins and Josh Hazlewood were ruled out due to injuries.

World champions Australia will now lean on a quartet of fringe fast bowlers - Sean Abbott, Spencer Johnson, Ben Dwarshuis and Nathan Ellis - in their bid for more ODI silverware.

Selectors said Starc would also not be available for the two warmup ODIs against Sri Lanka in Colombo, the first starting

later on Wednesday.

"We understand and respect Mitch's decision," selector George Bailey said in a statement on Wednesday.

"His loss is of course a blow for the Champions Trophy campaign but does provide an opportunity to someone else to make a mark on the tournament."

Selectors confirmed Steve Smith will lead the depleted squad in Cummins' absence, having recently captained Australia in their 2-0 series sweep of the test series against Sri Lanka.

Australia will also be without in-

jured all-rounder Mitchell Marsh and seam bowling all-rounder Marcus Stoinis who retired from ODIs in a surprise last week.

Power hitter Jake Fraser-McGurk has been included in the 15-man squad and may replace Marsh at number



three in the batting, with Matt Short and Travis Head likely to open.

Legspinner Tanveer Sangha has also claimed a spot, having played the last of his two ODIs in September 2023 away to India.

Australia open their Champions Trophy campaign against England in Lahore on Feb. 22 and play further group matches against South Africa and Afghanistan.

Australia squad: Steve Smith (capt), Sean Abbott, Alex Carey, Ben Dwarshuis, Nathan Ellis, Jake Fraser-McGurk, Aaron Hardie Travis Head, Josh Inglis, Spencer Johnson, Marnus Labuschagne, Glenn Maxwell, Tanveer Sangha, Matthew Short, Adam Zampa.

Gill hits century as India sweep England

Ahmedabad, India - India completed a 3-0 series sweep against England after Shubman Gill's fluent hundred, helped by some incisive bowling, secured their victory by 142 runs in the final one day international in Ahmedabad on Wednesday.

Gill smashed 112 to help India rack up 356 before being all out in exactly 50 overs, though a bigger total looked on the cards when they were cruising at 226-2 in the 35th over.

England could not capitalise

on their flying start and were bowled out for 214 in 34.2 overs as India got a major boost ahead of the Champions Trophy later this month.

"Very pleased," India captain Rohit Sharma said at the presentation ceremony. "When we came into the series, we knew there will be many challenges that we will have to face but we came out pretty well.

"Whatever was thrown at us, we responded pretty well throughout the series."



Shubman Gill

Asked to bat, the hosts lost Rohit in the second over but Gill forged century-plus partnerships with Virat Kohli (52) and Shreyas Iyer (78) to lay the foundation for a big total.

Asalanka stars in Sri Lanka's win

Sri Lanka captain Charith Asalanka led by example and smashed a belligerent hundred to set up a 49-run victory over a depleted Australia in their low-scoring opening ODI in Colombo on Wednesday.

Australia's second-string pace attack bowled out Sri Lanka for 214 in 46 overs despite

Asalanka's nearly run-a-ball 127 while coping with cramps following his decision to bat first.

Chasing a modest target, Australia could not recover from a top order meltdown and were all out for 165 in 33.5 overs.

Australia's fresh new-ball pair of Spencer Johnson (2-44) and Aaron Hardie (2-13) blew away the Sri Lankan top half, reducing the hosts to 55-5 in the 15th over.

Player of the match Asalanka added 67 runs with Dunith Wellalage (30) to prop up Sri Lanka and refused to throw in the towel even though wickets kept tumbling at the other end.

DEMBELE DAZZLES AGAIN

Frenchman hits brace as PSG blank Brest in Champions League playoff first leg

Guingamp, France - Paris St Germain seized control of their Champions League playoff with a commanding 3-0 first-leg win at Brest on Tuesday, driven by a brace from forward Ousmane Dembele.

The match, which marked only the second time two French sides had faced each other in Champions League history, was dominated by a clinical PSG despite Brest also having their chances.

PSG broke the deadlock after 21 minutes, with Vitinha converting a penalty after Pierre Lees-Melou's handball.

Brest were very much in the match when Abdallah Sima's header hit the post just after the half-hour mark.

The visitors, however, doubled their lead when Dembele cut inside from the right flank and beat the keeper at his near post with a low strike in the final minute of the first half, scoring in



Paris St Germain's Ousmane Dembele continued his red-hot form with another brace, and has now scored 18 goals in his last 11 matches

his eighth consecutive match for PSG.

Just after the break, PSG's Desire Doue was played through and slotted home with ease, but after a minute-long VAR check, the goal was ruled out for offside.

In the 66th minute, Dembele secured his brace, latching onto a loose ball in the box before sending a shot past Brest keeper Marco Bizot.

The 27-year-old Dembele has now scored 18 goals in his last 11

matches, while PSG are unbeaten against Brest in their last 31 encounters, with their last defeat coming in 1985.

PSG manager Luis Enrique heaped praise on Dembele after the Frenchman's brilliant display.

"You'd have to ask him what he ate at Christmas. He is a player full of confidence," Luis Enrique told reporters.

"Back when I played PlayStation as a kid, he was the kind of player you'd choose when you

We stayed focused from beginning to end and got the job done. But it is not over yet so we need to be focused to finish it off at the Parc des Princes

OUSMANE DEMBELE

needed someone to change the game.

"He was already good last season but in 2025 he is even better. You can see his teammates looking for him and finding him. He has an impeccable

attitude."

