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OMAN'S MOST TRUSTED BRAND AWARDS 2024 PRESENTED

Business heads and top management of 52 reputed brands in Oman converged on the ballroom of Shangri-La Barr al Jissah Muscat on Monday to receive the coveted trophies of Oman's Most Trusted Brand Awards 2024 – a symbol of consumer trust as well as a testimony of their commitment to quality and service excellence.

Hosted by Apex Media - publishers of Muscat Daily - the event was graced by H H Sayyid Dr Faris bin Turki al Said, Member of Technical Team of Oman's Promotional Identity, as chief guest. He delivered the keynote address and presented trophies to the winners amid loud cheers from their colleagues and applause of distinguished guests.

Oman's Most Trusted Brand Awards was set up by Apex Media in 2016 to recognise and honour brands in the sultanate that lived up to the expectations of consumers and set parameters for others in the fray to follow suit. In this edition of the awards, over 1mn consumer votes were polled across 52 categories.

MoU signed to set up AI chip unit in Salalah

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The sultanate is set to start an advanced artificial intelligence (AI) semiconductor chip manufacturing project in Salalah Free Zone, Dhofar following a memorandum of understanding (MoU) signed on Monday.

The agreement, between Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MTCIT) and AONH Private Holdings, is supported by regional and international investment funds.

The project aims to consolidate Oman's position in the global semiconductor industry, addressing the rising demand for AI technologies. It will also help develop local expertise in chip design and manufacturing, while attracting international talent, particularly from Taiwan, South Korea and Japan.

H E Dr Ali bin Amer al Shidhani, Undersecretary for Communications and Information Technology in MTCIT, stated that the project aligns with the Digital Industry Programme under the National Programme for Digital Economy and Oman Vision 2040. "This project will contribute to attracting new investments in the semiconductor industry, stimulating local technical innovation and advancing research in microelectronics. It will support economic growth, technological progress and sustainable development in Oman," he said.

> *This project will contribute to attracting new investments in the semiconductor industry, stimulating local technical innovation and advancing research in microelectronics*
>
> **H E DR ALI AL SHIDHANI**

He noted that the global semiconductor industry is expanding rapidly, driven by increasing demand for AI, the Internet of Things, 5G networks and autonomous driving technologies. According to global management consultants McKinsey, the market is expected to reach US$1tn valuation by 2030.

Ali Steve Chao, Chairman of AONH Private Holdings, highlighted Oman's strategic location and investor-friendly environment as key factors in selecting the country for the project. "With this initiative, Oman is set to make its mark on the world stage of chip manufacturing, developing advanced memory solutions and next-generation AI chips," he said.

He added that the company aims to attract top global talent, creating a hub for researchers, engineers and developers to drive innovation in semiconductor manufacturing, data centres and AI industries. Production operations are expected to begin three years after the project's launch.

MoF directs public sector to award tenders up to RO25,000 to SMEs

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Ministry of Finance (MoF) has issued Financial Circular 1/2025 directing all ministries, public authorities and government entities to award tenders for supplies, services and works valued up to RO25,000 to small and medium enterprises (SMEs), who own a Riyada card.

The circular aims to strengthen the role of SMEs in the Omani economy, encouraging their participation in government tenders. In addition, the ministry stressed the importance of collaborating with the Follow-up Committee of the National Local Content System to address challenges related to the tender process. It also urged ministries, government agencies and state-run companies to liaise with internal audit units to ensure compliance with the circular.

> *The directive will play a vital role in supporting the private sector, localising national industries and ensuring optimal use of public funds*

H E Said bin Mohammed al Saqri, Minister of Economy and Chairman of Tender Board, highlighted the significant impact of local content programmes. "These programmes play a vital role in supporting the private sector, localising national industries and ensuring optimal use of public funds. One of the main objectives is to stimulate SMEs and the entrepreneurship sector, increasing their share of government tenders," he said.

He noted the tangible growth in SMEs and their expanding presence in various sectors, including economic diversification and innovation. The new move, he explained, aligns with Oman's broader social and economic priorities, fostering youth participation and entrepreneurship, ultimately contributing to a diversified and sustainable economy.

The decision to raise the tender value to RO25,000 further supports the National Policy for Local Content, a key initiative aimed at economic diversification and job creation. "By expanding government tender opportunities to SMEs, we continue to enhance the entrepreneurial sector's role in driving innovation and sustainable growth," H E Saqri added.

According to the Ministry of Economy, there are 145,750 SMEs registered with Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises Development and employ 192,714 workers from the national workforce. However, despite their significant number, SMEs currently receive only 12% of government contracts. This policy shift is expected to increase their share in the coming years.

Al Khuwair Downtown project on track

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning has confirmed that the US$1.3bn Al Khuwair Muscat Downtown and Waterfront Development project is progressing as planned, and will soon transition into a detailed design phase, with implementation set to follow by year-end.

Designed by Zaha Hadid Architects, the project spread over 3.3mn sqm will have five key features - a marina, a waterfront with beaches and sports facilities, a canal walkway, a cultural quarter, and a ministry complex. It is a major component of Oman's National Spatial Strategy and aligns with the goals of Oman Vision 2040, balancing modern infrastructure with conservation of the country's natural heritage.

Located near the Al Khuwair desalination plant and adjacent to the Ministries District, the development aims to support Muscat's expansion while addressing overcrowding. Though the Ministries District will remain intact, it will undergo gradual remodeling as part of the project.

The ministry stated that the project is designed to promote sustainable urban growth, enhance infrastructure services and create well-planned communities. It will also contribute to balanced development across Muscat governorate, ensuring equitable distribution of residential areas.

Additionally, the ministry confirmed that a study on relocating Ghala Industrial Zone has been completed and is ready for review by the Council of Ministers. Plans are also underway to improve Muscat's infrastructure, with further details to be announced soon.

The project is set to play a key role in shaping the future of Muscat, reinforcing its position as a modern and well-planned city.

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Arab meet on Feb 20 for Gaza reconstruction

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Salalah hosts conference on tourism, hospitality

Our Correspondent
Salalah

The first International Conference for Academics and Professionals on Tourism and Hospitality began on Monday at the Sultan Qaboos Youth Complex for Culture and Entertainment in Salalah.

Organised by the University of Technology and Applied Sciences in collaboration with the Dhofar Governor's Office, the three-day event - titled Tourism in the Sultanate of Oman: National and International Visions and Practices - brings together experts from 15 countries to discuss trends, challenges, and opportunities in the tourism sector.

Tourism is a pillar of Oman's economic diversification, and this conference plays a vital role in supporting national efforts to enhance the sector's contribution to the economy

DR AHMED BIN ALI AL SHAHRI

Dr Ahmed bin Mohsen al Ghassani, Chairman of Dhofar Municipality, inaugurated the conference and honoured keynote speakers, experts, and sponsors. The event includes specialised workshops, an exhibition featuring 25 public and private entities, and a student competition aimed at fostering collaboration between academia and the industry.

Dr Ahmed bin Ali al Shahri, Assistant Vice Chancellor of the University of Technology and Applied Sciences in Salalah, highlighted the university's commitment to linking academic research with practical applications. "Tourism is a pillar of Oman's economic diversification, and this conference plays a vital role in supporting national efforts to enhance the sector's contribution to the economy," he said.

Discussions will focus on key topics such as sustainable tourism, the role of technology in enhancing visitor experiences, and strategic investment opportunities. Experts are also addressing issues like governance in tourism destinations, AI-driven advancements in the industry, and education and training to meet future demands.

Dr Ali bin Saeed Akaak, a key member of the organising committee, emphasised the importance of knowledge exchange in tourism marketing, business sustainability, and hospitality.

Dr Saud bin Mohammed al Farsi, Advisor to the Governor of Dhofar, described the conference as a key initiative supporting the governorate's tourism strategy. "The participation of local and international experts ensures valuable discussions that will contribute to shaping policies and strategies for tourism development," he said.

The opening day featured a visual presentation on tourism in Oman, followed by two panel discussions. Over three days, the conference will host eight dialogue sessions, 15 scientific tracks and five workshops.

SOHAR PORT / FREEZONE

إعلان مناقصة
Tender Announcement

تدعو شركة ميناء صحار والمنطقة الحرة الشركات المختصة للمشاركة في المناقصة أدناه
SOHAR Port and Freezone invites specialised companies to the following tender

No م.	Tender Ref الرقم المرجعي	Title العنوان	Tender Fee OMR الرسوم
1	SIPC 2025 - 006	Schools Students Program "Maseer"	105

- The above-mentioned tender fees including the VAT 5%.
- تشمل رسوم المناقصة المذكورة أعلاه ضريبة القيمة المضافة وقدرها ٥٪.
- Tenderers can request to receive the electronic tender documents from 9:00 am on Monday, 17/2/2025 until 4:00 pm on Sunday 2/3/2025.
- بإمكان مقدمي العطاءات طلب استلام وثائق المناقصة إلكترونياً ابتداء من يوم الاثنين ٢٠٢٥/٢/١٧م (الساعة ٩:٠٠ صباحاً) وحتى يوم الأحد الموافق ٢٠٢٥/٣/٢م (الساعة ٤:٠٠ مساءً).
- Deadline for submission of bids is 16 March 2025.
- آخر موعد لتقديم العطاءات بتاريخ ١٦ مارس ٢٠٢٥م.
- Tenderers to follow the below procedures and steps to obtain the electronic tender documents:
- على مقدمي العطاءات اتباع الإجراءات والخطوات التالية للحصول على مستندات المناقصة إلكترونياً:
- **Step 1**: Interested Tenderers should remit the stated tender fees as per the below bank details:
- **الخطوة الأولى**: يجب على مقدمي العطاءات سداد رسوم المناقصة وفقًا للتفاصيل البنكية أدناه:

SOHAR Industrial Port Co شركة ميناء صحار الصناعي	Account Name اسم الحساب
3101-007970-500	Account Number رقم الحساب
Oman Arab bank SAOC – Main Br بنك عمان العربي ش.م.ع.م – الفرع الرئيسي	Bank Name اسم البنك
OMABOMRUXXX	SWIT رمز السوفت كود

Note: Bank transfers is the only mode of payment accepted
ملاحظة: التحويل البنكي هي الطريقة الوحيدة المقبولة للدفع

Step 2:
Tenderers to send the following documents:
- A request for the electronic tender documents
- A scanned copy of bank transfer
- The firm's commercial registration documents

All shall be communicated to the following e-mail address:
sipc.procurement@soharportandfreezone.com

الخطوة الثانية:
يتعين على مقدمي العطاءات تقديم المستندات التالية:
- طلب الحصول على النسخة الإلكترونية من مستندات المناقصة
- نسخة من إيصال التحويل البنكي
- أوراق السجل التجاري للشركة

على أن يتم إرسالها إلى:
sipc.procurement@soharportandfreezone.com

Step 3:
Tenderers will receive the electronic Tender Document by e-mail.
- SOHAR reserves the right to accept or reject any tender without assigning any reasons.
- All SMEs, holders of Riyadah Card, are requested to provide their Riyadah Card along with the required documents to exempt them from the tender fees.
- For any clarification regarding the tenders please send an e-mail to:

sipc.procurement@soharportandfreezone.com

الخطوة الثالثة:
سوف يستلم مقدمي العطاءات نسخة إلكترونية من مستندات المناقصة عبر البريد الإلكتروني.
- يحق لشركة ميناء صحار والمنطقة الحرة قبول أو رفض أي مورد بدون الإفصاح عن الأسباب.
- يتوجب على حاملي بطاقة ريادة من المؤسسات الصغيرة والمتوسطة تقديم بطاقة ريادة إلى جانب مستندات الشركة لإستثنائهم من دفع رسوم شراء المناقصة.
- في حال وجود أي أسئلة أو استيضاحات تتعلق بالمناقصة الرجاء التواصل معنا عبر البريد الإلكتروني:

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Forum explores investment opportunities in Africa

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) hosted the Omani-African Business Forum on Monday, bringing together business leaders from Oman and several African countries to strengthen trade and investment ties.

The event, attended by Sheikh Faisal bin Abdullah al Rawas, Chairman of OCCI's Board of Directors, along with board members and business owners, aimed to enhance economic cooperation and identify new business opportunities. A total of 40 companies from nine African nations participated, representing sectors such as food security, logistics, energy, finance, construction, education, and fisheries.

Discussions focused on leveraging the strategic position of Oman and Africa, particularly the Horn of Africa and South and East Africa, to facilitate global trade. The region's proximity to key shipping routes complements Oman's location, making it a vital link in the movement of African products and services to international markets.

Rawas described Africa as a promising market with vast natural resources and strong consumer demand. He noted that Oman and Africa share deep historical and commercial ties, which provide a solid foundation for expanding trade and investment exchanges. "The chamber is committed to supporting Oman Vision 2040 by enhancing global competitiveness and exploring high-potential sectors."

Zainab Salem al Hashimi from OCCI outlined the chamber's efforts to support private sector growth, highlighting key Omani exports and priority sectors such as energy, minerals, renewable energy, agriculture, and logistics. She also provided insights into Oman's trade relations with African nations.

Aisha al Hadabi from the Ministry of Commerce, Industry, and Investment Promotion presented the Invest in Oman initiative, showcasing the country's investment incentives, financing mechanisms and legislative framework. She emphasised Oman's role as a strategic investment hub and its focus on economic diversification. The forum also facilitated direct business meetings, allowing Omani and African business owners to explore potential partnerships and expand trade relations.

Dhahirah forum showcases local talent

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI), with support from Daleel Petroleum, launched the Dhahirah Innovation Forum 2025 on Monday in Ibri.

Held under the slogan 'Dhahirah Innovates', the two-day event aims to highlight the role of innovation in economic development and social progress.

The forum was inaugurated by Najib bin Ali al Rawas, Governor of Dhahirah, and features over 50 innovators from the governorate. Participants include representatives from educational institutions, student-led companies, and research projects focused on innovative and technical solutions across various fields.

The event aligns with Oman Vision 2040, emphasising the importance of innovation in economic growth and sustainability. It encourages innovators to develop solutions to scientific and technological challenges and establish businesses that support their ideas.

The opening session included a visual presentation on the role of innovation in industrial and investment sectors, particularly highlighting the contributions of young entrepreneurs and researchers.

Majid bin Khamis al Badi, Board Member of the Chamber's Dhahirah branch and Head of the Education and Innovation Committee, underscored the forum's objective. "The forum provides a platform for innovators to showcase their ideas and scientific advancements. Innovation is a key driver of economic growth and sustainability, shaping a future built on knowledge and creativity," he said.

He added that the Dhahirah branch of the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry is committed to fostering a culture of innovation and supporting entrepreneurs.

Meet explores perspectives of Islam on humanitarian law

Our Correspondent
Muscat

College of Shari'a Sciences' 3rd International Humanitarian Law in the Light of Islamic Jurisprudence Conference commenced on Monday at Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre with participation of 20 countries.

The opening was held under the patronage of H E Sheikh Abdulmalik Abdullah al Khalili, Chairman of State Council, in the presence of senior officials, dignitaries and international guests.

The three-day conference aims to explore the intersection between international humanitarian law (IHL) and Islamic law principles, focusing on issues related to armed conflicts and human rights during war.

The conference will feature 167 research abstracts from scholars worldwide and present 90 papers, highlighting the role of Islamic jurisprudence in promoting peace and safeguarding the rights of conflict victims, particularly in the context of IHL and their legal applications.

Discussions include the definition and principles of IHL, protection of conflict victims, lawful methods of combat, accountability for war crimes, and contribution of Ibadi jurisprudence to conflict-related legal frameworks.

(ONA)

The topics discussed in this conference are the most pressing issues of our time. It is essential to trace the roots of religion, offering humanity a sound approach that will open blind eyes and make deaf ears hear
SHEIKH DR KAHLAN BIN NABHAN AL KHAROUSI

The conference has brought together prominent experts in international law and Islamic jurisprudence, representatives of International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and various government bodies.

Dr Rashid bin Ali al Harthy, Dean of College of Shari'a Sciences and Chairman of the conference's Main Committee, emphasised the goal of showcasing the legislative wisdom of the Qur'an and the sunnah (Prophet's teachings), underscoring Islam's principles of tolerance and its potential to offer effective solutions to modern humanitarian challenges in armed conflicts.

Sheikh Dr Kahlan bin Nabhan al Kharousi, Assistant Grand Mufti of Oman, stated, "The topics discussed in this conference are the most pressing issues of our time. It is essential to trace the roots of religion, offering humanity a sound approach that will open blind eyes and make deaf ears hear."

Gilles Carbonnier, Vice-President of ICRC, said, "This conference comes at a crucial time, particularly for the Arab world where millions of civilians are enduring the devastating consequences of armed conflicts, from Gaza and Lebanon to Syria, Yemen, Sudan and beyond. These conflicts represent a tragic reality for millions of children, women, the elderly and men alike. In this context, the international humanitarian conference seeks to prevent the suffering of war victims."

The College of Shari'a Sciences held the first edition of this conference in 2018 and the second in 2023.

OCCI promotes franchising as investment model

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) has launched a promotional campaign to support 17 Omani brands in expanding through franchise opportunities. The initiative aims to increase their visibility and grant them franchise rights locally, regionally and internationally.

Hamoud bin Salem al Saadi, Second Deputy Chairman of OCCI and Chairman of the Franchise Programme, said the current campaign is the third edition. The 90-day marketing drive is designed to promote franchising as a key investment model in Oman.

"The franchise model offers a unique opportunity for new business owners to acquire established brands and start their own ventures with continuous support and marketing assistance," he said.

The programme includes training, consultations and guidance for businesses looking to expand through franchising. It plays a key role in strengthening the private sector and promoting Omani brands beyond national borders.

Now in its third edition, the Franchise Programme aligns with Oman Vision 2040, supporting economic diversification and sustainable development. It aims to improve the business environment and foster growth across the country's governorates. By helping Omani businesses qualify for franchising, the programme contributes to strengthening the private sector both locally and internationally.

The franchise model offers a unique opportunity for new business owners to acquire established brands and start their own ventures
HAMOUD AL SAADI

SQU student's research on rare shunt complication earns top regional honour

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Malak bint Khalid al Ismaili, a final-year student at College of Medicine and Health Sciences of Sultan Qaboos University (SQU), has been awarded the Clinical Excellence Award in Research at the 21st Regional Meeting of Eastern Mediterranean Medical Students' Associations (EMR21).

She was feted for her research on 'Abdominal Pseudocyst Post Ventriculoperitoneal Shunt.'

