

MUSCAT DAILY

AN APEX MEDIA PUBLICATION

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 22, 2024

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Oman, Angola forge stronger ties

Muscat - The Sultanate of Oman and the Republic of Angola have expressed interest in establishing new cooperation and enhancing partnership, particularly in economic, commercial and investment sectors.

This came in a joint statement issued on Saturday on the occasion of the official visit of President Joao Lourenco of the Republic of Angola to the Sultanate of Oman. It reads as follows:

At the gracious invitation of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, President Joao Lourenco of the Republic of Angola paid an official visit to the Sultanate of Oman from December 19 to 21, 2024.

His Majesty held discussions with the president, during which they reviewed bilateral relations and explored ways to develop these to serve the common interests of both countries.

The two leaders expressed interest in establishing new cooperation, enhancing partnership, particularly in the economic, commercial and investment sectors, specifically in areas of mining, clean energy, technology, tourism, agriculture and food security, transportation, logistics and ports.

They agreed to commence negotiations to enter into a cooperation agreement that covers economic affairs, science, technology and culture, in addition to signing memoranda of understanding and agreements in areas such as mutual visa exemption for holders of diplomatic and official passports, on political consultations as well as in the field of agriculture.

His Majesty the Sultan and the president also exchanged views on regional and international issues of mutual interest, reaffirming their respect for international law and the United Nations Charter, and emphasising the



His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and President Joao Lourenco at Al Alam Palace on Thursday (ONA)

importance of cooperation within the framework of international organisations to achieve peace and security. Both leaders stressed the need to intensify efforts to address issues related to climate change.

The two sides held meetings to discuss ways to develop trade, exchange visits of commercial and investment

delegations, and encourage the establishment of joint projects.

His Majesty commended President Lourenco's efforts in bringing a lasting peace to Eastern DRC, and wished him success on assumption of chairmanship of Africa Union in February 2025.

The President of Angola praised the

wise leadership and foreign policy of His Majesty the Sultan, which is based on principles of dialogue and promotion of peace and harmony for all.

President Lourenco expressed his gratitude and appreciation for the warm welcome and generous hospitality extended to him and his accompanying delegation.

1 agreement, 2 MoUs signed

Muscat - His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and President Joao Lourenco of the Republic of Angola attended the signing of an agreement and two memoranda of understanding (MoUs) at Al Alam Palace on Thursday, as part of the latter's official visit to the Sultanate of Oman.

The agreement provides for acquiring a stake in Angola's Catoca and Luele mines. The first MoU deals with cooperation in the field of energy between the two sides, while the second pertains to exploring opportunities for cooperation

in strategic financial initiatives.

The agreement and MoUs were signed on behalf of Oman by Abdulsalam bin Mohammed al Murshidi, Chairman of Oman Investment Authority, while Diamantino Pedro Azevedo, Minister of Mineral Resources, Oil and Gas, and Vera Esperança dos Santos, Minister of Finance, signed the pacts on behalf of Angola.

The signing was attended by Royal family members, ministers, military commanders and members of the visiting Angolan delegation.



President of Angola concludes official visit

Muscat - Angolan President Joao Lourenco's official visit to Oman concluded on Saturday. He was seen off at the Royal Airport by Abdulsalam Mohammed al Murshidi, Chairman of Oman Investment Authority, H E Dr Rahma Ibrahim al Mahrouqi, Minister

of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, H E Dr Said Mohammed al Saqri, Minister of Economy (Head of Mission of Honour), and H E Dr Frederico Cardoso, Non-Resident Ambassador of Angola to Oman.

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Industrial sector Omanisation increases 5.5%

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The industrial sector in the sultanate witnessed significant growth in Omanisation rates in 2024 from January to November increasing 5.5%. During this period, 1,708 Omanis were employed, including 1,145 males and 563 females, surpassing the target of employing 1,000 Omanis in the year.

According to statistics from Ministry of Labour, the total

number of workers in the industrial sector reached approximately 30,993 Omanis at the end of November 2024.

Dr Ahmed bin Khalfan al Badawi, Head of Employment Team at Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP), emphasised the fact that the next phase will focus on increasing Omanisation of technical and specialised roles within the industrial sector.

He informed that the ministry is working to enhance profes-



sional specialisations and develop technical skills of the national workforce. This aligns with MoCIIP's strategic goal of investing in national talent through implementation of ini-

tiatives in partnership with development organisations.