With the home leg on February 19 looking like being smooth sailing, Luis Enrique acknowledged PSG were in a good position to reach the competition's last 16.

"There is a consistency that makes the team better. Brest made us suffer. We defended well. Our team is built to attack. We are on a very good run," he said.

Dembele praised his teammates for his current form.

"It wasn't easy. Brest are a team we know very well" he told reporters after the win over their fellow Ligue 1 side.

"We stayed focused from beginning to end and got the job done. But it is not over yet so we need to remain focused to finish it off at the Parc des Princes.

"I think the team are in a good dynamic. Everyone is focused and playing really well and that helps me to score goals if I am in the right positions to finish the chances."

The result leaves Brest with a mountain to climb in the return leg at the Parc des Princes on February 19.

Guirassy, Adeyemi on target as Dortmund ease past Sporting

Lisbon, Portugal - Borussia Dortmund forward Serhou Guirassy scored one and set up another in a 3-0 victory at Sporting in their Champions League playoff first leg on Tuesday to put last year's finalists in the driving seat for a spot in the last 16.

Champions League top scorer Guirassy headed in his 10th goal of the competition on the hour mark before providing Pascal Gross with a perfect assist to double the lead in the 68th.

Karim Adeyemi added another in the 82nd minute, completing a five-touch textbook counter-attack, to mark a winning European debut on the Dortmund bench for Niko Kovac ahead of next week's return leg.

The Croat had taken over last week but saw his team lose at home to VfB Stuttgart in his league debut on Saturday, with Dortmund struggling in the Bundesliga and at risk of missing out on next season's Champions League.

"You cannot come here and dominate against Sporting but in the first half we were far too slow," Kovac said. "After the



Borussia Dortmund's Karim Adeyemi is head over heels after scoring against Sporting on Tuesday

break we increased the speed and scored great goals. I was happy to see that physical commitment. To play here like that is not easy."

"Sporting are a good team and we saw it in the first half. We did

not have the initiative. We had to play faster, circulate it with fewer touches.

"We took the right decisions, not only when we scored. We could have scored maybe one more goal."

"On Saturday we go to VfL Bochum and we will face a tough task there. We now have to keep going," said the coach.

Sporting were more aggressive at the start and hit the woodwork with Maxi Araujo's

powerful drive bouncing off the crossbar. Another shot from Conrad Harder in the 35th was palmed wide by Dortmund keeper Gregor Kobel with the visitors failing to register a single shot on target in the first half.

That came in the 55th minute when Adeyemi's low drive was blocked by Rui Silva. Guinea international Guirassy, however, gave the keeper no chance, wrongfooting him with a looping

After the break we scored great goals. I was happy to see that physical commitment. To play here like that is not easy

NIKO KOVAC

header from a Julian Brandt cross.

The Germans kept up the pressure and eight minutes later doubled their lead, as Guirassy whipped in a cross and Gross volleyed in from close range.

Mbangula goal helps Juventus edge PSV

Turin, Italy - Juventus substitute Samuel Mbangula snatched a late winner as the Italian giants beat PSV Eindhoven 2-1 in the first leg of their Champions League knockout phase playoff tie on Tuesday.

The Belgian's 82nd minute close-range finish handed Juve a slender advantage to take to the Netherlands for next week's return leg after PSV fought back from a half-time deficit.

A thunderous strike from Weston McKennie had put the hosts into a 34th minute lead but Ivan Perisic, who turned 36 this month, put PSV level 10 minutes into the second half.

Both sides, who have previously won Europe's top club prize, had chances in a flowing game and will feel they can progress to the last 16 in the return encounter next Wednesday.

"There were phases where they dominated and we dominated. In the second half it went both ways and everything is still possible and we're going for it," said PSV captain

Luuk de Jong.

Juventus' opening goal was all down to the persistence of marauding defender Federico Gatti, eager to press forward on the right flank and who intercepted a poor clearance before taking the ball to the byline and putting in a dangerous cross.

PSV failed to clear properly as the ball bounced around in the six-yard box before falling again to Gatti, who chested it into the path of McKennie on the edge of the penalty area, setting up the American for a thunderous drive into the net.

The home side had made a lively start, pegging back PSV almost immediately and setting up chances for Kenan Yildiz, Timothy Weah and Nicolas Gonzalez but the Dutch side also had first-half opportunities.

Juve were also quick out of the blocks after the break and were denied a second goal in the 51st minute as Mbangula's strike from Weah's sprint down the wing and pinpoint cross was cleared off the goal-line by PSV defender Ryan Flamingo.



Samuel Mbangula of Juventus celebrates his goal against beat PSV Eindhoven

Kobe, Kawasaki reach Asian Champions League last 16

Kobe, Japan - Japanese champions Vissel Kobe booked their place in the knockout rounds of the Asian Champions League Elite on Tuesday with a 4-0 thrashing of China's Shanghai Port as compatriots Kawasaki Frontale confirmed their progress to the last 16.

Kawasaki cruised to a 4-0 win over 10-man hosts Pohang Steelers in South Korea to claim their berth in the next phase with one round of matches remaining.

South Korea's Gwangju FC will advance despite their 3-1 loss against Chinese Super League side Shandong Taishan while



Vissel Kobe's Yuya Kuwasaki scores against Shanghai Port in the Asian Champions League on Tuesday

Tuesday's results mean Yokohama F Marinos, who are third in the 12-team standings and play on Wednesday, are also through.

Malaysia's Johor Darul Ta'zim, meanwhile, kept their hopes alive with a 2-1 win over Australia's Central Coast Mariners.