The EMR21 conference, organised by International Federation of Medical Students' Associations, concluded on February 10 in Muscat, bringing together over 450 students from 18 countries.

Malak's research examined over 200 cases, presenting a

(Supplied photo)

systematic review spanning over 50 years (1969–2022) of abdominal pseudocyst cases - a rare complication of ventriculoperitoneal shunts used to treat hydrocephalus, which is a buildup of fluid in cavities called ventricles deep within the brain.

Her research analysed data from 208 patients - the majority children (62.8%). It identified infection and inflammation as primary contributors to these complications.

Her research findings revealed that diagnoses were predominantly made using CT scans (65.38%). Treatment approaches varied from surgery to shunt rerouting, resulting in a success rate of 71.2% and relapse in 9.1% cases. Kaplan-Meier analysis indicated that patients undergoing repeated shunt revisions had a higher likelihood of developing abdominal pseudocysts sooner. Age and initial surgery did not significantly impact the speed of onset.

Malak's research underscores the importance of early screening and continuous monitoring, particularly for patients undergoing repeated revisions, to enable early diagnosis and reduce the risks of these rare complications.

(ONA)

Seminar discusses factors driving economic diversification in GCC

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) is hosting a two-day seminar - 'Indicators of Gulf Economic Diversification' – in Muscat in partnership with Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung's Regional Programme Gulf States.

The event, which started on Monday, has brought together experts from the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries to discuss key factors and strategies driving economic diversification in the region.

Held under the patronage of Rashid bin Amer al Musalhi, First Deputy Chairman of OCCI, the seminar is focused on measuring economic diversification and identifying progress in sustainable growth across the GCC.

H H Sayyid Dr Adham bin Turki al Said, Chairman of OCCI's Economic Committee, said the chamber is committed to supporting Oman Vision 2040 objectives by assessing economic diversification trends and setting clear guidelines for future development. "GCC countries share a vision of prioritising economic diversification, especially given global economic fluctuations and shifting geopolitical realities," he said.

GCC countries share a vision of prioritising economic diversification, especially given global economic fluctuations and shifting geopolitical realities
H H SAYYID DR ADHAM BIN TURKI AL SAID

The seminar will examine the current status of economic diversification in the region and the composite index used to measure progress.

Yousef bin Hamad al Balushi, Vice-Chairman of OCCI's Economic Committee, highlighted the growing role of the private sector in driving diversification efforts. "Significant progress has been made, but there is still potential for further advancements, particularly through private sector engagement," he said.

The first day of discussions covered economic diversification in Oman, the composite index for Gulf countries and sustainable growth strategies. The second day will feature sessions on key economic variables affecting GCC growth, diversification indicators and mechanisms to integrate local economic pathways with international markets.

The Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung's Regional Programme Gulf States works with GCC countries to improve mutual understanding between the region, Germany and European countries.

Oman-Saudi Business Forum on Wednesday

Muscat – The Omani-Saudi Business Forum, organised by Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry through the Omani-Saudi Business Council, will start on Wednesday in Muscat. The two-day event aims to boost economic, trade, and investment relations between Oman and Saudi Arabia.

Discussions will focus on increasing trade volumes, expanding joint investments and strengthening private sector cooperation, particularly in ongoing projects.

Sheikh Ali bin Hamad al Kalbani, head of the Omani side of the Omani-Saudi Business Council, said the forum reflects the commitment of both nations to achieving economic integration. "The leaderships of Oman and Saudi Arabia are keen to enhance trade and investment ties through clear strategies that drive economic cooperation," he said.

Kalbani added that the forum is part of ongoing efforts for coordination between the private sectors of both countries. "It provides a platform to explore investment opportunities and assess the requirements needed to facilitate trade, supporting economic growth in both nations."

The forum is expected to build on recent economic partnerships between Oman and Saudi Arabia, further strengthening bilateral ties.

Sultan Qaboos University

ANNOUNCEMENT

Sultan Qaboos University announces their desire to sell used vehicles and their in sealed envelopes. Those wishing to enter the auction must adhere to the following conditions:

- Interested parties can view used vehicles in auction yard and receive the bidding on Tuesday and Wednesday)18-19/02/2025.(from 03:00 pm to 05:00 pm.
- Deposit of (500) Omani riyals in cash as an insurance. This amount will be refunded to the unsuccessful bidders.
- Submitting the offer in a sealed envelope after viewing the used vehicles, entitled by the name of the head of the committee for selling used vehicles, and put the envelope in bid box.
- The presented offer is binding on its owner if it is placed on it, and in the event that the buyer does not pay the purchase price on time, the insurance amount will be forfeited, and the sale will be awarded to another applicant.
- Those who win the bidding will be contacted. They must pay the remaining sum, and they are responsible for moving their items within 3 days from 09:00 am to 03:00 pm.
- The used vehicles are sold in their current condition and SQU is not responsible for any loss or damage to the sold vehicles if the shifting is not completed until 25/02/2025 and we applied (10) Omani riyals as a penalty for each day after 25/02/2025.

Notes:

- **Prices are sorted according to each vehicles and the higher price is taken.**
- **Funds will be collected electronically through visa cards.**
- **Entering the auction yard through Gate No (5).**
- **For more information, contact on 24142611 / 94094918 / 97172110.**

OPAZ issues tender for dry port construction at EZAD

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ) announced on Monday the launch of the third package tender for the development of the Economic Zone at Al Dhahira (EZAD), which includes the construction of dry port facilities and a veterinary quarantine.

OPAZ has invited experienced Omani and Saudi companies (joint ventures) to purchase the tender documents and submit their bids by April 17, the upcoming deadline.

The dry port is the central component of EZAD, located near the Omani-Saudi border (Rub' al Khali). It is being developed in collaboration between the Sultanate of Oman and Saudi Arabia. The total area allocated for the dry port is 4 sqkm, with the first phase of construction covering 1 sqkm. The tender also includes the construction of a veterinary quarantine.

Eng Ibrahim Yousuf al Zadjali, Project Manager for the Economic Zone at Al Dhahira, stated that the new tender will help EZAD achieve its goals of enhancing trade between the Sultanate of Oman and Saudi Arabia. The design incorporates state-of-the-art facilities and ensures the port is built to the highest standards and quality specifications, taking into consideration the requirements of all stakeholders.

The dry port is the central component of the Economic Zone at Al Dhahira (EZAD), located near the Omani-Saudi border (Rub' al Khali)

He confirmed that the dry port, in conjunction with the border crossing, will reduce the time needed for goods to be transported to and from Oman via other entry points. This will be achieved by minimising the number of transit points, thereby shortening the time required for goods to reach their final destination.

He also noted that the dry port will facilitate the smooth flow of goods between the Sultanate of Oman and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, boost bilateral trade, strengthen investment partnerships, and attract further investment.

The tender includes the execution of civil, mechanical, electrical, plumbing, and structural works for the dry port and veterinary quarantine.

According to the tender specifications, the project will involve the construction of a customs gate, inspection platforms, customs clearance areas, substation facilities, a maintenance workshop, laboratories, a water tank, fire protection systems, X-ray and scanning equipment, as well as the administration building, mosque, offices, rest areas, staff accommodations, fencing, surveillance cameras, and various other facilities.

The dry port will be operated by Asyad Group, a subsidiary of the Oman Investment Authority (OIA), due to its expertise in managing and operating such facilities.

Last year, OPAZ awarded a consultancy services contract for the design and supervision of the first phase's infrastructure facilities in the Economic Zone at Al Dhahira to a consortium of an Omani and a Saudi company. The first phase covers an area of 20 sqkm.

Additionally, last year, OPAZ issued a tender for the construction of the main roads, protection channels, and surface water drainage systems for EZAD, along with associated services. This tender is expected to be awarded before the end of Q1 2025.

The total area of EZAD is 388 sqkm, located 20km from the Rub' al Khali border crossing. The establishment of this zone aims to stimulate trade between Oman and Saudi Arabia, support economic diversification and development efforts, open new economic opportunities for Oman and the wider Gulf region, and capitalise on the competitive advantages and strategic geographic location of the zone.

RO128mn Asyad Shipping IPO to open on Feb 20

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Financial Services Authority (FSA) has approved the initial public offering (IPO) of Asyad Shipping Company, with the company set to offer approximately 1.042 billion shares worth over RO128mn. The offering represents 20% of the company's capital.

The IPO will be open for subscription from February 20 to 26 for individual investors, while institutional investors can subscribe until February 27. The share price for individual investors has been set at 123 baizas per share, while the institutional offering will follow a book-building process within a price range of 117 to 123 baizas per share.

According to the FSA, the IPO is divided into three categories: institutional investors, individual investors, and major investors. Institutional investors will receive 45% of the total offering, equally divided among local, regional, and international institutions. The minimum subscription for this category is 100,000 shares, with no upper limit.

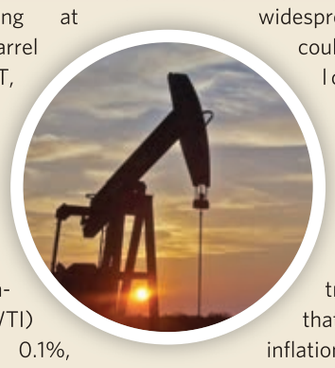
Individual investors have been allocated 25% of the offering, with a minimum subscription of 81,400 shares, in multiples of 100. Small individual investors can subscribe to a minimum of 1,000 shares and a maximum of 81,300 shares.

The remaining 30% of the IPO is allocated to major investors, who can subscribe to 312.5mn shares worth over RO40.63mn. Asyad Shipping, a subsidiary of Asyad Group under the Oman Investment Authority, is going public as part of the government's strategy to divest from state-owned assets. The offering aligns with Oman Vision 2040, which aims to attract domestic and foreign investment.

Oil prices rise amid hopes of Russia-Ukraine peace talks

London, UK - Oil prices saw a modest increase on Monday, fueled by expectations that the US Federal Reserve (Fed) will implement two rate cuts this year, and US President Donald Trump's announcement of 'great' reciprocal tariffs, while the potential for a peace agreement between Russia and Ukraine limits further price gains.

The international benchmark Brent crude rose by 0.2%, trading at $74.54 per barrel at 0744 GMT, up from $74.40 at the close of the previous session. The US benchmark West Texas Intermediate (WTI) increased by 0.1%, reaching $70.67 per barrel, compared to its prior session close of $70.56.



Expectations are growing that the Fed might implement two interest rate cuts throughout the year. Experts suggest these cuts could drive oil prices higher, supported by a weaker dollar and a boost in economic activity.

The depreciation of the US dollar is expected to make oil more affordable for buyers using other currencies. Meanwhile, interest rate cuts aimed at supporting economic growth could drive higher demand in oil-dependent sectors, including industrial production and transportation.

Moreover, US President Donald Trump's directive last week for trade and economic officials to develop 'reciprocal tariffs' targeting countries that impose tariffs on US goods continues to heighten the risk of a global trade war.

These measures could complicate the fight against inflation in the US, while the country's trading partners might experience production challenges due to additional tariffs.

Experts warn that widespread tariffs could have a long-term negative impact on global growth, potentially triggering a trade war that reignites inflation, which could, in turn, push oil prices higher.

On the other hand, the potential for a peace agreement between Russia and Ukraine continues to cap price increase.

In a phone conversation last Wednesday, Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin agreed to arrange talks on a resolution to the Ukrainian conflict as soon as possible. Trump made ending the Moscow-Kyiv war a key component of his presidential election campaign.

As efforts to bring an end to the war continue, market players are becoming less worried about supply disruptions, which is putting downward pressure on oil prices.

Anadolu Agency

Al-Futtaim Logistics expands into Oman

Muscat – The UAE-based Al-Futtaim Logistics, a leading provider of world-class supply chain and logistics solutions, has announced its expansion into Oman, reinforcing its commitment to supporting the country's growing aerospace sector.

This strategic move follows the successful launch of its Aerospace Logistics division in the UAE in 2023 and the upcoming establishment of operations in Saudi Arabia by the end of the current quarter, with Oman set to follow in Q2 2025.

As Oman and the wider Middle East strengthen their position as a global aerospace hub, the demand for advanced logistics solutions has never been greater. With the region's aerospace market growing at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 4.4% and the GCC's aircraft maintenance, repair, and overhaul (MRO) services sector set to expand by 14.5% over the next five years, fleet growth and rising demand for wide-body aircraft maintenance are driving the need for enhanced logistics services.

This expansion into Saudi Arabia and Oman marks a significant milestone for Al-Futtaim Logistics' regional growth

DR RAMAN KUMAR

The increasing number of new aircraft deliveries – expected to exceed 1,000 by 2029-30 – further underscores the urgency for specialized aerospace logistics solutions, particularly in Oman and the broader region.

In a press release, Dr. Raman Kumar, Managing Director of Al-Futtaim Logistics, said, "This expansion into Saudi Arabia and Oman marks a significant milestone for Al-Futtaim Logistics' regional growth. The aerospace industry operates in a time-sensitive environment where every minute counts, and our tailored logistics solutions are designed to minimize downtime and ensure seamless operations. With our extensive regional expertise and global reach, strong regulatory compliance, and commitment to innovation and artificial intelligence technology, we are ready to meet the dynamic needs of the aviation sector in these growing markets."

The expansion announcement follows Al-Futtaim Logistics' successful participation at the MRO Middle East event, where the company showcased its aerospace logistics solutions to the aviation industry. Additionally, Al-Futtaim Logistics hosted an exclusive 'Aerospace Customer Meet' on the sidelines of the event, further reinforcing its commitment to supporting the region's aviation sector.

Al-Futtaim's Aerospace Logistics division is dedicated to providing tailored solutions for a broad spectrum of clients, including Airlines, Maintenance, Repair & Overhaul (MRO) operators, Original Equipment Manufacturers (OEMs), Private Jet operators, Parts Suppliers, and Airports Services. With a focus on efficiency and reliability, the company offers time-critical movements, air-side deliveries at major airports, multiple carrier options, 24/7 Aircraft on Ground (AOG) desk operations, and comprehensive freight and local services visibility to MRO operations.

As an Authorised Economic Operator accredited by the UAE Federal Customs Authority and Dubai Customs, Al-Futtaim Logistics upholds the highest global compliance standards set by the World Customs Organization (WCO), Aviation Suppliers Association (ASA-100) and International Standards Organisation (ISO) practices.

Japan's GDP grows 2.8% in Q4; outlook murky

Tokyo, Japan – Japan's economy grew an annualised real 2.8% in the October-December period of 2024, marking the third straight quarter of expansion on robust corporate spending, but lackluster private consumption underscored the protracted effects of inflation, government data showed Monday.

Nominal gross domestic product, which shows the size of the economy in current prices, totaled 609.29tn yen ($4.01tn), surpassing the 600tn yen mark for the first time on a calendar year basis, according to the Cabinet Office.

In 2024, real GDP, which is adjusted for inflation and shows the total value of goods and services produced in a country, grew 0.1%, marking the fourth straight yearly gain.

But the pace of growth slowed sharply from 1.5% in 2023, as Japanese households struggled to cope with the rising cost of living without substantial gains in real wages.

The average market forecast was for an annualized real 1.32% expansion in the October-December quarter, according to a poll by the Japan Center for Economic Research.

On a quarterly basis, real GDP increased 0.7% from the previous July-September quarter, against the 0.33% rise projected by economists.

Capital investment increased 0.5% , marking a turnaround from a 0.1% drop in the July-September quarter, reflecting strong demand for chipmaking capacity and the need for new factory builds.

Another key component of domestic demand, private consumption, which makes up more than half of the economy, grew 0.1% , up for the third straight quarter.

Consumers ramped up spending on cars and durable goods such as air conditioners. The New Year's holidays were longer than the previous year, leading to increased spending on hotel stays. However, higher food prices curbed demand for rice and perishables.

"Private consumption turned out stronger than expected because we thought it would drop. But we need to be cautious about the outlook because wage growth, when adjusted for inflation, will likely be negative in the January-March quarter," said Saisuke Sakai, chief Japan economist at Mizuho Research & Technologies Ltd.

The forecast-beating GDP figures came as the minority government led by Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba explores better ways to support inflation-hit households. The ruling and some opposition parties are in talks to boost people's incomes and reduce education costs shouldered by families with high school children.

Kyodo News

MoH opens latent tuberculosis screening and treatment project

The Ministry of Health (MoH), represented by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, celebrated on Sunday the official launch of the Latent Tuberculosis Screening and Treatment Project as part of the Medical Fitness Screening Programme in Oman, under the title 'Oman Provides an Opportunity to End Tuberculosis' at the InterCity Hotel in Al Khuwair.

The event was held under the auspices of H E Dr Said bin Harib al Lamki, Undersecretary for Health Affairs in MoH, with the attendance of Suleiman bin Saleh al Dakhil, the Director-General of the GCC Health Council.

H E Dr Lamki, reviewed the progress of the project and its achievements, such as expanding universal health coverage in Oman and the strategy to eliminate tuberculosis. He also highlighted future plans to expand the programme.

On his part, Suleiman al Dakhil presented a detailed overview of the 'Wafid' programme, highlighting its concept, objectives, key stakeholders, the programme's online portal, and electronic connectivity with Gulf Cooperation Council countries, among other aspects.

Dr Amal al Maani, Director-General of the Center for Disease Control and Prevention in the ministry, emphasised that the project was the result of a comprehensive study of the epidemiological situation of tuberculosis in Oman.

She revealed that most active tuberculosis cases are imported, primarily coming through migrant workers. Therefore, this project is a response to enhance health security in Oman and expand the scope of preventive healthcare to ensure the well-being of the community in all its segments.

Dr Amal indicated that this project not only reflects a new step in the fight against tuberculosis but also represents a living example of effective partnership between the public and private sectors. It embodies cooperation between government authorities, the private sector, and international organisations, not only within Oman but also at the regional and international levels, to achieve public health goals and tackle infectious diseases through the implementation of digital health systems.

H E Dr Said bin Harib al Lamki reviewed the progress of the project and its achievements, such as expanding universal health coverage in Oman and the strategy to eliminate tuberculosis

The project contributes to improving diagnosis and treatment, increasing universal health coverage to make it more effective and inclusive. These systems enable the accurate and rapid tracking of health cases, helping to reduce the spread of the disease and ensure early treatment.

Eliminating tuberculosis is one of the most prominent global public health projects and a key goal of sustainable development. The program aligns with the objectives of Oman Vision 2040, which aims to strengthen a preventive healthcare system to build a healthy society.