Badawi further noted that Royal directives of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik regarding Industrial Strategy 2040, which came into effect mid-2024, have resulted in positive outcomes, including 265 initiatives. Of these, 125 initiatives are directly linked to the ministry's sectors, while the remaining 140 initiatives are distributed among other relevant authorities.

According to Badawi, the Industrial Strategy Team at MoCIIP has begun organising workshops with these authorities to familiarise them with details, objectives and implementation plans of the initiatives. The focus is on establishing new industries with advanced technologies, fostering entrepreneurship and innovation, and improving governance and industrial development management.

He also explained that

MoCIIP is working closely with governance committees and relevant authorities to ensure that efforts to localise jobs align with the goals of the National Employment Programme. This is being achieved through the Tawteen platform with the aim of meeting employment targets across various economic sectors. The ministry's strategy emphasises utilisation of educational and professional qualifications and attracting skilled national talent.

118 riders participate in Saham equestrian festival

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman Equestrian and Racing Federation, in cooperation with Saham Wali's Office, organised a traditional horse festival in Saham, North Batinah on Friday.

The event was held under the patronage of Sheikh Sebaa Hamdan al Saadi, Secretary-General of Secretariat General of National Celebrations.

Sheikh Dr Sultan bin Abdullah al Battashi, Wali, emphasised that hosting the traditional horse festival in Saham is in line with the wilayat's efforts to pro-

mote cultural and heritage tourism, enhance social cohesion and improve the economy. He noted the festival's role in preserving the cultural heritage associated with horses and underscored the historical value of horses in strengthening national identity.

The wali pointed out that the festival attracts tourists and stimulates the local tourism industry, while providing an opportunity to showcase the skills of participating riders.

According to Dr Abdulaziz bin Saud al Maamari, Chairman of Saham Equestrian Committee, which organised the festival, a

total of 118 male and female riders from various governorates participated this year. He highlighted that this strong turnout reflects the growing interest in equestrian activities.

The festival featured a variety of segments, combining traditional horse sports and displays of horse-related performances. Among the activities were artistic performances on horseback, Royal Navy of Oman's music band and several folk groups.

Other highlights included a pony race for children, horse shows and equestrian skills demonstrations.



Omani-Kuwaiti Economic Forum on Monday

Muscat - Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises Development and Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn), in cooperation with the Kuwaiti Ministry of Commerce and Industry, will organise the Omani-Kuwaiti Economic Forum in Kuwait on Monday. This event aims to enhance economic and trade relations between the two nations, focusing on opportunities for joint trade and investment coop-

eration, and increasing the volume of trade exchange.

It will feature sessions covering the manufacturing sector, supply chain integration, real estate development, hotel investments and food security. It will also facilitate bilateral meetings between Omani and Kuwaiti companies, promoting economic and trade cooperation, identifying trade opportunities, and discussions on developments in the manufacturing and food security sectors, alongside exchange of successful experiences and expertise.



Oman condemns deadly car attack in German Christmas market

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Sultanate of Oman has strongly condemned the recent run-over incident in the German city of Magdeburg, which resulted in the tragic loss of several lives and left dozens injured. Oman expressed its heartfelt condolences to the government of the Federal Republic of Germany and to the families of the victims, along with sincere wishes for the swift recovery of the injured.

A statement issued by the Foreign Ministry said, 'Oman reaffirms its unwavering stance against all forms of violence and terrorism, regardless of motives or causes.'

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ANNOUNCEMENT

The Internal Tenders Committee of the Ministry of Labour announces the following tenders:

Tender No.	Tender Description	Last date for electronic purchasing	Last date of tender submission
42/2024	Supply and installation of air conditioning units, along with the construction of a secondary roof for the Labour Department building in Mudhaibi	Tuesday 07/01/2025 2:00 PM	Monday 27/01/2025 10:00 AM
43/2024	Provision of cleaning services for the Labour Department building in Buraimi	Tuesday 07/01/2025 2:00 PM	Monday 27/01/2025 10:00 AM
33/2024 Re-offering	Provision of cleaning services for the Labour Administration building in Dibba	Tuesday 31/12/2024 2:00 PM	Thursday 09/1/2025 10:00 AM

- Specialized establishments can obtain tender documents electronically via the link below starting from Sunday 22/12/2024 at 8:00 AM
<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om/>
- Bids are submitted electronically.
- Tender envelopes will be opened at 11:00 AM according to the date specified for submitting bids for each tender.