The top eight finishers in the league phase in both east and west Asia qualify for the last 16, with matches in the knockout phase to be played in March. Teams will then advance to centralised finals in Saudi Arabia in April and May.

Yoshinori Muto gave Kobe the perfect start when he struck in

the 11th minute against Shanghai Port as former Yokohama F Marinos manager Kevin Muscat endured a torrid return to Japan with the Chinese Super League champions.

Yuya Kuwasaki added the second nine minutes after halftime with a shot that thumped in off the underside of the crossbar and, little more than a minute later, Koya Yuruki finished off an incisive counterattack for Kobe's third. Osaka saw his 78th minute penalty saved by Yan Junling but the former Japan striker swept in his side's fourth three minutes later.

Ancelotti proud of Real’s ‘unblemished performance’

Manchester, England - Real Madrid manager Carlo Ancelotti is full of praise for his side's efforts after they put in a well-rounded display in fighting back to win 3-2 at Manchester City in the first leg of their Champions League knockout phase playoff on Tuesday.

Ancelotti was delighted to finally lead Real to their first success at the Etihad Stadium, a victory he thought was deserved

due to the chances created, with Real having 20 shots compared to 11 from City, despite falling behind twice.

Kylian Mbappe and Brahim Diaz cancelled out a double from City's Erling Haaland with Jude Bellingham striking a last-gasp winner to give the holders an edge in the tie.

"I think it was a complete game in all aspects, beyond criticism from my part," Ancelotti



Carlo Ancelotti

told Movistar Plus.

"Everyone worked hard. We had a lot of chances. We didn't give up when we were behind. It was a well-rounded, unblemished performance. I think we deserved the win.

"We defended well, with a compact block ... they took the lead with a penalty but up front our players were very effective. They could have been a bit more accurate, but they generated a

lot of chances with mobility, teamwork and individual quality."

Ancelotti was not surprised his side were able to deliver such a performance but played down their advantage, urging them to keep focused and not be overconfident in the second leg.

"The result is a trick result. You've won, it can make you lower your arms, believe that

you don't have to come back and we can't fall into that trap," the Italian added.

"You have to prepare well, as we did today, with the same focus, quality and sacrifice, just like tonight, which was a great performance.

"Now is when the season starts for real and despite the difficulty we faced playing at a very hard place to visit we were able to earn a very good result."



Real Madrid's Jude Bellingham celebrates with teammates after scoring the winner against Manchester City on Tuesday

REALITY BITES

Bellingham scores late winner for Madrid as Man City crumble again

Manchester, England - Real Madrid's Jude Bellingham struck a last-gasp goal to give the Champions League holders a 3-2 victory over Manchester City in an edge-of-your-seat first leg of their knockout phase playoff on Tuesday at the Etihad Stadium.

Kylian Mbappe and Brahim Diaz also struck for Real, to cancel out a double from City's Erling Haaland, setting up what should be a thrilling second leg on February 19 in Madrid between two of Europe's most famous teams and biggest rivals.

Haaland opened the scoring with his first career goal against Real in the 19th minute when Josko Gvardiol chested the ball down to the 24-year-old Norwegian, who volleyed into the far corner. The goal was given after fans held their breath through a

four-minute VAR check for off-side.

Mbappe levelled in the 60th minute with a rebound off a free kick, awkwardly looping the ball off his shin over goalkeeper Eder-son and into the net.

I think we were playing well and creating a lot. We were always confident throughout the game that something would drop for us

JUDE BELLINGHAM

Haaland struck from the penalty spot in the 80th minute - awarded after Dani Ceballos took down Phil Foden by his right knee in the box - sending keeper Thibaut Courtois the wrong way.

It was his 49th goal in 48 Champions League games.

But City have struggled to hold

onto leads this season, conceding seven goals in the final 15 minutes of Champions League matches. And former City player Diaz pounced on a poor clearance by Ederson of Vinicius Jr's shot to tap home in the 86th minute.

Bellingham scored the winner in the 92nd minute to groans from City fans after a shaky pass back from Mateo Kovacic to Rico Lewis saw Vinicius nip in and loop the ball over from the left. Bellingham got in front of John Stones to slot home.

"I'm happy for the goal and for helping the team," Diaz said. "I feel we played a great match, it's not easy here, against a pretty good team ... but there's still the second leg and the work is not finished."

Real and City failed to advance automatically to the last 16 as one of the top eight sides in the Champions League table, in the new league-phase format, meaning one of the tournament's top contenders will be eliminated early. "It was a weird one. We played some of our best football of the season and ended up behind," Bellingham said.

"I think we were playing well and creating a lot. We were always confident throughout the game that something would drop for us. I don't care what form City are in, they are still an unbeliev-

able team. It's always tricky to play against them and we finally took the chance at the end."

The clubs are clashing for a fourth consecutive year, having met in four Champions League knockout ties since 2020, although never this early in Europe's elite competition.

City boss Pep Guardiola has said the frequency of meetings makes it feel like a derby, while Madrid manager Carlo Ancelotti called the fixture a "modern classic."

"It's so raw and frustrating for everyone," City defender Stones said, summing up the home side's agony.

"We were in the game until so late and then it's two situations that happen and we concede ... We need to see games out better," he said.

Responsibility belongs to all of us, says Guardiola after late collapse

Manchester, England - Manchester City boss Pep Guardiola had no explanation for yet another late-game collapse as his team lost 3-2 at home to Real Madrid in the Champions League playoffs on Tuesday to leave their campaign hanging by a thread ahead of the second leg.