The project was implemented by Qiagen; it is an integrated electronic system that connects various sectors within and outside the Ministry of Health to achieve integration between them and enhance efficiency and speed in executing procedures. This includes partnerships with the private sector for verifying the identity of migrants using fingerprinting and photographs, as well as collecting blood samples and transporting them to government laboratories.

The system also directly links laboratory-testing devices to both private and public screening centers for various infectious diseases, including tuberculosis, to ensure accurate and rapid diagnosis and governance. In addition, it integrates with relevant external entities, both within Oman and abroad, to ensure the accuracy of data, such as the electronic portal of Sand Centers, the Ministry of Commerce, Industry, and Investment Promotion, the Ministry of Transport, Communications, and Information Technology for electronic authentication, and the Royal Oman Police for residency verification.

Furthermore, the devices were externally connected to the Medical Wafid System of the Gulf Cooperation Council to ensure alignment of tuberculosis screening and treatment policies between the GCC countries and to enhance health monitoring of migrants.

To ensure its success, the 'IGRA' test was adopted in this programme for diagnosing latent tuberculosis.

Oman Air records highest seat occupancy at 88%

Oman Air has recorded its highest ever seat occupancy, achieving a record 88% total load factor in January this year, reflecting the percentage of available seats filled with passengers and demonstrating how efficiently the airline has utilised its capacity.

Of the 41 destinations Oman Air flew to last month, several achieved load factors as high as 95%. The airline has surged ahead of the global average, which was 83.5% for 2024, according to the latest numbers from the International Air Transport Association (IATA).

An impressive 77% occupancy was also achieved for its Business Class seats. Simultaneously, the airline is also growing its point-to-point market share to attract more tourists into Oman and contribute to the country's economic goals.

"We're extremely proud of this record load factor, which reflects the strength of our network and shows that the changes we have made to the business are starting to come to fruition," said Con Korfiatis, Chief Executive Officer of Oman Air, adding: "As we look towards the summer season, we can see a strong booking momentum and we continue to focus on sustaining this growth."

Muscat governorate conducts workshop on Tajawob Platform

Within its continuous efforts to enhance services and the beneficiaries' experience, Muscat governorate, in cooperation with the Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up Unit, conducted a workshop on the National Platform for Suggestions, Complaints and Reports (Tajawob).

The Central Team that manages the platform and its members from both internal and external to the governorate attended it.

The workshop aimed to introduce the team to the platform purposes and managing complaints, reports, and suggestions in its multiple channels, including its website, call centres, and customer services departments. It also affirms that activating the role of these departments according to the requirements of government excellence and involving beneficiaries to develop services is important.

Tajawob in the governorate will be a unified national electronic portal to receive suggestions and complaints. The Governorate and other institutions will gain more accurate information on the efficiency of services request methods, monitor performance in responding to these requests, and plan to take the appropriate decisions to improve the efficiency of both the methods and the services.

Beneficiaries can access the platform through tajawob.om and log in using the ID number and card expiry date, and then input the OTP verification code that is sent to the registered phone number.

After requesting, the Central Team will refer the topic to the relevant entity within one hour, and the entity must respond within a maximum of five working days. If the beneficiary has not received the required response, he or she can escalate it directly to the head of the relevant unit. Thus, it ensures effective follow-up to solve complaints and suggestions.

This workshop aims to achieve the objectives of Oman Vision 2040, 2040, to enhance transparency and responsibility in government work, quality government services, and boost participation of the community in development, and increase transparency and accountability.

Oman takes part in Gulfood 2025 to promote investment in food industry

The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates 'Madayn', is participating in the 30th edition of Gulfood, one of the world's largest annual food and beverage sourcing events.

Gulfood 2025 is taking place from February 17 to 21, at the Dubai World Trade Centre in the UAE, with over 129 countries joining the exhibition.

Khalid al Salehi, Director General of Marketing and Commercial Affairs at Madayn, highlighted Madayn's strategic focus in Gulfood 2025 on attracting and localising foreign investments in Oman's thriving food sector. "On the sidelines of Gulfood 2025, Madayn is organising an event targeting CEOs, investors, and industrialists interested in expanding their businesses or launching new projects in the sultanate's food sector," stated Salehi. "The event will showcase the diverse opportunities available in the food sector within Madayn's industrial cities across all governorates, while a discussion session will bring together Omani and international experts to spotlight strategies for food security, resilience, and innovation in sustainable food solutions."

On another note, and as part of its efforts to support Omani entrepreneurs and SMEs, Madayn has coordinated with the SMEs Development Authority to provide a dedicated space for non-exhibiting Omani entrepreneurs to connect and meet with investors and business leaders attending the event.

Additionally, Madayn has provided a platform for a number of entrepreneurs who graduated from the 'Industrial Innovation Specialist' programme in the Food and Beverage (F&B) industry, implemented by the Industrial Innovation Academy in Sur and Raysut Industrial Cities.

Shell Oman Marketing Company SAOG
Post Box 38, Mina Al Fahal, Postal Code 116, Sultanate of Oman

INVITATION FOR THE ANNUAL ORDINARY GENERAL MEETING

The Board of Directors of Shell Oman Marketing SAOG (the "**Company**") are pleased to invite all the shareholders of the Company to attend the Annual Ordinary General Meeting of the Company ("AGM") scheduled to be held at **3 pm** on **Wednesday, 5 March 2025**, through the electronic platform hosting the AGM. The platform can be accessed through Muscat Clearance and Depository Company's website (www.mcd.gov.om). In the event of not meeting the legal quorum, the AGM will be held at 3 pm on Wednesday, 12 March 2025, through the electronic platform hosting the AGM, to discuss the following agenda:

Agenda for the AGM:

1. To consider and approve the Board of Directors' Report regarding the Company's activities and financial position during the financial year ended 31 December 2024.
2. To consider and approve the Board of Directors' Report regarding Corporate Governance for the financial year ended 31 December 2024.
3. To consider and approve the Auditors' Report regarding the audited financial statements for the financial year ended 31 December 2024.
4. To inform the shareholders about the Report of the Board of Directors' performance evaluation for the financial year ended 31 December 2024.
5. To consider and approve the proposed cash dividend to shareholders as of the date of the AGM, equivalent to (37) Baisa per share for the financial year ended 31 December 2024.
6. To approve the sitting fees of the Board of Directors and sub-committees payable to the Board of Directors for the previous financial year and to determine the sitting fees for the next financial year.
7. To consider and approve the proposal of distributing the total sum of RO (42,400) as remuneration for the Board of Directors of the Company for the financial year ended 31 December 2024.
8. To inform the shareholders about Related Parties Transactions entered by the Company during the financial year ended 31 December 2024.
9. To inform the shareholders about the expenditure in support of social services during the financial year ended 31 December 2024.
10. To consider and approve the proposal of allocating RO (75,000) to support social services for the financial year ending 31 December 2025.
11. To elect a board member in the Board of Directors of the company to fill the vacant seat. Any person who wishes to be nominated to the Board of Directors of the Company is required to fill in a Director's Nomination Form and deliver it to the Company at least five (5) business days prior to the date of the AGM of the Company (by the end of working hours on Wednesday, 26 February 2025). The Company shall not accept any applications received after such date. Candidates must meet the required conditions for the Board of Directors' membership.
12. To appoint the Auditors for the Company for the year ending 31 December 2025 and fix their remuneration.

In accordance with the Company's Articles of Association and FSA's regulations on holding AGMs using the electronic platform, we would like to bring to your kind attention the following:

a) Any juristic person is entitled to authorize any natural person to attend the AGM and vote on their behalf through the electronic platform, provided that the natural person has an investor number in Muscat Clearing and Depository Company.

b) Voting on any of the agenda items mentioned in the notice commences three (3) days before the date of the commencement of the AGM and until the end of the voting process on the day of the AGM. In the event that the shareholder's balance changes, the voting shall be considered void, and he/she shall vote again on the day of the AGM.

For subsequent information, kindly contact **Mr. Azzan Hamed Al Yahmadi** on telephone number: **96622566**

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SQU hosts summit on sustainable growth, digital transformation

Under the patronage of H E Dr Said bin Mohammed al Saqri, Minister of Economy, the College of Economics and Political Sciences at SQU, in collaboration with the Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-Up Office, is organising the 3rd International Conference on Business and Economics.

The two-day event began at The St Regis Al Mouj Muscat Resort on Monday, under the theme 'Driving Digital Transformation and Connectivity for Sustainable Growth'.

This conference aims to bridge the gap between academia and industry by fostering collaborative links between scientific research and business. It provides an excellent platform for identifying new research areas, facilitating partnerships, and offering valuable networking opportunities across various business sectors.

Key discussions will centre on digital transformation and its impact on the economic cycle, the role of emerging technology enterprises in building an innovation-driven economy, the significance of global partnerships in achieving sustainable development, and strategies for economic diversification within the framework of Oman Vision 2040.

The conference will bring together officials, executives, entrepreneurs, economic researchers, and business leaders, alongside distinguished international speakers. The programme will include panel discussions and presentations, featuring real-world case studies on building technology enterprises and their integration into global markets.

Around 50 research papers will be presented, addressing key challenges and opportunities in entrepreneurship and the digital economy.

Nepal's foreign minister wants maritime ties for Global South

Dr Arzu Rana Deuba, Nepal's Minister for Foreign Affairs, on Monday addressed the plenary of the 8th Indian Ocean Conference titled 'Amplifying the Voice of Global South'.

The conference, which began in Muscat on February 16 under the theme of 'Voyage to New Horizons of Maritime Partnership' will continue till Tuesday.

The Nepalese Foreign Minister while raising the concerns being faced by the countries in the Global South highlighted the importance of maritime partnership in today's interconnected world.

She underscored the need for strong commitment to incorporating the voice of the countries in Global South as they play a key role in creating just, fair, equitable, and rules-based international order.

She also recalled the 'Summit of the Future' being held in New York during the 79th session of the United Nations General Assembly as a guiding post for addressing the concerns of the Global South.

The minister maintained that the roadmap for the future has been built with the adoption of 'Pact for the Future', 'Global Digital Compact,' and 'Declaration on Future Generations'. Shedding light on the importance of South-South and Triangular cooperation, she stressed on shared vision and united action for progress. She expressed Nepal's steadfast commitment towards expanding the 'New Horizons'.

The Nepalese minister called for stronger South-South Cooperation, regional integration and mutual learning, equitable access to finance, reform of the global governance and financial architecture, fulfillment of commitment by developed countries in development financing, equitable sharing of natural resources, improving connectivity and transfer of knowledge, skill and technologies.

Anchoring climate change as one of the top priorities, the Minister shared the information that the Government of Nepal is hosting 'Sagarmatha Sambaad' - a global dialogue forum on 16-18 May 16-18 this year in Kathmandu with the theme of 'Climate change, mountains and the future of humanity'. She invited all the high-level dignitaries present in the Conference to participate in the Sambaad.

The Nepalese Foreign Minister held bilateral meeting with India's External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar, during which Arzu highlighted the multi-dynamic and ever-growing bilateral relations between Nepal and India.

India's Jaishanker underscored the importance of the ongoing development partnerships between the two friendly nations.

شركة الفجر العالمية ش.م.ع.ع
AL FAJAR AL ALAMIA CO. SAOG

PO BOX 78, QURUM CITY CENTRE, PC 102, SULTANATE OF OMAN

Group's Unaudited Financial Results for the six months ended 31 December 2024

Chairman's Report

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I am pleased to present to you the report on the activities and unaudited financial results of the company for the 2nd quarter ended 31 December 2024.

1. Operating Results

For the six-month period ending December 31, 2024, the Group's total revenue declined by 3%, reaching RO 4.372 million, compared to RO 4.520 million in the same period of the previous year. The decrease in overall revenue was primarily attributed to challenges faced in the UAE operations, where technical issues impacted performance during the first half of the current fiscal year. However, management has successfully implemented alternative measures to address these challenges and expects to restore operations to normalcy.

On a more positive note, the Group's operations in Oman saw a significant 42% increase in revenue during the reporting period, demonstrating strong growth and resilience in the region. The financial performance of the parent company reflected this positive trend, with an operating profit of RO 0.478 million, a notable improvement from the RO 0.213 million operating profit recorded in the same period last year.

Despite a consolidated operating loss of RO 0.379 million for the first half of the fiscal year, the Group's performance showed a marked improvement from the previous year's loss of RO 1.066 million. While the consolidated results still reflect an operational loss, the Group's ongoing positive progress in Oman signals an encouraging outlook for the remainder of the fiscal year.

The Group recorded a consolidated net loss of RO 1.543 million for the six months ended December 31, 2024, an improvement over the net loss of RO 1.974 million for the same period last year. This reflects the Group's ability to reduce its losses, with a focus on strengthening its operations in Oman and addressing the challenges in the UAE.

2. Operations

In Oman, the drilling and blasting arm (Technical Services and Rock Blasting Co.) is seeing robust growth, spurred by the launch of several infrastructure projects in the first half of the fiscal year. More projects are expected to begin in the second half, further driving demand. The Group is actively enhancing its capabilities to meet this growing need, with the aim of capitalizing on the positive trend.

Our Gypsum Quarry (Awam Minerals Co.) has significantly ramped up its production capacity, reaching a monthly output of 80,000 to 100,000 tons. Plans are in place to further increase production to between 125,000 and 150,000 tons per month, which will contribute to the Group's overall revenue growth and strengthen its cash flow position.

In the UAE, the drilling and blasting division (Technical Drilling & Blasting Co.) has faced administrative and structural challenges in the first half of the fiscal year, which negatively impacted revenue. However, management has implemented alternative measures to resolve these issues and is confident that operations will return to normal by the end of the fiscal year. The Group anticipates regaining momentum in its UAE operations as a result.

The new explosives production facility in Siji, Fujairah, (Geodynamics Mideast Co.) is approaching completion and is set to begin production following the necessary regulatory approvals. This development will further solidify the Group's presence in the UAE market for drilling, blasting, and explosives, providing a valuable boost to its overall business.

The explosives production facility in Siji – Fujairah is in the final stages toward completion and is expected to be completed in the first half of 2024. This will undoubtedly strengthen the Group's position in the UAE market for drilling, blasting, and explosives.

3. Health, Safety and the Environment

Your Company is operated in a safe and efficient manner in strict compliance with the highest safety standards and in accordance with the prevailing Royal Oman Police and UAE authorities Explosives Rules and Regulations.

No accidents or environmental incidents were reported during the period ended 31 December 2024..

Consolidated Statement of Comprehensive Income

	GROUP		PARENT	
	31.12.2024 RO.	31.12.2023 RO.	31.12.2024 RO.	31.12.2023 RO.
Revenue	4,372,488	4,520,044	2,247,681	2,045,354
Cost of Sales	(3,926,732)	(4,787,961)	(1,459,207)	(1,625,146)
Gross Profit/(Loss)	445,756	(267,917)	788,474	420,208
Other Income	105,019	106,950	67,467	158,268
Administration & General expenses	(806,245)	(751,638)	(261,963)	(221,524)
Sales & Distribution expenses	(123,925)	(153,823)	(115,632)	(144,205)
Operating Profit/(Loss)	(379,395)	(1,066,428)	478,346	212,747
Finance charges	(1,033,062)	(944,756)	(497,490)	(434,074)
Profit/(Loss) from Operations	(1,412,457)	(2,011,184)	(19,144)	(221,327)
Share of loss from Investment in an associate	(82,621)	(36,431)	(82,621)	(36,431)
Profit/(Loss) before taxation	(1,495,078)	(2,047,615)	(101,765)	(257,758)
Taxation	(47,458)	73,844	(25,850)	22,427
Profit/(Loss) and total comprehensive income	(1,542,536)	(1,973,771)	(127,615)	(235,331)

Consolidated Statement of Financial Position

	GROUP		PARENT	
	As at 31.12.2024 RO.	As at 31.12.2023 RO.	As at 31.12.2024 RO.	As at 31.12.2023 RO.
Fixed Assets	11,807,883	10,739,685	459,498	487,407
Intangible Assets	3,555,829	3,895,620	-	-
Goodwill	22,063,432	22,228,249	579,717	579,717
Investment in Subsidiary	-	-	36,809,382	36,972,953
Investment in associates	554,157	735,242	554,157	735,242
Right of Use of Assets	64,425	342,271	62,601	74,695
Deferred Tax	1,475,105	1,310,224	354,566	355,714
Current Assets	8,411,013	8,724,261	17,638,110	14,874,977
Total Assets	47,931,844	47,975,552	56,458,031	54,080,705
Non-current Liabilities	23,892,880	25,378,017	23,028,467	24,004,451
Current Liabilities	15,410,294	10,718,477	9,355,483	5,762,794
Total Liabilities	39,303,174	36,096,494	32,383,950	29,767,245
Net Assets	8,628,671	11,879,058	24,074,081	24,313,460
Sharesholders' Fund				
Share Capital	4,933,025	4,933,025	4,933,025	4,933,025
Legal Reserve	1,436,224	1,436,224	1,340,068	1,340,068
Special Reserve	579,717	579,717	579,717	579,717
Share premium account	13,550,576	13,550,576	13,550,576	13,550,576
Retained earnings	(11,870,871)	(8,620,484)	3,670,695	3,910,074
Total Shareholders' equity	8,628,671	11,879,058	24,074,081	24,313,460

Your Company was in compliance with the Code of Corporate Governance and other applicable rules and regulations during the 6 months ended 31 December 2024.

4. Future Outlook

The Group maintains a strong order book and is poised to add additional infrastructure projects in Oman, which are expected to significantly contribute to revenue growth in both the drilling and blasting operations, as well as the explosives sector. Moreover, the Group anticipates a moderate increase in revenue from the mining sector, fueled by strong demand for gypsum and limestone minerals.

As drilling and blasting operations in the UAE return to normal, the Group expects further improvement in revenue. The Group is also nearing completion of its Geodynamic facility and anticipates receiving the necessary approvals to begin production shortly. In addition, a new regulation regarding explosives handling is set to be implemented in 2025. The Group has already taken proactive steps to prepare for this change, positioning itself to capitalize on new opportunities and further strengthen its market position in both the Drilling and Blasting sectors and the UAE market.

Awam Gypsum Quarry is on track to increase its production to approximately 125,000 to 150,000 tons per month by the end of the current fiscal year. This growth will make a meaningful contribution to the Group's revenue expansion and enhance its cash flow position moving forward.

5. Acknowledgements

The Members of the Board wish to record their gratitude to His Majesty Sultan Haithem bin Tariq bin Taimur and the Government of Oman for the successful efforts made to improve development and prosperity within the Country.