(The Ministry is not bound to accept the lowest price or any tender)

labour_OMAN

MERRY IN MUSCAT

Our Correspondent
Muscat

With Christmas around the corner, Muscat wears a colourful look as a festive vibe sweeps across the city. From dazzling decorations in malls to Nativity sets at homes, the celebrations blend the spirit of Christmas and Oman's unique charm. The dipping mercury has added to the festivities; clear skies and a gentle breeze creating the perfect backdrop for gatherings at churches and beaches adorned with streamers and twinkling lights. Christmas trees, small and big, with shining stars, baubles and globes have taken pride of space and Santa Claus appearances are bringing smiles to children and adults alike.

Sunil Dsouza, ex-CEO of a travel and aviation firm, described Christmas as a time of joy and peace, a season that embodies the spirit of celebrations. "It's about cherishing moments with close family, spreading good vibes and embracing happiness. Most importantly, it's a time to celebrate friendship and relationships, making the festive season truly special."

The festive mood is "infectious" for John Reeves, an oil and gas professional. "We love visiting malls, Oman Avenues Mall in particular, to soak in the holiday spirit. The decorations and activities make it feel like Christmas back home."

Markets are doing brisk Christmas business offering everything from handmade crafts to freshly baked cookies and cakes. The bustling atmosphere at the churches in Ruwi and Ghala are a highlight of the season.

Philippe Kronberg, General Manager of Shangri-La Barr al Jissah, shared his excitement about the festivities at the resort. "We're thrilled to celebrate Christmas in Oman's unique setting. Although there's no snow,



40-feet Christmas Tree at Shangri-La Barr al Jissah (Muscat Daily)

the weather is delightful, and we've created a magical atmosphere with the tallest tree in Oman, standing 40 feet tall. It took us a week to set up, and the energy and joy it brings are unmatched."

Hotels and resorts across the sultanate are adding to the festive cheer with elegant décor, themed dinners and family-

friendly activities. At Sheraton Oman Hotel, a 14 feet Christmas tree stands as the centrepiece of celebrations. "This year, our theme is blue and white, and we've taken a creative approach by designing an inverted gingerbread house with cakes hanging like stars," said Shrey Mehta, Director of Food and Beverage. "It's been wonderful to see

guests enjoying the festive atmosphere and our special culinary offerings."

Homemaker Jessica Suresh said, "The warmth here is different, not just in the weather but in the people and the celebrations. We enjoyed plum cakes and hot chocolate at Snow Oman. My teenage son, who's visiting from India, loved every moment of it."



51km mountain hike from Wadi Bani Khalid on Dec 26-27

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MHT) has announced a 51km mountain hike set to take place on December 26 and 27 in North Sharqiyah. Organised as part of the Sur: Arab Tourism Capital for 2024 celebrations, the two-day adventure will offer participants a unique opportunity to explore the stunning landscapes of the Eastern Hajar Mountains.

Called Challenge and Explore Trail Route (E35), the hike will take adventurers through majestic mountains, picturesque valleys and charming mountain villages. The hike will begin near a pond close to the village of Maqil in Wadi Bani Khalid at an altitude of 640m. The trail will gradually ascend to the highest peak overlooking Wadi Bani Khalid. Over a 20km stretch, hikers will follow a moderately steep mountain path, eventually reaching a campsite near a transmission station at an elevation of around 2,050m above sea level. The total ascent for Day 1 will be

Hikers are advised to bring a backpack, trail shoes, a first aid kit, a windproof jacket, a headlamp, a sun hat and at least 2lt of water

approximately 2,000m.

On Day 2, hikers will descend from the campsite at Halout village, first following a dirt road for 10km, and then a mountain trail. The descent will continue for another 11km, eventually leading to a paved road stretching the final 9km of the event. The hike will conclude at a bridge near Tiwi township, marking the 50km endpoint, with a total descent of around 2,700m.

The event promises participants awe-inspiring views, a chance to immerse themselves in Oman's rich natural heritage and the camaraderie of fellow adventurers. It underscores Oman's dedication to promoting eco-tourism and adventure activities as part of the celebrations

for Sur's designation as Arab Tourism Capital for 2024.

To ensure a safe and comfortable hiking experience, MHT has outlined essential gear requirements for participants. Hikers are advised to bring a backpack, trail shoes, a first aid kit, a windproof jacket, a headlamp, a sun hat and at least 2lt of water. These items are crucial for navigating the varying conditions along the trail.