Brahim Diaz and Jude Bellingham struck late to erase City's 2-1 lead, the latter netting the winner in the 92nd minute at the Etihad Stadium where the mood swung from joy to despair.

"We arrived at the last minute with a result and we could not keep it," Guardiola told a press conference.

"When you are 2-1 up against Real Madrid with a game coming up at the Bernabeu, you have to say: 'Let's be sensible', let them have the ball in their half, reset."

City defender John Stones acknowledged that the players had to be accountable.



After 2-1, many games it has happened, against Feyenoord in the Champions League, against Brentford, against Manchester United...

PEP GUARDIOLA

"After 2-1, many games it has happened, against Feyenoord in the Champions League (City led 3-0 in the 74th minute but were held to a 3-3 draw), against Brentford in the Premier League, against Manchester United, many games at the end we give away," he added.

"Unfortunately it has happened so many times, it's difficult."

Erling Haaland's double, including a penalty in the 80th minute, had City poised for a win over the holders and LaLiga pace-setters but leads have proved slippery this season for Guardiola's side, who are fifth in the Premier League. They have conceded seven goals in the final 15 minutes of Champions League matches this term.

"There was a lot of naivety from Manchester City, especially late in the game," former Manchester United forward Wayne Rooney said in his role as a pundit on Amazon Prime.

"The players tonight were looking round at each other, almost with a lack of belief in each other, and I think that is a worry for Guardiola.

"As the manager says we need to look at ourselves and take accountability. We were right on top at the start of the game and we know Real have quality to come out in the second half," he said.

"It is avoidable from us as the eleven on the pitch. We have to do better -- it's as simple as that. We have to keep a positive mentality and try to put it right."

However, Guardiola said the responsibility "belongs to all of us, not just the players.

"I don't have a problem to accept. To blame one specific player, that is ridiculous. It's all of us, me first. And of course the players as well," he said.

Vinicius has last laugh after City fans taunt him with ‘stop crying’ banner

Manchester, England - Some Manchester City fans took a not-so-subtle dig at Real Madrid's Vinicius Jr during Tuesday's Champions League playoff game, displaying a banner showing City midfielder Rodri with the Ballon d'Or trophy beside the caption, "Stop crying your heart out."

But Vinicius, who said he believed his activism against racism led to him not winning the prestigious award last year, used the mocking banner as fuel, helping Jude Bellingham score a

late winner as Real clinched a 3-2 victory in the first leg of the tie.

"Yes, I saw it. At times the opposing fans do things which spur me on to put in a great performance. I did that again here tonight and we managed to win the game," said player-of-the-match Vinicius.



Player-of-the-match Vinicius says the banner 'spurred him on to put in a great performance'

Real had cancelled their plans to attend the Ballon d'Or ceremony in anticipation of Vinicius not winning the men's award, with several teammates and former Real Madrid striker Cristiano Ronaldo saying the Brazil international deserved to win. Vinicius went on to win the FIFA player of the year 2024 award in December.

"We have to get back to Madrid and our fans will make it special," Vinicius said after Tuesday's win.

"The return leg will be tough but we have to keep this up and defend like we did tonight to ensure another magical night in front of our fans."

Forest survive scare against 10-man Exeter City

Exeter, England - Premier League high-fliers Nottingham Forest struggled past 10-man Exeter City 4-2 on penalties to reach the fifth round of the FA Cup after being held 2-2 by their third tier opponents.

Forest, who had started the night with a second-string side at St James Park, will now host top flight rivals Ipswich in the last 16 in March.

The lowest-ranked club left in the competition gave Forest, who are third in the top flight and now the highest-placed team remaining in the draw - a tough time after taking a fifth minute lead.

They then fought back from 2-1 down to end the second half with everything still to play for and the crowd holding their breath and hoping for another major upset.

Exeter's Ed Turns was shown



Nottingham Forest's Taiwo Awoniyi celebrates his goal against Exeter City

a straight red card in the 87th for a high challenge on second half substitute Morgan Gibbs-White but they still had several good chances after that as the game stayed deadlocked through extra time.

Forest, who made 10 changes

to the side that beat Brighton & Hove Albion 7-0 in their previous Premier League match, had Nigeria striker Taiwo Awoniyi treated on the pitch and taken off on a stretcher in extensive second half stoppage time.

"It was a hard game, we had a

lot of setbacks," a relieved Forest manager Nuno Espirito Santo told ITV television.

"I think we started the game in a bad way but the response was good.

"It was tough but happy in the end that we are going through."

Striker and captain Josh Magennis had the Grecians fans dreaming after Forest reserve goalkeeper Carlos Miguel fumbled an attempted catch and he was there to give Exeter a shock lead.

The hope of a similar upset to nearby Plymouth Argyle's 1-0 defeat of mighty Liverpool on Sunday died down 10 minutes later, when Ramon Sosa levelled with a shot that went in off goalkeeper Joe Whitworth.

Forest drew strength from the equaliser and Awoniyi put the visitors ahead in the 37th.



14

SQUID DELIGHTS
If you've not tried squid, you're seriously missing a delicious seafood snack



15

IN TOWN
ISC, Uttaranchal wing, Music Night and BBF meet on diversification



16

ENTERTAINMENT
A peek into tinsel town, in Hollywood and Bollywood



Photos: V K Shafeer

NHI COLLABORATION

Masterclass



Hubert Vaz

The buzz among students was palpable and faculty members, too, seemed upbeat about the prospect of learning a few culinary secrets of French gastronomy - known worldwide for its quality and diversity...