The Directors also wish to thank the Royal Oman Police, other Government bodies, our valued customers and Banker for their cooperation and support.

Haythem Mahmood Abd Al-Nabi Macki
Chairman

Note
The complete accounts shall be delivered to any shareholder or beneficiary upon request, in Arabic or English, within 7 days from receiving the application.

Omantel unveils Maqroo, first Arabic dyslexic-friendly font

Omantel officially launched Maqroo, the world's first Arabic dyslexic-friendly font, in an exclusive event held at The Chedi Muscat. The launch was attended by H E Dr Madiha bint Ahmed bin Nasser al Shibaniyah, Minister of Education, along with prominent officials, educators, and industry experts.

As part of its commitment to leveraging technology for social benefit, Omantel is collaborating with the Ministry of Education to explore ways to integrate Maqroo into the education sector, an initiative that aims to enhance accessibility and inclusivity for both students and educators.

Commenting on the launch, Talal al Mamari, Chief Executive Officer at Omantel, said: "At Omantel, we recognise the transformative potential of innovation. Maqroo is more than just a font - it serves as an empowering tool , offering a more inclusive reading experience for individuals with dyslexia.

"By making it publicly accessible and collaborating with the Ministry of Education, we are ensuring that this initiative reaches students and educators nationwide, thus broadening its impact and promoting inclusivity within the educational system."

Maqroo was developed after an extensive study of 650 Arabic fonts researched on people with dyslexia. One in every nine people in the Arab world has dyslexia, highlighting the importance of developing specialised educational and technological tools to enhance the ability to learn and actively participate in society. The goal was to optimise readability while preserving the aesthetic integrity of the Arabic script. By improving letter differentiation and spacing, the font assists dyslexic individuals in reading with greater ease and confidence.

Maqroo is globally available to educational institutions, designers, and organisations looking to adopt more inclusive communication tools.

Ras Al Hamra Golf Club to host charity golf for Positive Vision

Ras Al Hamra Golf Club is set to host a Charity Golf Scramble on February 21 in support of the Positive Vision Association (PVA), an Omani non-governmental organisation dedicated to raising awareness about HIV/AIDS, substance abuse, and community health support.

The event aims to unite golf enthusiasts, corporate sponsors and the broader community to promote awareness, reduce stigma, and provide essential support to individuals and families affected by HIV/AIDS and substance use.

Participants will engage in a golf tournament, raffle draws, live entertainment, and a dinner gathering open to families and supporters.

Nashia Nasib, president of the Positive Vision Association, stated, "Our mission is rooted in compassion, and we are here to embrace those who are most affected. This event is more than just a tournament; it is an opportunity to champion awareness, advocacy, and change within our community."

The event is made possible through the generous sponsorship of Renaissance Services as the title sponsor, Special Technical Services (STS) as the gold sponsor, MASIN Projects and Dolphin Village as the silver sponsor, and Al Busaidy, Mansoor Jamal & Co. (AMJ), Towell Group, Oman Shapoorji LLC as bronze sponsors.

These organisations play a significant role in supporting community-driven initiatives aligned with their CSR commitments.

Established on July 27, 2023, by Ministerial Decision 177/2023, Positive Vision Association is committed to enhancing public awareness of HIV/AIDS, drug addiction, and psychotropic substance abuse while promoting social inclusion and reducing stigma and discrimination.

Last year, PVA collaborated with key partners such as Al Jisr Foundation to support the peer education programme, Omantel for the establishment of a national hotline, Dar Al Atta'a to financially support people living with HIV.

INDIA

Earthquake jolts Delhi-NCR out of sleep

New Delhi - An earthquake measuring 4.0 on the Richter scale hit Delhi-NCR (national capital region) early on Monday at a depth of 5km, according to the National Centre for Seismology (NCS).

The strong tremors were felt at 5:36am. The sudden jolts prompted residents to rush out of their homes in panic.

"Earthquake of Magnitude:4.0, Occurred on 17-02-24, 5:36 AM IST, Lat: 28.59°N & Long :77.16°E, Depth: 5 Km, Location: 9km E of New Delhi," NCS posted on X.

Later, Union Minister Jitendra Singh said that authorities and professional experts were keeping a close watch and monitoring situations in New Delhi.

He also appealed people to stay calm and exercise precautions and preparedness for all possible aftershocks.

Taking to social media X, the Union Minister wrote in a post "Following the Earthquake tremors felt this morning in and around Delhi at about 5:36am, the authorities are keeping a close watch and professional experts as well officials in the Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES) are constantly monitoring. However, it is advised to stay calm and, exercise safety precautions and preparedness for possible aftershocks, if any."

The Union Minister also said that regular updates were being shared by the departments through different communication channels and social media channels. Meanwhile, a 20-25-year-old tree was uprooted at the Jheel Park in Dhaula Kuan, the epicentre of the earthquake.

A 20-25-year-old tree at Jheel Park is seen uprooted following an earthquake of 4.0-magnitude, in New Delhi on Monday (ANI)

Hours after the earthquake hit Delhi, tremors were felt in Bihar at around 8.02am on Monday, and it originated from just 10km under the Earth's surface

Caretaker Mahaveer told ANI: "I reported for duty at 9am today when I saw the uprooted tree. This is a 20-25-year-old tree. This must have happened due to the earthquake because there was nothing like wind or thunderstorms or anything here. Workers said that when they had a round at the park after the earthquake, they found the tree uprooted."

Another Caretaker of Jheel Park Janki Devi said: "We did not find any other damage but just an uprooted tree...The earthquake was felt around 5.30am; there were very strong tremors. Then it was found that the tree was uprooted due to that..."

Director of the NCS, Dr O P Mishra, on Monday, assured residents of the national capital that there is nothing to worry about as aftershocks of lesser magnitude are 'natural' and will heal by the earthquake of magnitude 4.0 that had struck Delhi early on Monday.

Speaking to ANI, Mishra stated the epicentre of the earthquake was in Dhaula Kuan, which falls under a seismic zone.

"Delhi has been experiencing minor earthquakes. This earthquake occurred in Dhaula Kuan. In 2007, an earthquake of 4.7 magnitude had occurred there. There is nothing to worry about. It is a seismic zone there," Mishra said.

Elaborating on the cause of the earthquake, the NCS Director said: "The earthquake occurred due to in-situ material heterogeneity... After 4.0 magnitude, the aftershock will be less by 1.2 magnitudes; it is natural as it will heal it."

Hours after the earthquake hit Delhi, tremors were felt in Bihar at around 8.02am on Monday, and it originated from just 10km under the Earth's surface. No casualties or damage have been reported so far.

Mishra, however, clarified that the earthquakes in Delhi and Bihar are unrelated, as such occurrences 'depend on the rock shearing strength, which is different for both these states'.

"People need to take precautions, as earthquakes do not kill people. It is the structures that kill people... Delhi has always been safe during such instances of shallow earthquakes; the structures that are built these days are very obstructive and attenuate the seismic waves," he added.

ANI

Places of Worship Act: SC adjourns hearing

New Delhi - The Supreme Court on Monday adjourned the hearing of pleas filed challenging the validity Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act 1991, which preserves the character of religious places as they existed on August 15, 1947.

A bench of Chief Justice of India Sanjiv Khanna and Justice P V Sanjay Kumar told the advocates appearing in the case that it is a three-judge bench matter whereas the sitting bench was a two-judge combination so it would be heard some other day.

The CJI also took exception to many intervention applications being filed in the case and said there should be a limit to such applications.

"We will not take up the Places of Worship Act matter today. It is a three-judges matter. Too many petitions filed. List sometime in March. There is a limit to interventions being filed," said the CJI.

Indian National Congress Party, CPI(ML), All India Majlis-e-Ittehad-ul-Muslimeen (AIMIM) head Asaduddin Owaisi, Jamiat Ulama-I-Hind, India Muslim Personal Law Board, Committee of Management Anjuman Intezamia Masjid which manages the mosque in the Gyanvapi complex, Shahi Idgah mosque committee of Mathura - among others filed applications in the top court against the petitions challenging the validity of certain provisions of a 1991 law.

The CJI also took exception to many intervention applications being filed in the case and said there should be a limit to such applications

They challenged the petitions filed by some Hindu petitioners saying that entertaining the pleas against the Act will open floodgates of litigations against countless mosques across India. Filing intervention application in the case they sought dismissal of pleas challenging the Places of Worship Act.

The apex court is seized of several petitions pertaining to challenge to the Act and strict implementation of the Act. Petitions had challenged the constitutional validity of Sections 2, 3, 4 of the Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act 1991, which it said violates the principles of secularism and the rule of law, which is an integral part of the Preamble and the basic structure of the Constitution.

The sections violated several fundamental rights including the right to equality and freedom to practice religion, said the pleas.

The Places of Worship Act prohibits altering the religious nature of any place of worship and imposes strict penalties for violations. On December 12, the top court restrained all courts across the country from passing any effective interim or final order including orders of survey in pending suits against existing religious structures.

It also ordered that no fresh suits be registered over such claims while the court is hearing pleas challenging the Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act, 1991.

Daughter of the Kashi Royal Family, Maharaja Kumari Krishna Priya; BJP leader Subramanian Swamy; Chintamani Malviya, former Member of Parliament; Anil Kabotra, a retired army officer; advocates Chandra Shekhar; Rudra Vikram Singh, resident of Varanasi and Swami Jeetendranand Saraswati, a religious leader among others have filed the pleas in the apex court against the 1991 Act.

Students are seen at the examination centre after appearing for CBSE Class 12th exams, in Prayagraj (ANI)

CBSE rejects 'paper leak'

New Delhi - The Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) on Monday denied allegations of paper leaks in the ongoing Class 10 and 12 board examinations, calling them 'baseless' and an attempt to create panic among students and parents.

The CBSE board exams began on Saturday with over 42 lakh students appearing at more than 7,800 centres across India and abroad. According to board officials, a total of 24.12 lakh Class 10 students are taking exams in 84 subjects, while over 17.88 lakh Class 12 students are appearing for exams across 120 subjects.

In an official statement, CBSE said: "It has come to the Board's attention that certain unscrupulous elements are spreading rumours on YouTube, Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), and other social media platforms regarding paper leaks or claiming access to the 2025 examination question papers. These claims are baseless and are intended to create unnecessary panic."

The Board assured that it has implemented strict measures to ensure a smooth and fair examination process. It also warned against engaging with such misinformation, stating: "Students found involved in such activities will face consequences under CBSE's Unfair Means rules and relevant sections of the Indian Penal Code (IPC)."

CBSE is closely monitoring the situation and working with law enforcement agencies to take action against those responsible for spreading false information. "CBSE will pursue legal action against anyone found responsible for spreading misinformation to uphold the integrity of the examination process," the statement added.

ANI

North Korea's leader unveils plan to expand Pyongyang

Seoul, South Korea - North Korean leader Kim Jong Un has announced a plan to expand the capital Pyongyang and renovate its dilapidated suburbs, state media reported on Monday.

Kim unveiled the plan at a groundbreaking ceremony on Sunday for the construction of 10,000 flats in Pyongyang's Hwasong area, the state-run Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) reported.

It is part of his broader five-year development plan announced in 2021 to build 50,000 housing units in the capital.

Kim said his government will follow a construction plan to expand the capital eastward toward Kangdong County - a suburban county in eastern Pyongyang - after completing the Hwasong construction project.

The proposed plan includes the construction of a cluster of science research centres, schools and modern housing in Hwasong and nearby areas.

It also envisages the establishment of another science and culture district within the city, while dilapidated regions in and around the capital area will be refurbished.

The construction plan will be presented at a meeting of the Workers' Party of Korea next year.

Japan warns of growing Russia-N Korea military ties

Munich, Germany - Japan has raised concerns over the deepening military cooperation between Russia and North Korea, emphasising that security in Europe and Asia is 'closely linked and inseparable'.

In an interview with Anadolu, Japanese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Toshihiro Kitamura warned that North Korea's reported decision to send troops to Ukraine could further escalate the ongoing conflict.

"The security of both continents is closely linked and inseparable. We are worried about the military cooperation between Russia and the DPRK," Kitamura said, referring to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, North Korea's official name.

"By sending troops from North Korea to Ukraine, that may lead to a deterioration of the situation in Ukraine," he added. Kitamura also voiced concern over the exchange of military technology between the two nations.

The security of both continents is closely linked and inseparable. We are worried about the military cooperation between Russia and the DPRK... sending troops from N Korea to Ukraine may lead to a deterioration of the situation in Ukraine

TOSHIHIRO KITAMURA

While Russia has been using weapons and ammunition supplied by North Korea, Japan fears that Moscow may reciprocate by providing Pyongyang with advanced technology that could potentially aid its nuclear and missile programmes.

"We are worried about this kind of cooperation between the two countries," he said.

Kitamura noted that Japan has been actively strengthening its security partnerships beyond its immediate region, deepening cooperation with Western countries and NATO allies. He highlighted the Individually Tailored Partnership Program (ITPP) with NATO, which was adopted two years ago to enhance collaboration in key areas such as cybersecurity.

"We believe that the security of the North Atlantic and Europe and the security of Asia are inseparable. That is why we try to cooperate with Europe and other members of the international community in order to address these Ukrainian issues," he said.

He further stressed the importance of NATO as a key partner for Japan, emphasising their shared commitment to democracy and freedom.

"Just this month, we held a Japan-NATO conference on strategic communications in Tokyo," he noted.

Also, at the recent NATO Summit in Washington, Japan reaffirmed its participation in the Indo-Pacific Four (IP4), a group comprising Japan, Australia, South Korea, and New Zealand, he added.

Since Japan views regional security as interconnected, Kitamura reiterated that it will continue working alongside G7 countries and other allies to support Ukraine.

"The most important thing is to stop the fighting on the ground and establish peace and stability in Ukraine," he said.

Anadolu Agency

German election: Candidates spar on economy, Ukraine war, Vance

Conservative Merz, the frontrunner, got heated with second-place far-right contender Weidel on the issue of Ukraine

Berlin, Germany - Germany's four main chancellor candidates debated each other live on television on Sunday, one week before voters go to the polls. It is the first time that German voters will see four candidates on the debate stage.

The snap federal election was called for February 23 after the current coalition government collapsed in November last year.

With just seven days to go, the right-wing opposition parties are leading the polls - Friedrich Merz's conservative Christian Democrats (CDU) at around 30% and Alice Weidel's far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) at around 20%.

Incumbent Chancellor Olaf Scholz's centre-left Social Democrats (SPD) are currently polling in third place with 15%, while their coalition partners, Vice-Chancellor Robert Habeck's Green Party, are coming in fourth with just over 13%.

During the debate, the candidates discussed their plans for the German economy and how they view Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Merz and Scholz criticised US Vice President J D Vance for interfering in German politics after his speech at the Munich Security Conference on Saturday, whereas Weidel, who met with the US vice president at the sidelines of the event, called for good relations with the Trump administration.

Illegal migration was also a major topic discussed during the TV showdown. The debate began at 20:15 local time and finished two hours later.

With just seven days to go, the right-wing opposition parties are leading the polls - Friedrich Merz's conservative Christian Democrats (CDU) at around 30% and Alice Weidel's far-right AfD at around 20%

Closing statements: Scholz and Weidel

The order in which the candidates give their closing statements was determined by lottery, and began with incumbent Chancellor Olaf Scholz (SPD) and Alice Weidel of the far-right AfD.

Scholz (SPD): "I think this debate has shown the SPD and the incumbent chancellor ought to continue into a second term. It's about war and peace, security in Europe and the finances needed to achieve that without cutting into pensions, health care or infrastructure. We must encourage investment in Germany and ensure that the country remains together with a higher minimum wage and a fairer tax system which demands more from those who earn more."

Weidel (AfD): "We want to make Germany wealthy and secure again. We will stop illegal immigration by securing our borders and by the deportation of those here illegally or who commit crimes. The CDU, by the way, has also prevented this for years. We have the highest energy prices in the world, which we will also change with the help of new technologies: reliable nuclear power, coal, gas and also renewable energies - but without gigantic subsidies which harm our country and its tax payers. Vote for the AfD for real political change."

Habeck and Merz

Habeck (Greens): "The situation is too serious and the pressure on Germany too great for electoral arguments. Ladies and gentleman, I'm 55 years old and have lived in a country where security and prosperity seemed guaranteed. This guarantee is no longer so solid. After the election, we have to work together politically to find solutions together. I therefore request that I may continue to serve Germany, so that my children and your children may enjoy the same possibilities that we had in the past."

Merz (CDU): "After February 23 comes February 24 and we will have to solve problems. These include irregular migration and economic stagnation. I want to lead a government which stops arguing with itself, a government which is engaged in Europe and ensure that Germany's voice is heard. That can only happen if we're economically strong, when young businesses have a future, when we have a better education policy, when our country has a stronger voice. That's what I stand for - and absolutely not with the AfD. If you want change, then you'll get that with the CDU."

DW

UK ready to send troops to Ukraine

London, UK - UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer said on Sunday that he is 'ready and willing' to deploy British troops to Ukraine to enforce a peace deal.

"I do not say that lightly. I feel very deeply the responsibility that comes with potentially putting British servicemen and women in harm's way," he wrote in an article for The Telegraph.

"But any role in helping to guarantee Ukraine's security is helping to guarantee the security of our continent, and the security of this country," he added.

The end of the Ukraine war, 'when it comes, cannot merely become a temporary pause before (Russian President Vladimir) Putin attacks again', Starmer said.

"But second, while European nations must step up in this moment - and we will - US support will remain critical and a US security guarantee is essential for a lasting peace, because only the US can deter Putin from attacking again," he added.

UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer

Starmer said he will be meeting with US President Donald Trump in the coming days and collaborating with him, along with all G7 countries, to secure the 'strong deal' they need.

"We must be clear that peace cannot come at any cost. Ukraine must be at the table in these negotiations, because anything less would accept Putin's position that Ukraine is not a real nation," he said.

Starmer added that Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky and the Ukrainian people have demonstrated remarkable 'resilience' and made immense 'sacrifices' in defence of their nation.

"We cannot have another situation like Afghanistan, where the US negotiated directly with the Taliban and cut out the Afghan government. I feel sure that President Trump will want to avoid this too."

Starmer said that Ukraine's path to NATO membership is 'irreversible', also emphasising that European countries must increase defence spending and take on a 'greater role' within the alliance.

Anadolu Agency

Donald Trump says his meeting with Putin 'could be very soon'

Washington, D.C., US - US President Donald Trump said on Sunday that his expected meeting with his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin in Saudi Arabia 'could be very soon'.