For added comfort, participants may also bring optional gear such as trekking poles, sunglasses, gloves, thermal shirts and sunscreen. While not mandatory, these items can enhance the overall hiking experience.

Each participant is permitted to prepare a dropbag containing essentials like extra clothing, personal hygiene items and a cold-weather jacket. The ministry will transport these bags, which will be available for pick-up at the campsite.

To secure a spot for this adventure, participants are required to make a refundable deposit of RO10. Registration will close on Tuesday, December 24.

Oman ranked 45th in index on govt's AI readiness

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman continues to make significant strides in integrating artificial intelligence (AI) into its governance framework, securing the 45th position globally in the 2024 Government AI Readiness Index published by Oxford Insights, a London-based consulting firm. The sultanate maintained its position as fifth in the Middle East, reflecting its progress in leveraging AI for innovation and effective public sector governance. The index evaluates nations based on their infrastructure, governance and ability to deploy AI technologies in public services.

In September 2024, Oman launched its National Programme for Artificial Intelligence and Advanced Digital Technologies to enhance the role of information and communications technology in the economy as part of efforts to achieve Oman Vision 2040 objectives. Spanning from 2024 to 2026, the programme includes a series of initiatives aimed at aligning the nation with global advancements in AI.

A key feature of the programme is development of a national open data platform to support entrepreneurs, investors and decision-makers by providing easy access to valuable data. Establishment of a national research centre for AI will assist researchers and academics in



The National Programme for Artificial Intelligence and Advanced Digital Technologies aims to increase the digital economy's contribution to the country's GDP from 2% in 2021 to 10% by 2040

exploring cutting-edge technologies. Furthermore, a collaborative AI 'studio' is set to provide tech solutions to specialists and organisations.

The programme aspires to improve Oman's ranking in the global Government AI Readiness Index and aims to increase the digital economy's contribution to the country's GDP from 2% in 2021 to 10% by 2040.

Muscat Chapter ICAI Hosts Dynamic Panel Discussion at Avenir 2024



The Muscat Chapter of ICAI (MC-ICAI) as part of its commitment to contribute to the young aspiring professionals made its mark at Avenir 2024, a prominent career guidance event organized by Indian School Al Mabella on Friday, November 29, 2024. A key feature of the event was an insightful panel discussion titled "Charting Success Globally Through Indian CA Professional Qualification", which highlighted the global relevance and adaptability of the Chartered Accountancy profession.

Moderated by CA Sangeetha Suresh, the session featured an esteemed panel of experts, including CA Mubeen Khan (Past Chairperson of MC-ICAI), CA Sachin Singhal, CA Aastha Rangan (Past Chairperson of MC-ICAI), and CA Badri Narayan Subudhi. Each panelist shared valuable perspectives and personal experiences, illustrating the extensive opportunities available to Indian Chartered Accountants (CAs) on a global scale. The discussion explored

critical themes such as:

1. The global demand for Indian CAs, celebrated for their technical expertise and ethical grounding;
2. How the Indian CA qualification prepares professionals to excel across diverse sectors, including finance, auditing, consulting, and entrepreneurship;
3. Strategies for young aspirants to leverage their credentials for rewarding international careers; and
4. Inspirational success stories offering practical guidance for students pursuing the CA path.

Moderator CA Sangeetha Suresh reflected, "Facilitating this discussion was an honor. The insights shared were both motivational and practical, equipping students with a clear roadmap for achieving their goals."

The session resonated strongly with an audience of students and teachers, who found it both enlightening and motivating. Supporting the event's seamless execution

were CA Abhishek R. Vaishya and CA Ajil James Kurian, whose contributions enhanced the overall experience for attendees.

Speaking on behalf of MC-ICAI, Chairperson CA Gaurav Kapoor remarked, "Avenir 2024 provided an excellent platform to connect with students and showcase the transformative potential of the Indian CA qualification. It's not just a career choice but a pathway to global influence."

MC-ICAI is proud to champion events like Avenir 2024, fostering meaningful dialogue and inspiring young minds. By sharing professional expertise and real-world experiences, the chapter continues its mission of empowering future generations to achieve their aspirations.

MC-ICAI, an overseas chapter of the Institute of Chartered Accountants of India (ICAI), is committed to advancing professional development, knowledge exchange and community engagement among its members in the Sultanate of Oman.