When Chef Jamil Fathallah, from Ecole Hôtelière de Paris Lycée Jean Drouant, visited the National Hospitality Institute (NHI) in Wadi Kabir this week, to share his expertise via masterclasses for students and faculty members, the stainless-steel workstations in the kitchen seemed to shine like the Sun. And, if the reflections of students on lucid surfaces seem to compound the numbers present, the smiles on the faces of young hospitality hopefuls seemed to convey that they were, indeed, on good ground with regard to their career choice.

As the budding chefs gathered around Chef Jamil with great enthusiasm, they couldn't quite hold back their murmurs as they held him in high esteem and awe. But then, a few quick claps from the Chef brought in order as the masterclass got underway on February 11. They were assembled to learn technique, rather than a recipe in producing what looked like chocolate-filled cup cakes with a nice crust (Tarte Normande).

After a briefing, he got the team leader

Chef **Jamil Fathallah**, from Ecole Hôtelière de Paris Lycée Jean Drouant, visited National Hospitality Institute this week to deliver a few masterclasses to students and faculty in a bid to share French culinary techniques



to delegate tasks, from gathering ingredients, whipping up dough and chocolate cream, to making sure all necessary equipment and utensils were on hand - the key instructions revolved around quality and efficient time management. One hour, down the road, the workstation displayed the final product, hot and fresh with a soft centre.

Michel Hartbrot, professeur agrégé en charge des relations internationales, at Ecole Hôtelière de Paris Lycée Jean

TECHNIQUE TEACHINGS

- The series of masterclasses over three days involved techniques involved in the following dishes:
- Blanquette de Veau - Riz Pilaf
 - Moelleux au Chocolat
 - Quiche saumon / Epinards et Salade de Printemps - Ile Flottante
 - filet de Poulet Sauce Supreme - Purree robuchon - Tarte aux poires Amandine
 - Salmon tartare / Beef tartare - French vinaigrette
 - Sole meuniere and chicken - Table laying
 - Oeuf Bourguignonne - Tarte Normande
 - Dos de Cabillaud - Legumes glaces et Beure blanc - Creme brulee
 - French cheeses - French vinaigrette
 - (tasting and plate service)
 - Fruit cutting - Apricot NHI

Drouant, accompanying chef Jamil, disclosed, "These masterclasses are done to ensure cooperation. We have signed a partnership last year with NHI to have a series of masterclasses with students and teachers of NHI -we want to increase the exchange programmes between both establishments, such that we deliver masterclasses here while students of NHI also get a chance to visit us in France to get hands-on experience there."

The masterclasses for students and

teachers have been designed on different lines as teachers already have basic knowledge, he said, lauding the standard of teaching as well as the facilities and equipment available at NHI at present. "On our part, what we can bring here is the European experience. As tourism is picking up in Oman, it is important that Oman provides a good standard of cuisine for international tourists, especially fusion food."

Chef Jamil added, "We are here to

teach some basic techniques to the students, not create any new recipes. French cuisine is all about techniques and that's what makes it different." Born in France, Chef Jamil hasn't had any stint working in any part of Arabia, but says that there is no major difference between French cuisine and Arabic cuisine - what makes French cuisine different from that of the rest of the world is technique - used for all courses of a meal.

Michel and Chef Jamil both also agree that it is the climate and environment of a country which dictates the nature of its cuisine and the ingredients used. Michel pointed out, "Even within Arabia, the cuisines of Saudi or UAE are different. Also, the culture of each country does have a bearing on the food consumed."

Chef Jamil added, that though he has come on a teaching mission, every such visit is also a learning experience. He admitted that he was much taken up by the types of spices available and used in this part of the world and would make it a point to take some back with him. Though spices from around the world are available in France, getting them from their original sources makes all the difference, he said.

The students of the masterclass who were at varying stages of their course diligently took up whatever tasks were handed out and, with the dexterous final touches of Chef Jamil, together they produced within an hour what he had visualised for them.

cook-up

SQUID DELIGHTS

Spicy Stir-fried Squid



Seafood Snack

If you've never bought squid from the fish market, these recipes will lead you there soon. Crispy, crunchy, spicy, tangy squid rings!

Fried Squid Rings

- Ingredients**
- 1 large squid
 - ¼ cup all-purpose flour
 - 1 /3tsp salt
 - 1 egg
 - 2tbsp water
 - 2 cups bread crumbs
 - Oil for deep frying
 - Salt - for garnish
 - Lemon
 - Japanese mayonnaise (optional)

Method

Clean the squid and cut into neat, 1cm thick rings. In a medium bowl, mix flour, salt, egg, water together with a whisk. Dip squid in the batter, then coat with bread crumbs.

Heat oil for deep-frying (175° C) at medium heat. Place the coated rings in the hot oil and cook until golden brown, turning once or twice. Remove from oil on a paper napkin and sprinkle with salt. Serve with lemon wedges and mayo.

- Ingredients**
- 1 medium size squid
 - ½ medium carrot
 - ½ medium onion
 - ½ medium zucchini
 - 2 scallions
 - 1tbsp vegetable oil
 - 1tbsp sesame oil
- For the sauce:**
- 2tbsp Korean chilli pepper paste
 - 1tbsp Korean chilli pepper flakes
 - 1½tbsp soy sauce
 - 1tbsp sugar
 - ½ tbsp corn syrup or 1tsp more sugar
 - 1tbsp minced garlic
 - 1tsp minced ginger
 - 1tsp sesame seeds
 - A pinch of black pepper powder

Method

Combine all of the sauce ingredients in a small bowl. Clean the squids and slice into rings or strips. Mix the squid with the seasoning mix and marinate while preparing vegetables.