"It could be very soon. It'll be soon," Trump told reporters.

He said Putin wants to end the Russia-Ukraine war.

"I think he wants to stop fighting. I see that. We spoke long and hard," Trump said.

Trump said Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky also wants to end the war.

"We're moving along. We're trying to get a peace with Russia-Ukraine, and we're working very hard on it. It's a war that should have never started," he stressed.

On February 12, Trump held separate phone calls with Putin and Zelensky in a bid to end the Ukraine conflict.

US President Donald Trump and his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin

'Russia-US meeting on Tuesday'

Meanwhile, a Russian daily has claimed that the Russia-US meeting on Ukraine will take place on Tuesday in Saudi Arabia, while American media reported that Kyiv was not invited to take part in the gathering.

The Russian daily *Kommersant* claimed on Sunday with a link to its sources in the Kremlin that the Russian official delegation will be headed by Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and the US negotiation team by Secretary of State Marco Rubio. The US team will also reportedly include National Security Adviser Mike Waltz and Special Envoy for the Middle East Steve Witkoff.

Meanwhile, American media reported that the Ukrainian authorities were either not invited or unwilling to take part in the meeting.

Last Wednesday, Russian President Vladimir Putin and his US counterpart Donald Trump agreed in a phone talk to organise contacts on the Ukrainian settlement as soon as possible. Trump made ending the ongoing Moscow-Kyiv war a part of his presidential election campaign.

Anadolu Agency

Deadly storms sweep through eastern US, leaving 10 dead along devastation

Kentucky, US - At least 10 people have died, and hundreds of thousands are without power as severe storms and flash floods wreaked havoc across the eastern US, with Kentucky suffering some of the worst damage in recent memory, press reports said on Sunday.

"This is one of the most serious weather events we've dealt with in at least a decade," said Kentucky Governor Andy Beshear, after confirming that nine of the fatalities were in Kentucky, including a child, and one in Georgia.

The storm unleashed heavy rainfall, triggering flash floods, mudslides, and road closures.

Emergency crews carried out more than 1,000 rescues in Kentucky alone, with 19 swift-water teams deployed across multiple counties. Noting that all 120 counties in the state have been impacted, Beshear said two nursing homes had to be evacuated, including one where 100 patients were relocated by state police.

Among the victims were a mother and her seven-year-old child, who were swept away by floodwaters in Hart County, Kentucky, while trying to cross a flooded roadway near Interstate 65, officials said.

The flooding has left nearly 40,000 Kentucky residents without power, 9,800 without water, and more than 26,000 under boil-water advisories.

In addition to flooding, parts of the state saw snowfall and icy conditions, making travel even more hazardous. In response to the unfolding disaster, Beshear declared a state of emergency and requested federal assistance.

Trump approves disaster declaration

US President Donald Trump approved the emergency disaster declaration late on Saturday, unlocking federal funds for rescue and recovery efforts.

Other states across the South and Northeast also reported significant damage.

In Tennessee, residents of a nursing home in Macon County were evacuated as waters rose dangerously close to the facility.

Tornadoes touched down in Mississippi and Alabama, damaging homes and infrastructure.

The severe weather brought heavy snowfall to the Northeast, with Burlington, Vermont, receiving 8.5 inches of snow, while Boston recorded 5.4 inches.

Wind gusts reached up to 71mph (114kph) in Atlanta, where a person died after a tree fell on their home.

Virginia and West Virginia also faced significant flooding, prompting local officials to issue evacuation orders.

"Multiple areas of the town are currently experiencing flooding, with the river expected to rise even higher," the Richlands Police Department in Virginia said in a statement, urging residents to leave immediately.

The storms left more than 400,000 utility customers without power across multiple states, including Alabama, Georgia, Virginia, and North Carolina.

Forecasters warned of continued flood risks, with swollen rivers likely to remain above critical levels in the coming days.

The National Weather Service (NWS) extended a flash flood emergency for several counties in West Virginia and southwestern Virginia, calling the situation 'extremely dangerous and life-threatening'.

As search-and-rescue efforts continued, officials urged residents to remain vigilant.

"Stay home if you can," the Simpson County Office of Emergency Management in Kentucky advised.

Anadolu Agency

Saudi to host Arab meeting on Feb 20 to discuss Gaza reconstruction

Istanbul, Turkey - Saudi Arabia will host a 5-way Arab meeting on February 20 to discuss an Egyptian proposal for rebuilding the Gaza Strip without displacing its Palestinian inhabitants, an Arab League official said on Monday.

The planned meeting will be attended by Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Hossan Zaki, the assistant secretary-general of the Arab League, said in televised statements.

"It is possible that Palestine could be invited to the meeting to discuss the general framework of the (Egyptian) proposal that will be presented to the Arab summit," he added.

Egypt said early this month that it will host an emergency Arab summit on February 27 following a controversial proposal by US President Donald Trump to take over Gaza and resettle its Palestinian inhabitants to develop it into what he called 'the Riviera of the Middle East'.

"These countries will meet this time to coordinate regarding the Egyptian ideas and proposals that will be presented at the Arab summit," Zaki said.

Zaki noted that the planned Arab summit could be postponed for several days due to 'logistical reasons related to the schedules of the leaders of the participating countries'. "Egypt is keen on having the largest number of leaders attend to ensure the success of the summit," he added.

The summit aims to 'formulate a cohesive, solid and strong Arab position on the Palestinian issue in general, reject the displacement plan that was an Israeli idea and adopted by the US administration, and present a general Arab proposal that counters this American proposal', Zaki said. On Sunday, Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi confirmed that his country is preparing a 'comprehensive' plan to rebuild Gaza without displacing Palestinians.

The planned meeting will be attended by Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan, Qatar and the UAE) and Hossan Zaki, the assistant secretary-general of the Arab League

Trump's plan for Palestinian resettlement has been rejected by the Arab world and many other nations, who say it amounts to ethnic cleansing.

The controversial idea came amid the ceasefire agreement that took effect in Gaza on January 19, halting Israel's genocidal war, which has killed nearly 48,300 Palestinians, most of them women and children, and left the enclave in ruins.

'Constructive outcomes'

Meanwhile, the Arab Interior Ministers Council affirmed that its latest meeting resulted in 'constructive outcomes that will positively impact the future of joint Arab security efforts'.

In a statement following the meeting held on Sunday in the Tunisian capital Tunis, the council said the 42nd session achieved 'several significant results that will contribute to enhancing joint Arab security cooperation'. The session was attended by several Arab interior ministers, representatives from regional and international organisations, as well as high-ranking security delegations, according to the statement.

During the meeting, the ministers discussed key security threats facing the Arab region, including terrorism, drug trafficking, cybercrime, and illegal migration, as well as other forms of transnational organised crime.

Israel intensifies attacks in southern Lebanon

Jerusalem - The Israeli army intensified its attacks in southern Lebanon on Monday ahead of a February 18 deadline for withdrawing its forces from the area.

Israeli forces pushed deep into the center of Kfarchouba town, where Lebanese army troops are deployed, the Lebanese state news agency NNA reported. The Israeli army also launched a combing operation in the town of Mahlat al-Sawwan in southern Lebanon, the broadcaster said.

The Israeli operation came one day after warplanes struck sites where the army claimed Hezbollah activities were spotted.

Israel's public broadcaster KAN said the Israeli attacks coincided with a Sunday speech by Hezbollah Secretary-General Naim Qassem, who said that Israel must fully withdraw from Lebanon by February 18. Today, we are facing the February 18 deadline, and the occupation army must fully withdraw from southern Lebanon. It should have no positions or presence whatsoever," Qassem said.

A fragile ceasefire has been in place in Lebanon since November 27 last year, ending months of mutual shelling between Israel and Hezbollah.

At least 25 Palestinians arrested in West Bank

Ramallah, Palestine - The Israeli army rounded up at least 25 more Palestinians in fresh military raids in the occupied West Bank, according to the prisoners' affairs groups on Monday.

Minors and former prisoners were among the detainees in the raids that targeted several areas in Hebron and Ramallah, the Commission of Detainees' Affairs and the Palestinian Prisoner Society said in a joint statement. The arrests came amid military raids by the Israeli army that have killed at least 55 people and displaced thousands in the northern West Bank since January 21.

According to the statement, at least 160 Palestinians were arrested by Israeli forces in Jenin and 130 others in Tulkarem in the northern West Bank since last month.

The new arrests brought the number of Palestinians detained by the Israeli army in the West Bank since October 2023 to over 14,500, including those who were released after being arrested, according to Palestinian figures.

The figure does not include those arrested from the Gaza Strip whose numbers are estimated to be in the thousands.

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

At least 916 Palestinians have since been killed and over 7,000 others injured by Israeli army fire in the occupied territory, according to the Health Ministry.

In July 2024, the International Court of Justice declared Israel's decades-long occupation of Palestinian land illegal and demanded the evacuation of all existing settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem.

Meanwhile, the Israeli government issued a tender to build nearly 1,000 settlement units in the occupied West Bank, an anti-settlement group said on Monday. The Peace Now group, an Israeli watchdog that monitors settlement building in the West Bank, said 974 additional settler homes will be built in Efrat settlement south of Bethlehem city.

It warned that the construction of an entire neighbourhood in the Efrat settlement 'blocks the development of the Bethlehem metropolis to the south, and if Israel seeks to annex it to Israel, it will cut off the entire southern West Bank'.

The Israeli organisation accused Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of harming Israel's interests and undermining the two-state solution through imposing realities on the ground.

"While the people of Israel sets their sights on the release of the hostages and an end to the war, the Netanyahu government is operating 'on steroids' to establish facts on the ground that will destroy the chance for peace and compromise," it said.

Gazans find more bodies in rubble

Gaza City, Palestine - Palestinian medics and rescue teams recovered nine more bodies from the rubble in the Gaza Strip, pushing the overall death toll from Israel's genocidal war since October 2023 to 48,284, the Health Ministry said on Monday.

A ministry statement said that the toll also included four Palestinians killed by Israeli army fire in the last 24 hours.

According to the ministry, 16 injured people were also admitted to hospitals, taking the number of the injured to 111,709 in the Israeli onslaught.

"Many victims are still trapped under the rubble and on the roads as rescuers are unable to reach them," the ministry said.

A ceasefire agreement has been in place in Gaza since January 19, pausing the Israeli war that has caused widespread destruction and left the Palestinian enclave in ruins. Despite the ceasefire, the Gaza local authorities reported almost daily ceasefire violations by the Israeli army.

Meanwhile, the Gaza Media Office, citing Israeli restrictions on the entry of humanitarian supplies, said on Sunday that the number of aid trucks entering Gaza over the past two days has not exceeded 30% of the expected volume,.

Gaza received fewer than 180 trucks, far below the daily quota of 600 set under a ceasefire agreement between Israel and the Palestinian group Hamas, according to the office's statement.

On Thursday, Ismail Al-Thawabta, the head of the media office, told Anadolu that Israel continues to block essential humanitarian aid in violation of the ceasefire deal. The same day, Hamas said that Egypt and Qatar were working to resolve gaps in the agreement and reaffirmed its commitment to implementing the deal, including a prisoner exchange, according to the agreed timeline.

Palestinian officials have complained that Israel is failing to abide by the part of the agreement to let in more humanitarian aid. Hamas had suspended hostage releases last Monday, demanding that Israel first comply with the humanitarian provisions of the agreement.

On Saturday, Hamas' military wing, the Al-Qassam Brigades, released three Israeli hostages as part of the sixth prisoner exchange under the first phase of the ceasefire deal, which took effect on January 19.

The agreement has faced violations in four key areas, according to Hamas: targeted killings of Palestinians, delays in returning displaced civilians to northern Gaza, the obstruction of essential relief supplies and restrictions on medical aid.

Anadolu Agency

Sudan: $6bn appeal launched to assist 26mn

Geneva, Switzerland - The UN and its partners on Monday launched the 2025 humanitarian and refugee response plans for Sudan, appealing for a combined US$6bn to assist nearly 26mn people inside the country and in the region.

In a joint statement, the UN humanitarian office, OCHA, and the UN refugee agency, UNHCR, stressed that nearly two years of conflict have fuelled a 'catastrophic protection crisis' and displaced 12mn people in Sudan and across borders.

Underlining that nearly two-thirds of the population need emergency aid, and the country is facing famine conditions, they said the refugees in 'dire need' arrive in neighbouring countries where local resources are already stretched thin.

"Sudan is a humanitarian emergency of shocking proportions," OCHA chief Tom Fletcher said in the release. "Famine is taking hold. An epidemic of sexual violence rages. Children are being killed and injured. The suffering is appalling. But our plan is a lifeline to millions."

"We need to stop the fighting, the funding to deliver for the Sudanese people, and better access by land, sea and air to those who need help," he said.

Filippo Grandi, the UN high commissioner for refugees, for his part, stressed that 'the consequences of this horrific and senseless conflict spread far beyond Sudan's borders'.

"Neighbouring countries have shown great solidarity by welcoming refugees, even when more are arriving every day. But their resources are stretched - essentials such as water, shelter and health services are scarce - and Sudan needs urgent support," Grandi said.

"The international community must step up and help, not just to ensure that emergency aid and life-saving protection can continue without disruption, but also to end the violence and restore peace to Sudan," he added.

According to the UN, famine conditions have been reported in at least five locations in Sudan including displacement camps in Darfur and in the western Nuba Mountains, and 'catastrophic hunger is expected to worsen by May'.

Greece: Earthquakes force continued school closures on islands

Athens, Greece - Greece on Sunday has extended school closures for another week on four Aegean islands due to ongoing seismic activity.

Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis announced from social media that schools in volcanic island of Santorini, Yamurgi, Niyoz, and Anafiya will remain closed for another week as the islands continue to be affected by seismic movements.

The decision follows a state of emergency declared on the islands, where schools had already been closed for two weeks due to the ongoing situation. Meanwhile, scientists from two government committees provided an update on the seismic activity in the region, particularly in the sea area between Santorini and Amorgos.

They confirmed that while the seismic activity is in a relative lull, it remains linked to submarine faults and a combination of tectonic and magmatic processes.

Scientists say, around 1,300 earthquakes recorded in the marine area of Anydros between Thera and Amorgos since February 1

Increased 'ground deformation' has been also noted in the wider Santorini area, which is continuously monitored.

Scientists say, around 1,300 earthquakes recorded in the marine area of Anydros between Thera and Amorgos since February 1, the largest having a magnitude of 5.3.

In a televised interview on Tuesday, a highly regarded scientist and Chair of Earth Sciences at the Academy of Athens explained that the earthquakes are becoming stronger and more widespread.

He suggested that, given this situation, it is too early to completely dismiss the possibility of a volcanic eruption in Santorini.

Santorini has erupted three times in the 20th century - 1925-1926, 1939-1941, and in 1950.

Anadolu Agency

Suspected bird flu: Thousands of birds culled in Northern Ireland

Istanbul, Turkey - Officials in Northern Ireland have culled approximately 64,000 birds at a poultry farm in County Tyrone due to a suspected bird flu outbreak. According to Sky News, the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs was notified of the case on Friday.

Northern Ireland's Chief Veterinary Officer Brian Dooher confirmed that all birds at the farm in Dungannon are being culled as a precautionary step.

Authorities have established a temporary control zone and sent samples from the farm for testing. If the results confirm the presence of highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI), commonly known as bird flu, additional protective measures will be implemented.

"The disease control measures have been taken to limit any potential spread, and I urge all bird owners - whether backyard or commercial - to take the necessary steps to protect their flocks," Dooher said.

Irish Agriculture Minister Andrew Muir stressed the need for vigilance, pointing to a recently confirmed HPAI case at a captive bird facility near Magherafelt.

"This suspected case reinforces the need for strict biosecurity. Whether you keep a small number of birds or manage a commercial flock, it is vital to follow all protective measures and report any signs of disease," Muir said.

Several HPAI cases have already been detected in wild birds across Northern Ireland. Authorities continue to monitor the situation closely and may introduce further containment measures if testing confirms the virus at the Dungannon farm.

Anadolu Agency

China-EU ties to give world 'more stability', says Beijing

The statement came as tensions between the EU and the Donald Trump administration have seen an uptick

Foreign Ministry said the international community also expects 'a healthy and stable China-EU relationship more than ever before'

Beijing, China - China on Monday said that its relations with the EU will provide 'more stability to the turbulent world' amid tension between the 27-nation bloc and the US, according to the state media.

"Amid the rise of unilateralism and protectionism, and the interweaving of uncertainties and instabilities, the international community yearns for peace and stability more than ever before," Foreign Ministry spokesman Guo Jiakun told reporters in the Chinese capital.

The international community also expects 'a healthy and stable China-EU relationship more than ever before and hopes that China and the EU will become constructive forces in a changing world more than ever before'.

Beijing's statement came as tensions between the EU and the Donald Trump administration have seen an uptick over the ongoing war in Ukraine, NATO as well as trade and tech issues.

Noting that 2025 marks the 50th anniversary of diplomatic relations between China and the EU, Guo said Beijing will work with the bloc to 'maintain the partnership orientation, enhance strategic communication and coordinated cooperation, jointly uphold multilateralism, and address global challenges together'. "We will strive to inject new vitality into China-EU relations and provide more certainty and stability to the turbulent world," he said.

On the imposition of tariffs by the US, Guo said China has 'repeatedly stated its position that there are no winners in trade wars and tariff wars, which will only harm the common interests of people of all countries'.

Reacting to US President Donald Trump's claim that the BRICS bloc was 'dead', he said the emerging economic bloc was 'an important platform for cooperation among emerging markets and developing countries'. "The BRICS nations advocate openness, inclusiveness, cooperation, and win-win results. They do not engage in camp confrontation or target third parties, but aim to achieve common development and universal prosperity."

Meanwhile, China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi urged NATO to pursue a 'positive and responsible policy' towards Beijing.

Wang made these remarks during a meeting with NATO Secretary-General Mark Rutte on the sidelines of the Munich Security Conference, according to a Chinese Foreign Ministry statement released on Sunday.

The top Chinese diplomat said Beijing expects the military alliance to 'develop an objective and accurate perception of China', ministry spokesman Lin Jian said in a post on X.

Wang described China as a 'force for maintaining peace and stability', noting that the world's second-largest economy 'has the best track record among major countries'.

Despite war, ethnic Koreans 'feel at home' in rural Ukraine settlement

Kyiv, Ukraine – "Why did we Koreans come to Ukraine? To work in the countryside! The conditions here are good for growing vegetables," said Olena Pak, a resident of the rural Shevchenkove settlement in southern Ukraine.