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Mazda sets new benchmark for quality

Mazda Oman has unveiled a groundbreaking campaign, setting new benchmarks for luxury and value by offering its premium range of vehicles at truly unbeatable prices.

Known for their cutting-edge designs, advanced engineering, and stellar performance, Mazda vehicles are the epitome of sophistication and reliability. This campaign represents a unique opportunity for customers in Oman to own a premium Mazda at significantly reduced prices, reinforcing Mazda's dedication to delivering high-quality craftsmanship combined with advanced technology and affordability.

The campaign features a carefully curated selection of Mazda models, each tailored to meet the varied needs and desires of drivers. From the efficient and stylish Mazda 2 to the powerful and refined Mazda CX-90, Mazda offers something for everyone.

Each model offers an exceptional balance of design, performance, and comfort, all at prices that make owning a premium vehicle more accessible than ever before.

For those who enjoy a blend of sportiness and elegance, the Mazda 6, starting at RO8,850, is the perfect choice. This sleek sedan is powered by a 2.0L Skyactiv-G engine and a six-speed automatic transmission, providing an engaging and dynamic driving experience.

Along with its spirited perfor-



mance, the Mazda 6 prioritises safety with features like six airbags, Dynamic Stability Control (DSC), and Traction Control System (TCS), ensuring a safe and secure ride. Reverse Parking Sensors, Tyre Pressure Monitoring System (TPMS), and Mazda's G-Vectoring Control

Plus (GVC Plus) further enhance the driving experience, offering greater stability and handling. With its stylish 17" alloy wheels and keyless entry, the Mazda 6 combines both form and function, delivering an unforgettable driving experience.

The Mazda CX-5, starting at

RO8,955, brings together style, performance, and advanced safety in one exciting package. A dynamic and capable SUV, the CX-5 is equipped with six airbags, DSC, TCS, and GVC Plus for superior handling and control. As you move up the trims, it includes additional safety tech-

nologies such as Smart City Brake Support Rear (SCBSR), Pedestrian Brake Front (PBF), and Rear Cross Traffic Alert (RCTA), providing an extra layer of protection on every drive. Features like the Tyre Pressure Monitoring System (TPMS) and Electronic Parking Brake (EPB)

ensure that the CX-5 remains a top contender for those who value both safety and style in their vehicle.

For those who demand more from their driving experience, the Mazda CX-60, starting at RO12,999, offers the perfect blend of luxury, performance,

and cutting-edge safety. This premium SUV is packed with advanced safety features such as Blind Spot Monitoring (BSM), Lane Departure Warning (LDWS), Lane Keep Assist (LKA), and Smart City Brake Support (SCBS), offering extra protection in various driving situations. Additional technologies, including Pedestrian Brake Front (PBF), Mazda Radar Cruise Control (MRCC) with Stop & Go, and Kinematic Posture Control (KPC), enhance the safety and comfort of every journey.

The Mazda CX-60 promises a confident and secure driving experience, making it the ideal choice for those seeking sophistication and peace of mind on the road.

The Mazda CX-90, starting at RO15,999, is the true embodiment of Mazda's philosophy of 'Power and Elegance Perfectly Aligned'. This luxury segment SUV combines a 3.3L Turbo MHEV engine with a suite of advanced safety features, creating a driving experience that is both exhilarating and reassuring. The CX-90 comes equipped with seven airbags, Blind Spot Monitoring (BSM), Lane Keep Assist (LKA), and Smart City Brake Support (SCBS) to ensure your safety on the road. With advanced systems like Mazda Radar Cruise Control (MRCC) with Stop & Go, Traffic Jam Assist (TJA), and a 360-degree view camera, the CX-90 enhances driving confidence in any situation.

Meethaq Islamic gets GIFA leadership award

Meethaq Islamic Banking from Bank Muscat, has been honoured with the esteemed Global Islamic Finance Award (GIFA) for Market Leadership. This prestigious recognition highlights Meethaq's unwavering commitment to advancing the Islamic Banking landscape in the Sultanate of Oman.

The accolade underscores Meethaq's dedication to providing top-tier Sharia-compliant services and innovative solutions tailored to the diverse needs of individual and institutional customers. Since its inception, Meethaq has remained steadfast in its mission to excel consistently delivering financial solutions that align with evolving



customer requirements.