Slice the onion. Cut the zucchini and carrot into half lengthwise and thinly slice into 2-inch long pieces. Cut the scallions 2-inches long.

Heat a large skillet over high heat and add the vegetable oil. Add the carrots, followed by the onions, zucchini, and then the scallions. Stir fry the vegetables quickly only until they start to wilt, about 2 minutes.

Push the vegetables to the sides of the skillet. Add the marinated squid and any remaining sauce to the center of the skillet. Stir fry just until the squid pieces curl up and turn opaque (about 2 minutes).

Stir to mix the vegetables and the squid well for a minute. Drizzle the sesame oil over. (Do not overcook the squid.) Serve warm with steamed rice.

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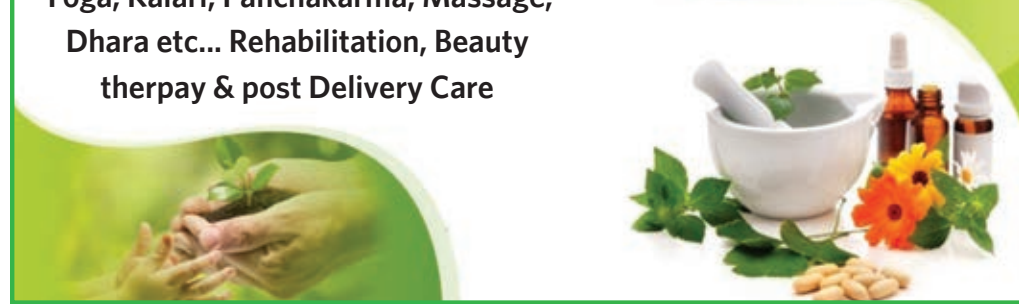
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Happy birthday Uddhav!
Love Papa, Mamma and Peehu



SREEJU
FEBRUARY14

Wishing you a very special birthday and a wonderful year ahead!

NAME CHANGE

We JIAZ HAMSA (name of father as per the passport, holder of **Indian passport No Z4227231**) and **SHANITHA JIAZ**, (name of mother as per the passport, holder of **Indian passport P7136769**) having present residing address at **AL WADI AL KABIR, Flat 2100, Complex 150 Way No 5031, Muscat, Sultanate of Oman**, would like to bring to your attention an error in our son's **CBSE Tenth certificate**. The parents' names (Sequence) have been incorrectly mentioned as per his **old passport No V9131286**. We already corrected parents name sequence in his **new passport No C4386217**. As aforementioned in the passport, we are correcting the error in the CBSE Tenth Certificate. Any objection towards the above changes may please be communicated to the Embassy of India, Muscat, Diplomatic Quarters, Al Khuwair, Po Box No 1727, Postal Code 112, Ruwi, Sultanate of Oman.

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take a break

IN TOWN

Musical Night



Indian Social Club, Uttaranchal Wing, recently organised a musical night for its members



Photos: V K Shafteer

BBF Meet



British Business Forum held a seminar on Diversifying Private Sector on January 27



Photos: V K Shafteer

BOGGLER

T	A	Y	T
X	L	B	A
E	I	E	C
O	E	D	Z

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

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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

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	5		3		4	1		
		4	1	7	6	9		5

TRIVIA QUIZ - FOR TEENS

1. What is the name of the vegetable seen in the picture?



- A. Lotus stems
- B. Asparagus
- C. Bamboo shoots
- D. Spring beans

2. Who invented the first computer?

- A. Philo Taylor Farnsworth
- B. Charles Babbage
- C. Steve Jobs
- D. Martine Cooper

3. What is the main export of Oman?

- A. Fish
- B. Petroleum oil
- C. Dates
- D. Perfumes

Answers
1. B
2. B
3. B

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE



ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

You've always felt that it is better to keep your mouth closed and appear a fool than to open it and remove all doubt. At the moment, however, you have a lot on your mind and in your heart, and you really want to let it all out. Stop worrying about seeming like a fool. The only thing you'll seem like is a fool in love.



TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

Your ability to focus is the stuff of legend, and that goes double when you're on a mission like right now. What might that mission be? To outshine your coworkers so that you'll be able to get that raise you've been bucking for. There's no need to lose any sleep over it. Keep up like you have been and you'll win what you want, hands down. Just don't let any secrets slide.



GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

It's officially time to reconnect with your favorite playmates. They've been missing you, you've been missing them, and the few phone calls you've had time to make just aren't cutting it. Make time for them tonight. You're guaranteed to have some serious fun, and isn't that what life is all about?



CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

Just when you thought you might actually be able to see things clearly for a while, it turns out it is not quite time. And you'll come to that realization via a startling message that arrives this afternoon. Now, this doesn't mean you should be expecting bad news or that you'll be disappointed with what happens. Not at all.



LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

You've never been known to rule with a heavy hand. You always lead sternly and fairly, but you never make rules just because you can, and you never enforce anything you don't absolutely need to. So when you suddenly start barking orders to one and all and they act like they don't quite recognise you, be patient. This just isn't like you.



VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

Gossip is like fast food. It seems delicious before and during, but later you just end up feeling disgusted with yourself. If coworkers or friends insist on swapping other people's secrets and want you to join in, just find a way to discreetly move away. There's no need to pass judgment or call them out.



LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

Buck authority? If it's called for, you're ready to put up your dukes and fight it out. This one issue you've been dealing with lately has really gotten under your skin, and you're willing to do whatever it takes to make your point. Good for you, because you're right. And you know it too, don't you? Don't give up and don't give in. Keep at it. You're almost there.



SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

You're just about due for something totally out of the ordinary. You've turned down all kinds of fabulous temptations in just about every category lately. But just as you start to wonder why, the Universe will deliver you a one-of-a-kind reward designed especially for you. Don't question it and don't worry about why it's there.



SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

Every now and then everything just falls into place with only the smallest effort on your part. See what happens when you go with the flow today rather than try to force things to happen exactly the way you want them to. If you go for it immediately, you'll bypass all the pleasurable anticipation. Since victory is already pretty much a foregone conclusion, you should let it linger.



CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

You're challenging authority again. You've almost certainly been tweaking the rules and playing devil's advocate at every opportunity. The good news is that you have an appreciative audience for all of your hijinks. The somewhat less good news is that you may have also earned the irritation of someone who thinks they're in charge.



AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

While your pals might not be able to fix your problems, they can at least figure out a way to put a smile on your face. When the going gets rough, just reach out to your friends. That's what they're there for. You've been a bit melancholy lately, but that isn't necessarily anything to worry about. Everyone experiences the doldrums. That's part of life.



PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

If you keep saying yes when you mean no, you might end up driving yourself crazy, not to mention the people you love. Don't try to give people what they want all the time. You need to think about what you want too. Like a little extra peace and quiet. Or maybe you want to bow out of going to that distant cousin's wedding. Whatever it is, give yourself what you want.

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

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

entertainment



Park Bo Young's Wooga Squad streak! Is V next?

Fellow K-drama fans, have you noticed? Park Bo Young is literally collecting 'Wooga Squad' members like a pro! First, she starred in 'Strong Woman Do Bong Soon' (2017) with Park Hyung Sik, which was honestly one of the cutest rom-coms ever (Min-Min marry me). Then in 2023, she teamed up with Park Seo Joon (daddy) for 'Concrete Utopia', which was super intense and even got picked as South Korea's entry for the Oscars! Now, she's about to work with Choi Woo Shik in 'Melo Movie'.

And guess what? Fans (including me) are going crazy wondering if BTS' Kim Taehyung (aka V) will be next! Twitter is already blowing up with people saying, "Park Bo Young is working with every Wooga Squad guy! Kim Taehyung, you might be next!"

Taehyung showed his acting skills in 'Hwarang: The Poet Warrior Youth', and we all know he's insanely talented. Imagine him and Park Bo Young in a drama together—pure perfection! Someone, please make this happen as soon as he is free from his military service!

Do you think Taehyung should be next? Let's manifest it!

Kanye West dropped by talent agent

Kanye West has been dropped by his talent agent following his antisemitic remarks and controversial merchandise on his Yeezy website. Daniel McCartney, an agent at 33&West, announced the decision via Instagram, stating that the agency could not stand by West's 'harmful and hateful remarks'.

"Effective immediately, I'm no longer representing Ye (Kanye West) due to his recent hateful and harmful remarks that myself not 33&West can stand for," McCartney wrote before signing off with 'Peace and Love to all'.



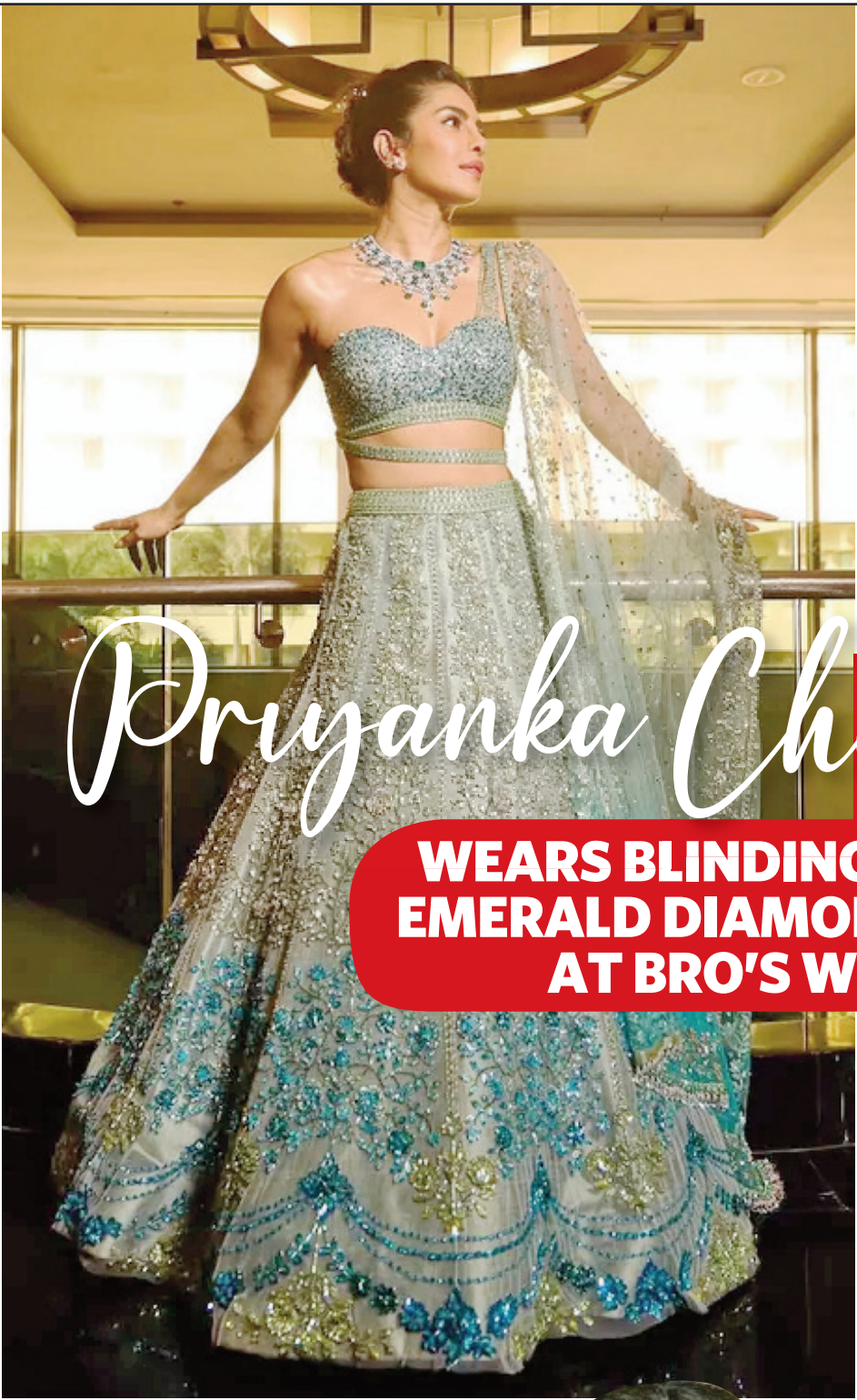
Shraddha Kapoor to star in 8 horror films