Her parents, like those of her husband Oleh, also an ethnic Korean, came to Ukraine from Uzbekistan in the 1970s, when both countries were part of the Soviet Union. "They leased land from the state, which they worked on, while making plans. There were many Korean farm workers," recalled Oleh Pak.

The Mykolaiv region, in southern Ukraine, has been home to one of the largest settlements of ethnic Koreans in Ukraine for over half a century now. Most moved there in the 1950s and 1960s from Central Asia, to which they had been deported in the 1930s from the Russian Far East, where many had fled to at the beginning of the 20th century to escape the Japanese occupation of Korea.

'We don't want to leave'

Olena and Oleh Pak have Ukrainian first names and passports, but they also speak Korean very well. They said their families always spoke the language at home and upheld various traditions, such as making kimchi, a Korean dish of preserved vegetables with salt and spices.

"It's passed down from generation to generation, without kimchi we wouldn't have survived a single winter," said Olena Pak.

Like their ancestors, the Paks are farmers. They expanded their business in the 2000s and were soon growing vegetables in three greenhouses. But they almost lost everything after Russia launched the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. Half of the community was under Russian occupation for nine months, while the other half was in the line of fire. Today, only one greenhouse remains, in which the family continues to grow vegetables and herbs.

Olena Pak volunteers in her free time, and every day she goes to the local cultural centre to weave camouflage nets for the Ukrainian army. "We don't want to leave, we feel at home here. This is our home and our country," she said.

To South Korea and back to Ukraine

But many homes have been destroyed, and much of the land is now contaminated by land mines. About a third of the families of ethnic Korean descent have left the settlement. Some families went to South Korea as part of voluntary programs.

The Paks grow vegetables in their greenhouse

The Mykolaiv region, in southern Ukraine, has been home to one of the largest settlements of ethnic Koreans in Ukraine for over half a century now. Most moved there in the 1950s and 1960s

A few have since returned, including the Kogai family, which was evacuated to Seoul, where 12-year-old Ksenia attended school and began to learn the language. However, like her mother, she did not want to stay in South Korea. "I wanted to go back because I realise that this is our home, and I don't want to leave," she said.

The Kogais' home was destroyed by bombs in 2022, so they are currently living in a garden house. As per tradition, their pine tree will remain in the house until spring. They always celebrate the Korean New Year at the end of January, just as they were taught by their ancestors.

Ksenia's mother, Alyona, was born in the Mykolaiv region. Her father was Korean, and her mother a local Ukrainian woman; they got married in 1975. At the time, Alyona told DW, Koreans were still rather unusual so many people came from different villages to see the groom.

"I went to school here and always told all my classmates that I would never marry a Korean. But fate had other plans," she said. She and her husband Leonid say such marriages are commonplace today.

Never would the Kogais have imagined that a member of the family would join the army. But in 2022, Alyona's brother, Serhiy, joined the Territorial Defence Forces. He is currently fighting for the Ukrainian army on the front in Russia's Kursk region.

Other Koreans are serving on the Russian side, but they come from North Korea - a fact that has outraged Alyona Kogai and her family. "They also come from Asia, but they are fundamentally different from South Koreans, as if they were zombies," she said.

Many young people have left

Some ethnic Koreans from Shevchenkove joined the Ukrainian partisans during the Russian occupation. Community head Oleh Pylypenko said they actively supported the Ukrainian armed forces in the first months after the Russian invasion of 2022. Oleksandr Hvan, whose home was converted into a hospital for Ukrainian military doctors, was among them. A bunker was also built in his yard.

Today, there is little left of his farm, he told DW sadly - but he plans to stay anyway. "I could escape somewhere, but I want to keep my property here. I came here after doing my military service in what was the Soviet Union. I built a life for myself and started a family," he said.

Most of the ethnic Koreans in the region describe themselves as Ukrainians of Korean descent, as does the governor of the Mykolaiv region, Vitaliy Kim.

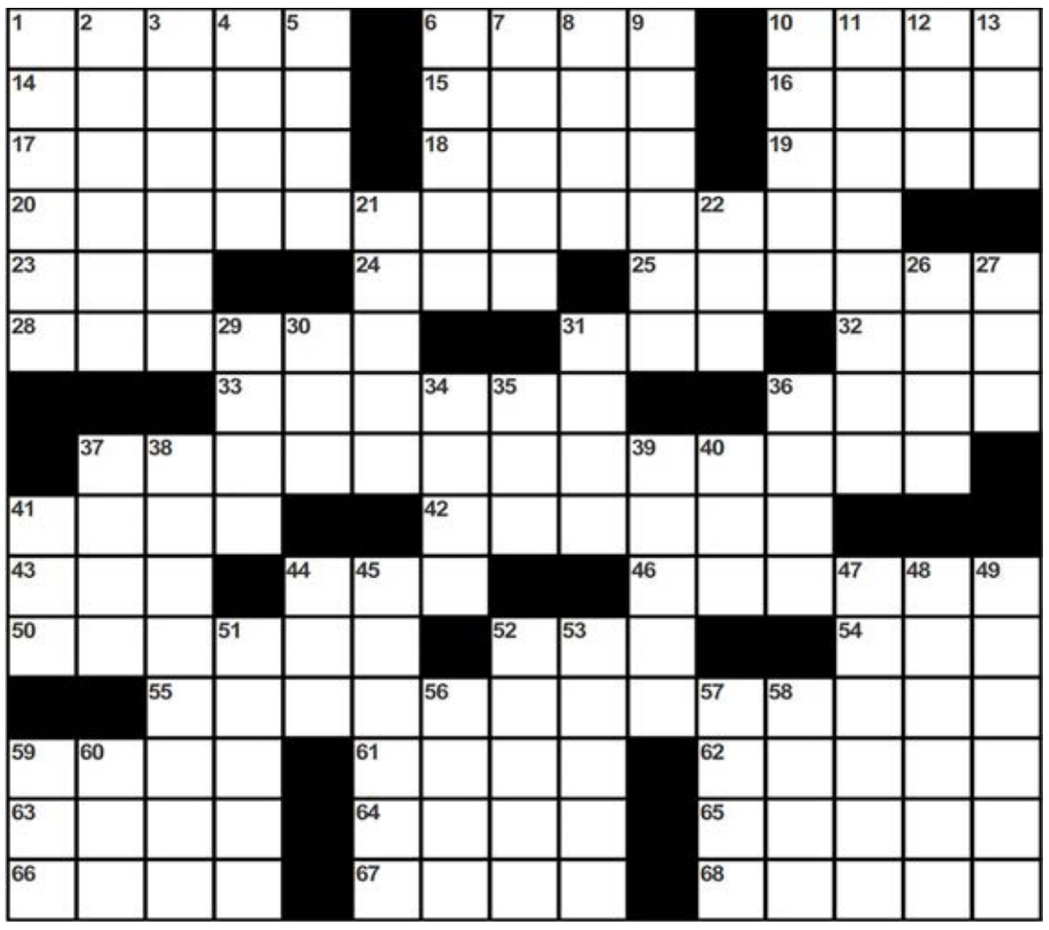
The younger generation speaks fluent Ukrainian, as confirmed by the teachers at the local school, which is attended by children with Korean surnames such as Zoi, Li, Kim or Hagai.

One of the teachers, Lilya Kusevich, said many of the ethnic Koreans have very good grades in Ukrainian language class. "Elizaveta Zoi achieved the maximum number of points in the exam, for example. They are very hardworking children," she said.

A fifth of the pupils in Shevchenkove are ethnic Koreans. Since Russian attacks damaged the school, learning has been restricted to online classes.

DW

DAILY CROSSWORD



ACROSS
1) Computer code for characters
6) Component ofE=mc2
I 0) Handle roughly
14) Farmers' market unit
15) One way to run
16) Church nook
17) Slow, on a score
18) Opening time, for many
19) Got bigger
20) Why Mick Jagger shouldn't retire? (with 55-Across)
23) Maiden name pre-ceder
24)_Tome
25) Jewelry fasteners
28) Word seen before "special"
31) Ship's designation
32) "Do the Right Thing" p1zzena owner
33) '50s Kenyan rebel
36) Fashion label
37) Lyrics from 20-Across
41) Tennyson's "Geraint and II
42) Cup supporter
43) Be decisive
44) Was on the bottom?
46) Present from birth
50) Some mammals of Africa, briefly
52) Twinings product
54) Factor in the makeup business
55) See 20-Across
59) Fly with the eagles
61) Snooker sticks
62) Seven in Spain
63) Robinson of "Weakest Link"
64) Neck of the woods
65) Color of honey
66) Kitchen vessels
67) Inclined to listen in
68) Brewer's need

DOWN
1) Cockeyed
2) Dorm room staple
3) Boated without a motor
4) Like JFK
5) Baal, e.g.
6) Food from heaven
7) Bud
8) Princes, but not princesses
9) Draw
10)_ cum laude
11) Evening activity at Aspen
12) Take unfair advantage of
13) Kareem, as a kid
21) Any Time?
22) Bullfight cheer
26) Breathe hard
27) Furtive
29) At the hub of
30) Chatter incessantly
31) "Star Trek" role
34) Waterfall byproduct
35) One-time connection
36) Bruce or Laura of Hollywood
37) Ruler unit
38) One in a suit
39) Suffix for "beaut"
40) Mattel doll
41) Listening device
44) Boozehound
45) Depth charge, slangily
47) Itsy-bitsy creature
48) Preferences
49) Thrust out
51) Holes in the head
52) Feller's targets?
53) Test format, sometimes
56) Italian dough?
57) Start of a national anthem
58) Gesture without words
59) Tree juice
60) A Beatle's spouse

NOTE PAD

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE

ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19
You've never had a problem with conversation. In fact, you can always find something to chat about, no matter who you're with. But for the moment, you're also going to be amazingly sensitive not only to the words someone is saying, but what they're not saying. Just don't become so wrapped up in someone else's feelings that you forget about your own.

TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20
Luck is still in the air. Big time. But no one is going to be as lucky in love as you, as if you ever needed any help in that department. Your usual magnetic charm will be running on high, but you'll also be incredibly perceptive. It's almost not fair. The only thing you can do to make it up to everyone else is to share something they all want: a bit of your time. It's the least you can do..

GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21
Don't just sit there. Listen to your intuition. Someone needs you, but they're far too proud to ask. So offer. Go to them, and let them know you'll be there for them, no matter what they need. If this is someone who's been there for you in the past, you might want to remind them of that just so they don't feel guilty about accepting what you're offering.

CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22
Put all the nonsense of the past few days behind you. It's time. Focus on the days ahead, which will be interesting and unusual. Oh, and speaking of interesting, prepare yourself for a terrific period. Sure, it doesn't seem like it now, but pretty soon you will have something to celebrate. Start making those plans now, even if you don't have an official reason yet

LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22
Ready to snuggle up, get close, and become intimately involved? Well, the last part of that has probably already happened. Now it's just a matter of admitting it, first of all to yourself. Then, of course, you need to schedule some quality time alone together. There's a whole array of astral formations out there pushing for you, you know, and all those love songs can't be wrong.

VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22
Right now, the stars are busy turning up the volume on all your personality traits: compassion, tenderness, and intuition for starters. Since it's also a good time to relax and have fun, you might want to start doing that now. And if your sixth sense seems to be especially keen, don't doubt it. It is. Your antennae are running on high. Use them wisely!

LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22
You're in the mood for education, new experiences, or foreign travel, and you may want to go it alone. If you can't take off just yet, you at least need to try to make plans. Browse online to find new possibilities for your next big trip. Be sure you're at least checking out someplace you've always meant to visit. It's a big world, with lots to do, but there are only so many hours

SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21
These new folks you've been seeing so much of lately? They're really something, aren't they? You feel quite happily involved with them. In fact, it probably feels as if you've known them all for far longer than you have. Well, that's a big plus, and you'll be seeing a great deal of them over the next few weeks. Just don't forget your old friends in the process. Why not get them all together?

SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21
Your honest enjoyment of people always promises a good time, and that's particularly true today. You have energy and imagination to spare, and when it comes to the social scene, you can't be beat. Awkwardness and anxiety be gone! When you're around, the fun comes steadily and refreshingly. You can turn even the most boring scene into a laugh riot!

CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19
Yesterday's luck hasn't gone anywhere just yet. In fact, since the Universe has decided to grant you an amazing dose of intuition in addition to all your gifts, you won't believe just how fortunate you are, and in how many categories. So when something at the back of your brain starts tugging at you, trying to get you to listen, think of it as an alarm of sorts, alerting you that you really are supposed to pay attention.

AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18
For quite a while you've been considering what to do about your relationship with a certain possessive someone. Should you end it, slow it down, or jump right in? The fact that you're not sure is a statement in itself. You may not want to end the relationship just yet, but keep a careful eye on that jealousy. It seems like a compliment initially, but it can quickly become irksome.

PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20
Don't worry about this romantic roll you're on coming to a close. It's really just getting started. And it's not going to be strictly the romance that will be devastatingly good. You have luck coming at you in all categories. That goes double for finances, by the way, so if you're in the mood to spend a bit more on an extravagance, go right ahead. A new outfit, maybe?

TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

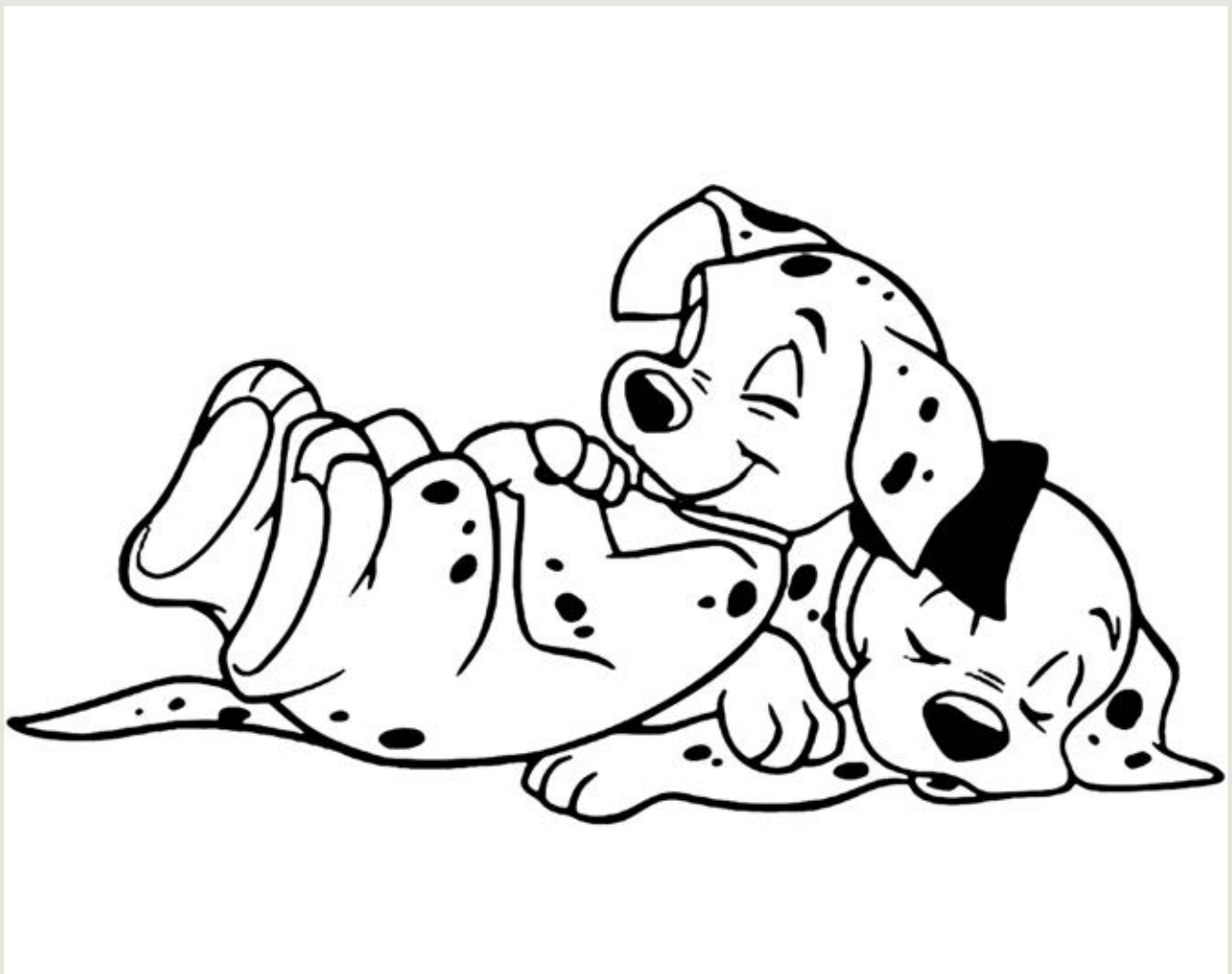
1. The Dutch-based Stellantis N.V., formed in 2021, is a 50:50 merger between two internationally recognised manufacturing conglomerates from which countries and in what field?
A. Italy and France, automobiles
B. UK and Germany, medicine
C. Hungary and Nigeria, fashion
D. USA and Russia, energy

2. What is a medical term referring to the presence of pathogenic organisms in the bloodstream, leading to blood poisoning?
A. Tetanus
B. Septicemia
C. Hypertension
D. Bursitis

03. What is Hilary Clinton's maiden name?
A. Rodham
B. Bouvier
C. Roosevelt
D. Kennedy

Answers: 1. A 2. B 3. A

KIDS COLOURING



BOGGLER

I	U	T	A
D	R	R	O
I	E	G	Y
I	V	E	L

Each game will present you with a matrix filled with letters. The objective is to form words by linking adjacent letters - to the left, right, on top, bottom, or diagonal to each other. The Boggles Classic game uses a 4 x 4 matrix. Words are valued at one point for each letter in excess of two letters. A three letter word is worth one point, a four letter word is worth two points, and so on. Valid words must be at least three letters long.

SOLUTION
20-25 words: Excellent,
15-20 words: Very good,
10-15 words: Good,
5-10 words: Average

DO YOU SUDOKU?

LEVEL EASY: Fill in the grid so that every row, every column and every 3x3 box contains the digits 1 to 9 and only one instance of each number

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

WORD BUILDER

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

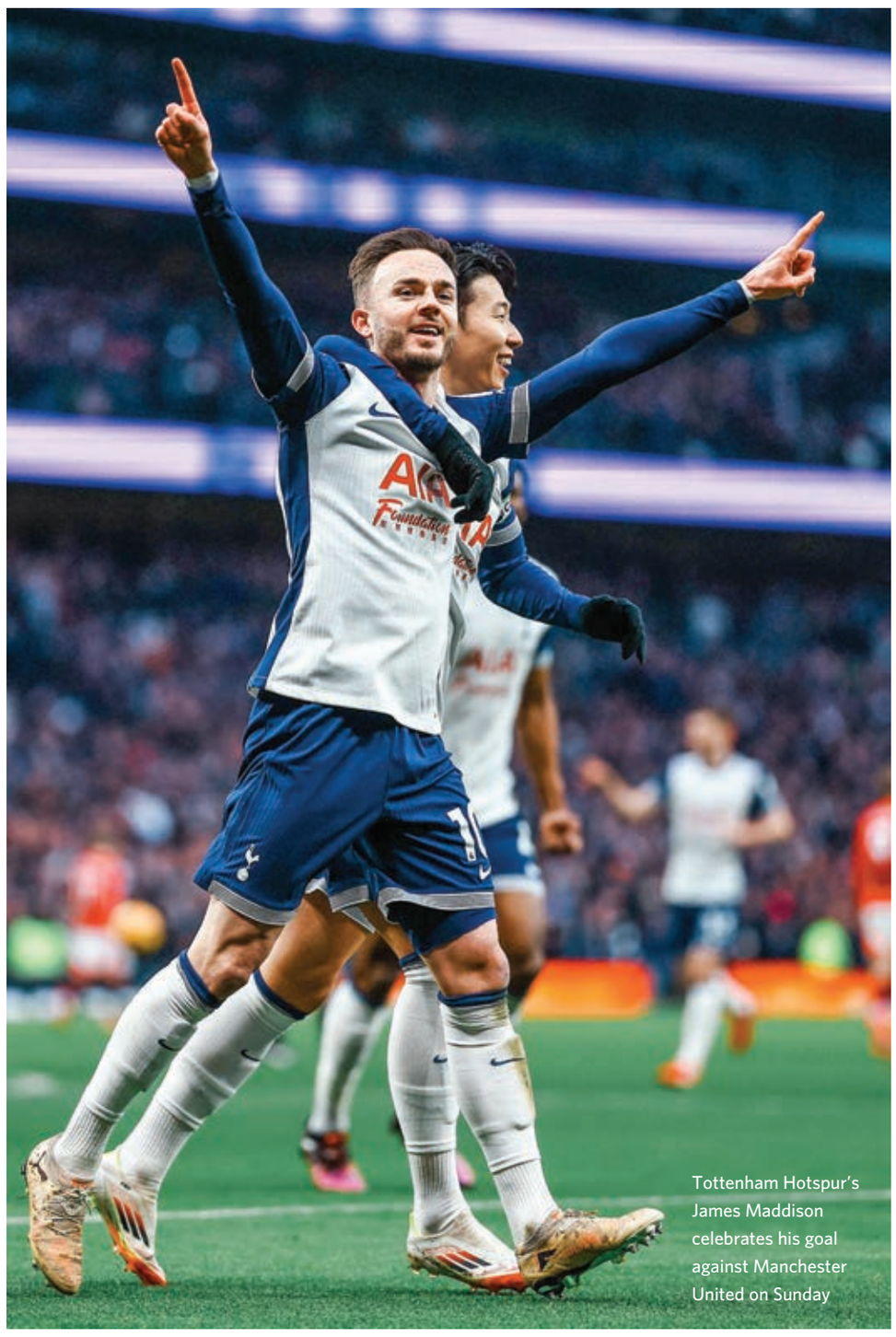
Rules: Words should be at least four letters long, proper nouns and duplicates don't count

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER

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

MADDISON PUNISHES MAN UNITED

English midfielder's goal hands Tottenham win against arch-rivals


Tottenham Hotspur's James Maddison celebrates his goal against Manchester United on Sunday

London, England - Tottenham Hotspur midfielder James Maddison's early goal was enough for his side to end a barren home run in the Premier League by beating fellow strugglers Manchester United 1-0 in an entertaining clash on Sunday.

Maddison, back in the starting lineup after injury, tapped in a rebound from close range after 13 minutes to settle a contest in which both sides showed their frailties.

Tottenham's first home league win for 105 days eased the pressure on their Australian manager Ange Postecoglou with his team moving above United into 12th place with 30 points.

United manager Ruben Amorim's tough start to life at Old Trafford continues though and the Portuguese has now lost eight of the 14 Premier League matches since he took charge.

His side dropped to 15th with 29 points as they became the first United outfit to suffer defeats in a league double against Spurs since the 1989-90 season.

It was another underwhelming display by the visitors although they did have their chances with Alejandro Garnacho wasting a golden opportunity in the first half.

"I am not worried. I understand our fans, what the media think about it. I hate to lose, that feeling is the worst," Amorim said. "I am confident in my work. The place in the table is my worry, I am not worried about me."

Tottenham's injury list is finally shrinking and Postecoglou welcomed back first-choice goalkeeper Guglielmo Vicario and playmaker Maddison into his starting team while Destiny Udogie, Wilson Odobert and Brennan Johnson were all on the bench.

In contrast, United's woes worsened this week with the news that the versatile Amad Diallo, one of their few bright sparks this season, is likely to be out for the rest of the campaign.

> *It was important we won today. We've had it tough for the past two and a half months. I certainly feel there's a massive opportunity in the back half of the year*
>
> **ANGE POSTECOGLOU**

United's starting lineup was complemented by a bench resembling a youth team with nine of them aged 19 or under.

The Spurs fans staged a pre-match protest against Chairman Daniel Levy's running of the club and while one victory will not cure the side's troubles, it was a step in the right direction after they tumbled out of both domestic cups last week.

"It was important we won today," Postecoglou said. "We've had it pretty tough for the past two and a half months.

"We feel, and I certainly feel, there's a massive opportunity in the back half of the year."

There are still 13 Premier League games left this season, while Spurs and United are Europa League favourites.

United had the first big chance in the game on Sunday with Rasmus Hojlund forcing a sharp save from Vicario who then reacted well to keep out Garnacho's follow-up.

Tottenham took the lead when Son Heung-min's volleyed cross fell to Lucas Bergvall whose shot was clawed away by Andre Onana into the path of Maddison who converted from close range.

We can play better, says Postecoglou after Spurs avoid 'car crash'

Ange Postecoglou

London, England - Tottenham Hotspur manager Ange Postecoglou fired back at his critics as his side recovered from consecutive cup exits to beat Manchester United 1-0 in the Premier League on Sunday.

The Australian has been under intense pressure with his injury-hit team languishing in the lower reaches of the league table and bowing out of both domestic cups last week.

A pre-match protest by fans frustrated by Chairman Daniel Levy's running of the club underlined the malaise at Tottenham, but James Maddison's winner lightened the mood as Spurs did the league double over United for the first time since 1989-90.

"Everyone likes an impending car crash. I am sure we had a lot of people willing that scenario on. I know how hard these players have worked," Postecoglou, whose side won a home league game for the first time since Nov. 3, told Sky Sports.

"Our training was better and I was confident that we would put in a good shift. The focus is still on trying to win games. In the background we are doing it our own way. We are looking into ways we can do things better."

Postecoglou has pointed to a crippling injury list this season which has deprived him of most of the first team.

They were still without the likes of defenders Cristian Romero and Micky van de Ven plus striker Dominic Solanke on Sunday but Tottenham were boosted by the return of Maddison and Italy goalkeeper Guglielmo Vicario to the starting lineup.

With Brennan Johnson, Destiny Udogie and Wilson Odobert back on the bench after returning to fitness, Postecoglou can maybe see some light at the end of the tunnel at last.

"It does make a massive difference. Getting guys like Vic and Madders contributing straight away, you can see the quality they have and the presence they have," Postecoglou said.

"It might take them one or two games to get up to speed, but the fact we have them available, yeah, it's an enormous boost for us. They're quality players. We can play better definitely, but when we get some boys up to speed we can start growing into it."

The win moved Spurs above United into 12th spot with 30 points from 25 games, a point above the 15th-placed visitors.

I have a lot of problems, but I stick with my beliefs: Amorim

Ruben Amorim

London, England - Manchester United manager Ruben Amorim insists there is no running away from the club's plight after they suffered a 1-0 loss at Tottenham Hotspur on Sunday -- their 12th defeat in 25 Premier League games this season.

The Portuguese has now lost eight of his 14 league games in charge with United down in 15th place in the table.

Not since 1973-74 have United lost 12 of their opening 25 games in a top-flight season and while they look far enough away from the bottom three to avoid the same fate as that team and get relegated, the gloom is deepening at Old Trafford.

"What you see guys and what you discuss every week, I also see. I have a lot of problems, my job is so, so hard here. But I stick with my beliefs," Amorim told Sky Sports in his post-match interview in north London.

"You grow and you learn a lot of things. We just need to face it and not run away, that is my feeling. Today will hurt, it is a tough pain to lose so many games, but then you can change things in a week."

The problems are stacking up for Amorim who suffered a big injury blow in the build-up to the game with news that the versatile Amad Diallo, the one bright spot this season, will face a lengthy spell on the sidelines.

United's starting line-up at Tottenham was low on top quality with the likes of Kobbie Mainoo and Manuel Ugarte also absent from midfield because of injury while the substitutes bench featured eight players aged 19 or under.

Of those only Chido Obi was given a brief appearance, coming on in the 90th minute to replace the tiring Casemiro.

"We have young kids and we have to work with the young kids. We were not expecting so many injuries in one week. These things happen. Let's focus on the next game."

Mejbri accuses Osmajic of racial abuse

Hannibal Mejbri with Milutin Osmajic

Burnley, England - Burnley midfielder Hannibal Mejbri complained to the referee after Preston North End forward Milutin Osmajic made an alleged racist comment during Saturday's match between the two sides.

The alleged incident took place as the teams played to a goalless draw in the second-tier Championship.

Tunisia international Mejbri is a former Manchester United player.

"I will not be silent about what happened today. I will always call out racism whenever I hear or see it. That is the only way we change as a sport and a society," Mejbri wrote on Instagram.

"I am a strong person but nobody should have to experience this disgusting abuse on the pitch."

Burnley said Mejbri made referee Andrew Kitchen aware of the comment during the second half and the referee had registered the complaint.

"The club will continue to show its complete support to Hannibal," Burnley added.

'We looked tired, but wins like this are crucial'

Wolverhampton, England - Liverpool head coach Arne Slot praised the fight his side showed and admitted his players looked tired as the Reds battled to a 2-1 win over Wolverhampton Wanderers on Sunday.

The victory restored Liverpool's lead over Arsenal at the top of the table to seven points.

"We needed to fight and we needed Alisson," Slot told Sky Sports. "In a season where you want to achieve something, you need to have wins like this as well. Wins like this should also be included where you want to achieve something.

"It's never the gameplan never to create anything at all. We did have a goal offside and a penalty overturned.

"Wolves took a lot of risks. The team felt today to bring this win over the line, defending was more important than attacking. if this is what it takes to win a game then I'm happy the players could do that again.

> *We were tested today. We thought we'd scored a third and then a penalty for the third but both were correct from the referee*
>
> **ARNE SLOT**

"Fatigue comes from running a lot and a bit of mental fatigue a lot. We were mentally tested today. We thought we'd scored a third and then a penalty for the third but both were correct from the referee. Maybe it did lead to us being a bit tired. I did see for the first time this season that players were more tired than they have been.

"It wasn't the plan that Cody Gakpo got injured because [Luis] Diaz played against Plymouth. He showed great character by being really important with the two goals and his work rate.

"You can never breathe in this competition. I saw Arsenal's 15-game unbeaten run and the gap has always been the same so that shows that we do. If you want to compete for something special then you have to win a lot of games in this league."

Slot: We were a bit shaky - I didn't enjoy the last 20 minutes

Liverpool head coach praises team's mentality after holding off a resurgent Wolves to secure a 2-1 win and go seven points clear

Incredibly, it was the first time since records began in 2003/04 that Liverpool failed to attempt a shot in the second half of a Premier League match at Anfield.

Slot revealed after the match that Gakpo remains a doubt for the trip to Villa Park due to the knock the Dutch forward picked up against Everton.

FRUSTRATING INTERRUPTION

Francisco Conceicao of Juventus celebrates after scoring against Inter Milan on Sunday

Nerazzurri miss chance to go top of Serie A after narrow defeat at the hands of Juve

Turin, Italy - Inter Milan missed the chance to go top of Serie A as they fell to a 1-0 loss at Juventus on Sunday with Francisco Conceicao scoring the decisive late goal in an action-packed match.

The Portuguese winger sparked jubilation in the stadium after 74 minutes following clever footwork in the box by Randal Kolo Muani before he found Conceicao, who fired home.

Inter failed to capitalise on Napoli being held to a 2-2 draw at Lazio on Saturday and are two points off the pace with 54 points from 25 games. Juve are now in fourth spot with 46.

Much was at stake in the 267th Derby d'Italia, with the reigning champions knowing an away win would see them finally leapfrog Napoli, while Juve could move into the top four, having struggled to find a winning formula for much of the season.

Inter's Mehdi Taremi set the tone in an intense clash with a stunning bicycle kick that goalkeeper Michele Di Gregorio reacted swiftly to push away, before Denzel Dumfries sent the rebound over the bar.

Minutes later, Juve's Nico Gonzalez struck a powerful long-range shot that forced Yann Sommer into a fingertip save before making another stop to keep out the follow-up from Conceicao.

The chances kept coming for both sides, with Kolo Muani and Inter forward Lautaro Martinez wasting clear opportunities by sending their efforts well over the bar as halftime approached.

Just before the break, Dumfries led another Inter attack into the box but the Juve defence forced him into a tight angle and his shot clipped the post.

Both sides continued to play on the front foot in the second half as they tried to end the deadlock but it was Conceicao who finally broke Inter's resistance to delight the home fans.

Only minutes later, Juve came close to another goal as Teun Koopmeiners' shot was blocked on the line by Dumfries.

Inter pushed forward and Marcus Thuram produced a volleyed attempt but they could not find a last-ditch equaliser, leaving the thrilling title race on a knife-edge with 13 rounds to go.

'Regret and disappointment'

Inter coach Simone Inzaghi was left frustrated after his side's defeat.

"There is a lot of regret and disappointment, but the boys showed great organisation and courage," Inzaghi told DAZN.

"We needed to score more goals and finish the first half with a lead," he added, pointing to Inter's recent away defeats, including a 3-0 loss at Fiorentina, to underline the need for improvement.

The coach explained that his decision to make three substitutions in the 62nd minute was due to Juve's superiority after the break and Inter's lack of fluency.

"We had to do better, the last situation was wrong. In the nine years I've been in Turin, I've never had so many chances. It hurts to lose, we really wanted to win. Everything is still open, but we need to change the tempo," added Inzaghi.

Inter visit Antonio Conte's Napoli side on March 2.

"It will be an important game, like tonight, but we have other games first," added Inzaghi, whose side host Genoa on Saturday and Lazio in the Coppa Italia quarter-finals on Tuesday.

Motta delighted with Juve's hard work

Turin, Italy - Juventus manager Thiago Motta praised his players for their dedication and hard work in improving on mediocre results, helping them get back into the top four race in Serie A.

His side secured a 1-0 home win over Inter Milan on Sunday, putting them in fourth place as they bid to qualify for next season's Champions League after a campaign marked by a series of draws that has left them off the pace in the title race.

"I don't do my work to please or displease anyone, I do it for myself because I know we're on the right path," Motta told reporters. "I like to see the team improve, battle, work hard, and play good football to win the game.

Thiago Motta

"The players, above all, deserve the support of the fans. They give their all every day for the team and for Juventus."

Reflecting on Juve's win over reigning champions Inter, who remain in second place two points behind Napoli, Motta said the first half was difficult, with his side showing their opponents too much respect.

"We certainly had a different energy in the second half. The first was tough, and we showed them too much respect, allowing them too much time on the ball," he said.

"We know Inter have a lot of quality, but if you don't press them you end up struggling. We did much better with that in the second half."

With four wins in a row across all competitions, Motta said that performing at home in the Allianz Stadium had proven to be a bigger challenge than playing on the road this season.

"We seem to have more freedom away from home. At home, we've faced struggles. The first half tonight was a reminder of that, but in the second half we pressed high, played good football, and earned the win."

Maroan Sannadi

Racist chants aimed at Sannadi halts Bilbao's match at Espanyol

Barcelona, Spain - Athletic Bilbao's LaLiga game at Espanyol was temporarily halted after visiting striker Inaki Williams reported alleged racist abuse towards teammate Maroan Sannadi in Sunday's 1-1 draw.

The incident occurred in the first half when Williams told referee Guillermo Cuadra Fernandez that Espanyol fans had hurled racial abuse at Sannadi, whose parents are Moroccan.

The game was stopped in the 16th minute when the referee discussed the issue with the two captains and match delegate.

"It should be remembered that legislation on the prevention of violence in sport prohibits and sanctions active participation in violent, xenophobic, homophobic or racist acts," said a message on the stadium screen condemning racism.

Spanish media reported that the match was halted for three minutes as part of the anti-racism protocol, and announcements were made asking the crowd to stop chanting.

The referee warned that he would stop the game if the incident was repeated.

After the game resumed, Espanyol's Roberto Fernandez scored in the 62nd minute and Oihan Sancet equalised in the 77th.

Espanyol and Athletic condemned the abuse on Sunday.

Clubs and players have been outspoken on the issue, with Real Madrid striker Vinicius Jr saying in September that Spain should be stripped of its right to host the 2030 World Cup unless significant progress is made to tackle racism.

Neymar scores first goal for Santos since return to Brazil

Santos, Brazil - Neymar scored for the first time in 16 months after his penalty set Santos on the way to a 3-1 win over Agua Santa in the Paulista Championship on Sunday and the Brazil forward said he was happy to be playing again after a long injury absence.

The 33-year-old converted from the spot in the 14th minute, with Thaciano adding a second and Guilherme sealing the win with his the 70th minute strike after an assist from Neymar.

Neymar of Santos celebrates after slotting home a penalty against Agua Santa on Sunday

Neymar's last goal came in October 2023 for Al-Hilal. A serious knee injury restricted him to only seven appearances after joining the Saudi side in 2023.

"I'm happy to be playing again. I feel I'm improving," he said. "Obviously I'm not going to be 100% physically, it's only my fourth game but I'm getting better and better.