Apart from Stree 3 and Bhediya 2, Shraddha Kapoor will make an appearance in all the films of the horror comedy universe. In January this year, movie-buffs got a pleasant surprise when filmmaker Dinesh Vijan announced 8 new films in the Maddock Horror Comedy Universe along with their release dates, all of which have Shraddha. This was great news for fans.



Priyanka Chopra's brother, Siddharth Chopra, tied the knot with Neelam Upadhyaya on February 7. At the wedding, Priyanka dazzled in a custom turquoise blue embroidered lehenga set designed by Manish Malhotra for the special day. She paired the shimmering ensemble with a blinding emerald and diamond Bulgari necklace.

Priyanka's elegant neckpiece is called the Emerald Venus Necklace from the Eden, The Garden of Wonders high jewellery collection. According to the Bulgari website, the jewel is inspired by a luxuriant Mediterranean plant called Capelvenere, Italian for 'Venus's hair'. It took the Bulgari craftsmen about 1,600 hours to complete the necklace.



Priyanka Chopra

WEARS BLINDING 200-CARAT EMERALD DIAMOND NECKLACE AT BRO'S WEDDING



BLAKE LIVELY SAYS MAKERS 'RESENTED' HER FOR TAKING 'CONTROL OF MOVIES'

Amid her *It Ends With Us* feud with actor-director Justin Baldoni and ongoing lawsuits from both sides, a resurfaced video shows Blake Lively admitting to taking creative control over her films. In the clip, shared by TikTok user stephwithdadaeets, Lively reveals that her involvement in the filmmaking process has sometimes led to tension with producers.

The *Gossip Girl* star was at the Forbes Power Women's Summit in 2022 where she shared that some industry professionals 'resented' hiring her simply as an actress when she asserted herself creatively. She explained that, early in her career, she would keep her creative ambitions hidden during meetings to secure roles.



PRINCE WILLIAM, KATE MIDDLETON TO MISS 2025 BAFTA AWARDS

Prince William and Kate Middleton, the Prince and Princess of Wales, will not be attending this year's British Academy Film Awards (BAFTAs), which are set to take place on Sunday at London's Royal Festival Hall.

Kensington Palace confirmed on Monday that the royal couple will be absent from the star-studded event.

While the couple will not be present in person, Prince William, who has served as the president of the British Academy of Film and Television Arts (BAFTA) since 2010, is expected to make a pre-recorded appearance during the ceremony, as per *Deadline*.

This marks the second time the couple has missed the BAFTA awards in recent years, with both attending in 2023.

Angelina Jolie's KIDS HATE CELEB LIFESTYLE



Angelina Jolie's kids - Maddox, Pax, Zahara, Shiloh, and twins Knox Leon and Vivienne Marcheline - have repeatedly expressed their desire to keep a distance from showbiz. Despite joining her behind the scenes for a couple of projects in the past, they haven't shown any affinity to get in front of the camera and follow in their famous parents Jolie and Brad Pitt's footsteps.

"I always wanted them to be around film because I wanted them to know as a part of — it's such a wonderful family, to be creative, to be an artist, to be... They're not interested," the *Maria* actress said at a panel at the Santa Barbara International Film Festival on February 5.

WHAT'S ON

CHHAAVA

Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj was a visionary leader who defied tyranny to establish the Maratha Empire. Chhava brings to life the extraordinary journey of Sambhaji, Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj's eldest son. As the father's legacy passes to Chhatrapati Sambhaji Maharaj, the story unfolds with a son's unwavering resolve to uphold his father's dream.



Genre: Action. Starring: Rashmika Mandanna, Akshaye Khanna, Vicky Kaushal. Language: Hindi. Releasing: 14 February