"I was anxious to score and wanted to dedicate this to the fans and my family."

Neymar began his career aged 17 with Santos in 2009, racking up 136 goals and 64 assists in 225 matches to help the club secure their first Copa Libertadores title in nearly 50 years in 2011.

He joined Barcelona in 2013, moved to Paris St Germain for a world record fee of 222 million euros ($232 million) in August 2017 before joining Al-Hilal for a reported fee of around 90 million euros.

Brazilian media has reported that Neymar's deal with Santos runs until the end of June.

Borja goal earns River Plate home victory against Lanus

Buenos Aires, Argentina - A second-half strike by Miguel Borja earned River Plate a 1-0 home win over Lanus in the Apertura tournament of the Argentine Primera Division on Sunday.

The victory lifted River to third place in Group B, level on 12 points with Independiente, who have a game in hand, and two points behind leaders Rosario Central.

"The win was the most important thing; we're still looking for a good style of play," River Plate goalkeeper Franco Armani told TNT Sports.

"In the second half we saw a different side to the team and that's what we want, picking up three points."

The hosts had a few chances to take the lead in the first half, with a Facundo Colidio long-range effort that hit the crossbar and Gonzalo Martinez's wide shot just before the break.

Lanus' best chance to break the deadlock came in the 34th minute when Armani denied Walter Bou's close-range attempt.

Miguel Borja

River then thought they grabbed the lead nine minutes into the second half through Giuliano Galoppo's low strike only to see the goal disallowed for a Gonzalo Montiel offside.

Substitute Borja finally netted in the 77th minute after a deflection from the defence ricocheted off River's Maximiliano Meza and into the Colombian's path for his first goal this season.

The 32-year-old Borja missed a golden chance to score a second goal seven minutes later, sending a penalty kick over the crossbar.

The visitors pushed hard for a late equaliser, but Armani produced a couple of key saves, blocking captain Carlos Izquierdoz and Alexis Canelo's efforts in stoppage time. The defeat left Lanus eighth with seven points.

"We have to keep it up. I try to respond when the team needs me, that's what the goalkeeper is there for. Overall, it was a good game," Armani added.

River, Argentina's most successful team, next play at San Martin on Saturday.

Pakistan skipper Mohammad Rizwan and Indian captain Rohit Sharma

BATTLE FOR ODI SUPREMACY

India, Pakistan look to make the most of familiar conditions in Champions Trophy, which has no clear favourites

New Delhi, India - The sprinkling of stardust over the Champions Trophy may appear somewhat thin on its return to the calendar after eight years but fans can expect a wide open one-day international tournament in the absence of an overwhelming favourite.

The tournament featuring the top eight teams in the ODI format was discontinued by the International Cricket Committee (ICC) after the eighth edition in 2017, when Sarfaraz Ahmed's Pakistan beat India in the final.

Pakistan are therefore holders as well as hosts as they stage a first global tournament since the 1996 World Cup, even if political tensions mean India will play all their matches, including the March 9 final should they make it, in Dubai.

Reigning ODI world champions Australia are among several countries sending weakened contingents with Steve Smith standing in as captain of a squad featuring a second-string pace attack.

Regular skipper Pat Cummins, fellow quick Josh Hazlewood and all-rounder Mitchell Marsh were all ruled out by injury, while left-arm quick Mitchell Starc withdrew for personal reasons and all-rounder Marcus Stoinis has quit ODIs altogether.

Sri Lanka did not make the cut for the Champions Trophy but nevertheless handed the Australians a humbling reality check in the run-up to the tournament with a 2-0 series drubbing.

Reigning Twenty20 world champions India have made the finals of the last three ICC events and Rohit Sharma's team signalled their fine form by winning seven of eight limited-overs matches against England.

Runners-up in the 2023 ODI World Cup on home soil, India boast one of the world's most destructive batting lineups but will be without pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah, who has been laid low by a back injury.

Seamer Mohammed Shami's impressive return to action in the home series against England was a big relief for Rohit, who will also expect vital contributions from spin all-rounders Axar Patel and Ravindra Jadeja.

New Zealand will also fancy their chances of claiming the title having won the tri-nation trophy in Pakistan, beating the hosts in the final of a warm-up tournament also featuring 1998 champions South Africa.

Mitchell Santner's Black Caps side went through the tournament unbeaten and now have a fair idea of the kind of conditions they will face in the Champions Trophy.

"If you look at the track record of New Zealand in ICC events, they are always there or thereabouts," former New Zealand pace spearhead Tim Southee told the ICC. "In a tournament like the Champions Trophy, if you get on a bit of a roll, anything can happen. I'd love to see the Black Caps there and hopefully lifting the trophy at the end."

England were unable to defend to defend the T20 or ODI World Cup under Jos Buttler and are now licking their wounds after a tour of India where they were blanked 3-0 in the 50-overs matches.

They have already lost the services of Jacob Bethell through a hamstring injury, while their bowling trio of Brydon Carse (toe), Jamie Overton (hamstring) and Jofra Archer (hand) are all nursing fitness issues.

Giant-killers Afghanistan will make their Champions Trophy debut following their sixth place finish in the ODI World Cup in 2023, when they beat former champions England, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

Pakistan, who face New Zealand in the tournament opener in Karachi on Wednesday, are hoping a successful Champions Trophy will pave the way open for more such tournaments as the country battles perceptions that it is not safe for visitors.

Brazilian teen Fonseca wins Argentina Open

Buenos Aires, Argentina - Joao Fonseca became the youngest Brazilian to win an ATP tournament on Sunday after the 18-year-old captured the Argentina Open title with a 6-4 7-6(1) win over home favourite Francisco Cerundolo.

Fonseca has established himself as one of the game's most exciting young talents with his victory at the ATP Next Gen Finals in Jeddah in December and his win over ninth seed Andrey Rublev in the first round of the Australian Open last month.

He lost to Italy's Lorenzo Sonego in five sets in the second round at Melbourne Park.

"It is a dream, I work every day for these moments. Playing a final away from home, in Argentina, is difficult," said Fonseca after denying fifth seed Cerundolo the title in front of a raucous crowd in Buenos Aires.

"It's very special and I've taken another step forward in my career and I'm closer to my dream of becoming world number one," he told a press conference.

Joao Fonseca of Brazil celebrates with the Argentina Open trophy

Fonseca also defeated Argentines Tomas Martin Etcheverry, Federico Coria and Mariano Navone in the earlier rounds before beating Serbian Laslo Djere in the last four.

Cerundolo had stunned top seed Alexander Zverev of Germany in the quarter-finals before knocking out Spain's Pedro Martinez in the semis.

Elsewhere, French second seed Ugo Humbert successfully defended his title in Marseille by beating Serbia's Hamad Medjedovic 7-6 (4), 6-4 in the final.

Humbert smashed 13 aces without committing a double fault and won an overwhelming 27 of his 33 first-service points (81.8 percent).

The 26-year-old, who now has seven career ATP titles, also capitalised when Medjedovic went to his second serve, winning 17 of 28 second-return points (60.7 percent).

Serbian No. 7 seed Miomir Kecmanovic saved two championship points and rallied to beat No. 8 seed Alejandro Davidovich Fokina of Spain 3-6, 6-1, 7-5 to win the trophy in Florida.

Kecmanovic had eight aces without a double fault, saved 5 of 7 break points and converted 4 of 6 opportunities to break Davidovich Fokina's serve.

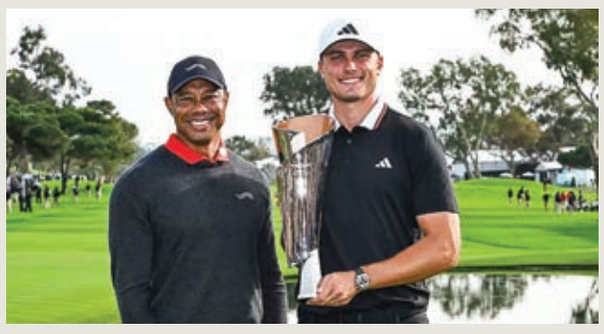
PGA Tour-LIV Golf negotiations in a 'very positive place', says Woods

San Diego, US - Tiger Woods said on Sunday that talks toward a deal that would resolve the fissure in golf between the U.S.-based PGA Tour and Saudi-backed rival LIV Golf are moving in the right direction.

Woods added that PGA Tour Commissioner Jay Monahan and Player Director Adam Scott had a productive meeting with U.S. President Donald Trump this month, where they asked him to get involved in talks with Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund.

"I think we're in a very positive place right now," Woods said during the CBS Sports broadcast of the Genesis Open in San Diego.

"We had a meeting with the president. Unfortunately I had some other circumstances that came up but Jay and Adam, they did great during the meeting and we have a subsequent meeting coming up," he said.



Tiger Woods with Genesis Open champion Ludvig Aberg

"I think things are going to heal quickly. We're going to get this game going in the right direction. It has been headed in the wrong direction for a number of years. The fans want all the top players playing together and we're going to make that happen."

LIV Golf, which features no-cut, 54-hole events, held its inaugural event in June 2022, and through mega-money contracts and lucrative purses has since lured a number of golf's biggest names, including major champions Jon Rahm and Bryson DeChambeau.

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ADDICTIONS

SMOKING is not cool

SMOKING A SINGLE CIGARETTE CAN DECREASE YOUR LIFE EXPECTANCY BY 20 MINUTES. HOW MUCH OF YOUR LIFE DO YOU WANT TO CUT SHORT? THE CHOICE IS YOURS

Smoking just one cigarette can decrease your life expectancy by an estimated 20 minutes, according to a new study.

Researchers from University College London (UCL) in the UK analysed follow-up data from the British Doctors Study and data from the Million Women Study for their analysis.

They found that the life expectancy loss was higher for women with roughly 22 minutes lost compared to men who lost roughly 17 minutes of their life expectancy per cigarette smoked. They published their findings in the journal Addiction.

The new estimate was nearly twice as high as a 2000 estimate published in the British Medical Journal (BMJ) which found that a single cigarette shortened a person's life by 11 minutes on average. This, however, was based only on data about male individuals.

"This is quite significant, insofar as the old estimate was based on incomplete data from the British Doctors Study, which had not concluded at the time of the previous estimate," Lion Shahab, a professor of health psychology at UCL who didn't take part in the study, told Euronews Health.

"Then, the thought was that the average smoker lost 6.5 years of life compared with a non-smoker. Since the end of the study, this estimate was increased to 10 years of life (for men) and based on the Million Woman study to 11 years for women," he said.

"The impact of smoking on shortening life expectancy nearly doubled, which is reflected in the new estimate," he added.

Variations among individuals

The study authors point out that the estimate comes with caveats due to variations between individuals.

"To make an estimate like this you have to make a lot of assumptions. The authors have been clear about this and report these as limitations," said Jamie Hartmann-Boyce, an assistant professor of Health Policy and Management at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst in the US who was not involved in the study.

Shahab added, that "risks from smoking accumulate across the lifespan, and this risk does not increase linearly but exponentially," meaning that "the impact of a single cigarette smoked after age 45 is likely much higher," on life expectancy compared to one smoked at age 20.

Preventable cause of death

Tobacco ranks as the 'most preventable cause of illness and death in the world', according to the World Health Organization (WHO).

It has been linked to 7.2 million deaths annually, killing more people than AIDS, malaria, and tuberculosis combined.

Currently, 179 million adults and 4 million adolescents aged between 13 and 15 are smokers in the European region, according to WHO estimates.

On strategies to quit smoking, "evidence shows people's chances are best when they receive a combination of behavioural support – like counselling from a stop smoking specialist – with a stop smoking medication like varenicline, a nicotine patch plus a short-acting form of nicotine replacement like gum, or regulated nicotine-containing e-cigarettes," Hartmann-Boyce said.

(Courtesy: clevelandclinic.org)

VANDANA CHAWLA

NUTRITION & YOU

Brown rice vs white rice - for diabetics

As we all know, rice is a staple food for millions worldwide, be it Asia, Africa or the Western world. But, when it comes to people with diabetes, choosing the right type of rice is crucial for managing blood sugar levels.

The debate between brown rice and white rice is common, not only among diabetics, but also among health conscious individuals.

Let's compare the nutritional profiles of both types of rice, their effects on blood sugar, and understand which is better suited for diabetes management.

Understanding the difference

Brown rice is a whole grain that contains, the bran, germ, and endosperm. Owing to minimal processing, this variety of rice retains its fibre, vitamins, and minerals, making it a nutrient-dense choice.

White rice, on the other hand, is processed, polished, and devoid of the bran and germ. This makes it softer and easier to cook but also takes away essential nutrients, including fibre, vitamins, and minerals.

In simple words, Brown rice is nutritionally a better choice.

Diabetes management, in simple words, means blood sugar management. As long as spikes in blood sugar is kept under check, diabetes is well managed. This can be understood by looking at the Glycaemic Index values.

Glycaemic Index and Rice

Glycaemic index (GI), is a measure of how quickly a carbohydrate-containing food raises blood sugar levels. For diabetes management, foods with a lower glycaemic index are preferred as they provide more stable blood sugar control.

When GI of both varieties of rice are taken, its found that, Brown rice has a lower GI (50-55). This is due to its fibre content, which slows digestion and helps prevent blood sugar spikes. However, white rice has a higher GI (70-90), meaning it is rapidly digested and absorbed, causing a sharp rise in blood glucose levels.

Health benefits of brown rice

Helps regulate blood sugar levels

Lower GI values as compared to white rice, helps in controlling sharp sugar spikes. Studies suggest that switching over to brown rice may lower the risk of developing type 2 diabetes.

Supports heart and mental health

Brown rice is high in flavonoids, plant compounds with antioxidants that reduce the risk of chronic illnesses, like heart disease and Alzheimer's. The high fibre content and healthy fats help in lowering cholesterol, and improving heart health.

Aids in weight management

Maintaining a healthy weight is important for diabetes control. The fibre in brown rice provides satiety, keeps stomach full for longer time and thereby, reduces overeating and cravings for high-calorie foods.

Improves gut health

Brown rice is a good source of prebiotic fibre, which supports a healthy gut microbiome, which is in-turn linked to improved insulin sensitivity.

So, brown rice scores higher than white rice. Here are some tips for including brown/white rice in diet:

- Start gradually – If switching from white rice to brown rice, start by adding small amounts of brown to white rice and increase the amount of former gradually.
- Watch portion sizes – Even though brown rice is healthier, excessive consumption can still impact blood sugar. A portion of ½ cup cooked rice per meal is recommended.
- Pair with protein and fibre – Combine brown rice with lean proteins and high-fibre vegetables to slow digestion and balance blood sugar levels. Adding lentils, lean meat are some good examples.
- White rice, though not a healthier option but pairing it with protein (such as lentils, chicken, or fish) and fiber-rich vegetables can help reduce its glycaemic impact.
- Try alternative whole grains – Quinoa, millets, are other nutritious whole grains that provide similar benefits like brown rice, plus will bring variety to meals.

To conclude, brown rice is the healthier choice for diabetes management. While white rice can be included in moderation, it is advisable to opt for whole grains. Eating in moderation and balancing meals with fibre, protein, and healthy fats is key to manage diabetes effectively.

20S WORKOUT

YOUR TIME STARTS NOW

IF YOU ARE IN YOUR TWENTIES, THIS IS THE RIGHT TIME FOR YOU TO DEVELOP YOUR PHYSIQUE, BUILD MUSCLES, AND SHAPE YOUR PERSONALITY WITH DISCIPLINE AND DETERMINATION. THE FOLLOWING CIRCUIT WORKS THE BODY'S BIGGEST MUSCLES WHILE TESTING THE HEART AND LUNGS FOR THE PERFECT BALANCE

Fitness regimes are for everyone - young, not-so-young, and old - as long as you take the age-appropriate approach to fitness. And if you are young, and in your early twenties, and considering hitting the gym, it is the 'right time' of your life to beef up your fitness ambitions, quite literally.

If you're young, focus on strength training with compound exercises like squats and deadlifts. For middle-aged men, mix bodyweight exercises and flexibility training into your routine, to maintain strength and prevent injuries, is apt.

As a young man, building a solid foundation in strength training and cardio is vital for your fitness expedition. These components not only enhance your physical performance but also elevate your confidence and overall well-being. Consider the following routines:

INCLINE BENCH PRESS

- Set an incline bench to a 30-degree angle.
- Take an overhead grip slightly wider than shoulder-width apart and extend your arms to press the bar up.
- Lower it slowly to the top of your chest and then extend your arms back to the starting position.
- Focus on pushing the weight in a straight line, finishing directly above your chest.
- Perform 5 sets of 4 reps at 85% 1RM.

CHIN-UP

- Grab pull-up bars with an overhand grip.
- Extend your arms, bending your knees if necessary, to hang from the bar.
- Pull your body up until your neck is level with your hands, keeping your body straight.
- Lower yourself down until your arms and shoulders are completely extended again, then repeat.
- Perform 3 sets of 8 reps.

CLEAN AND JERK

- Stand with a barbell in front of you using an overhand grip.
- Flex at the knees so the bar rests on your thighs. Shrug your shoulders to pull the barbell up.
- Get your body under the bar and, squat slightly while pushing the bar overhead.
- Now fully extend your legs before bending the knees to the start. Perform 3 sets of 10 reps at 70% 1RM.

JUMP SQUAT

- Position a barbell on your shoulders and grasp it with an overhand grip.
- Stand with feet shoulder-width apart, then crouch down.
- Stop when your thighs are just parallel to the floor, then forcibly extend your legs, exploding upwards to leave the ground slightly, toes pointed down.
- Land softly and sink straight into the next rep.
- Perform 3 sets of 8 reps at 70% 1RM.

SPRINTS

- Warm up by jogging for 10 minutes on a treadmill.
- Now stand with a foot either side of the conveyor.
- Set the speed to a fast sprint (effort: 9 out of 10).
- Now hold the rails and jump onto the belt. Start sprinting and let go of the rails once you're steady.
- Sprint for 30 seconds, then jump off and rest for 30 seconds.
- Repeat for 10 minutes.

ROMANIAN DEADLIFT

- Stand with your toes under the barbell, feet flat on the floor and shoulder-width apart.
- Bend at the hips to grip the bar slightly wider than shoulder-width. Lift the bar, keeping your legs as straight as possible.
- Pull your shoulders back, then lower until your torso is parallel to the bar.
- Repeat without putting the bar down. Perform 5 sets of 8 reps at 70% 1RM.

(Courtesy: menshealth.com)

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