Speaking on the recognition, Ali Ahmed al Lawati, Assistant General Manager, Meethaq Corporate Banking, expressed his delight, stating: "We are immensely honoured to receive this prestigious award, which reflects

Meethaq's enduring journey of accomplishments and successes. We extend our gratitude to the GIFA team for recognising Meethaq's leadership in the Islamic banking sector. This recognition would not have been possible without the trust and

confidence of our valued customers. Meethaq remains committed to delivering exceptional sharia'a-compliant services and innovative solutions that meet the aspirations of our customers while adhering to the international standards."

Liva Insurance wins award for Best Marketing Video Concept

Liva Insurance turned the inaugural edition of 'The Oman Marketing Impact Awards' (TOMI Awards) into a stage for its creative brilliance, securing the prestigious title of 'Best Marketing Video Concept' for its acclaimed one-year anniversary video, showcasing its commitment to impactful and innovative marketing excellence.

The brand's anniversary video was recognised for captivating audiences with its heartfelt tribute to Oman's rich cultural heritage, seamlessly intertwined with a fresh, contemporary narrative centred on family bonds. By celebrating the nation's timeless traditions, the video has resonated emotionally with over 200,000 viewers on social media since its debut.

Hosted by Muscat Media Group, TOMI Awards mark a historic milestone as Oman's first annual event dedicated to celebrating outstanding marketing achievements across a range of media formats and industries. Designed to ignite a new era of creativity, the awards shine a spotlight on the nation's most impactful campaigns, setting a benchmark for excellence in ad-



vertising.

The event - at the Crowne Plaza Muscat on December 11 - stood out for its transparent and rigorous selection process. Winners were chosen through a unique combination of public voting, evaluations by industry marketing leaders, and final assessments by an international jury of distinguished experts.

Esteemed panelists included Farah El Kadi, Regional Executive Creative Director at SSUP World; Chehadi Bourdoukan, Executive Creative Director at WHY; and Jamil Asidy, Executive Creative Director at

MEMAC Ogilvy - KSA. In a competitive field of over 250 entries across 14 categories, Liva Insurance's campaigns stood out for their innovation, cultural authenticity, and audience engagement.

CEO Hanaa al Hinaï shared her pride in the team's success, stating: "Winning the Best Marketing Video Concept award is a testament to our clear communications strategy, and our customer's trust in us and our messaging. This award honors not just the campaign we've created but the collective effort behind making our vision a reality."

OCEC hosted 14 international events in 2024

The Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre (OCEC), a premier venue in the region, achieved a significant milestone in 2024, hosting 14 international and regional events of high-calibre, a report stated.

The OCEC continues to establish itself as Oman's leading

destination for large-scale events that drive substantial economic and social impact. By attracting international events, the venue plays a pivotal role in supporting the Sultanate's economic diversification goals under Oman Vision 2040.

Among the prestigious

events hosted at the OCEC this year were the Middle East Space Conference, the International Occupational Health Summit, and the General Arab Insurance Federation (GAIF) Conference, which collectively brought thousands of visitors to the state-of-the-art facility. Other landmark

events included the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RCOG) World Congress and the Gulf Petrochemicals and Chemicals Association (GPCA) 18th Annual Forum, which combined welcomed over 5,000 delegates from over 80 countries.

ISM organises annual art and craft extravaganza Winter Strokes

Under the aegis of the Board of Directors, Indian School Muscat hosted Winter Strokes - the Annual Art and Craft Extravaganza on December 14 and 15, to celebrate the artistic expressions through the vibrant fusion of colours and contemporary art forms.

Art is an expression of our inner soul which is significant to the students as it adds wings to their own imagination and form to their ingenuity. As part of the Indian School Muscat's illustrious Golden Jubilee carousal, the Winter Strokes was structured



into two distinct categories.

The first category was the Competitive Segment, an exhilarating Inter-School Competition inviting talents from various Indian Schools in Oman to compete for creative supremacy. The second highlighted the Exhibition Showcase, a curate display of remarkable artworks by students of the host school.

Chief guest Dr Mona Ismail - Dean, Scientific College of Design, and guest of honour Nidheesh Kumar, Finance Director, Indian Schools Oman, inaugurated the much-awaited Winter

Strokes 2024 with the ribbon cutting ceremony. Dr Mona conveyed her profound elation to be a part of the symposium and commended the artistic efforts on display. Wishing the school, a good luck, she offered to extend a helping hand to the school in future endeavours and to collaborate with Scientific College.

Nidheesh Kumar expressed an overwhelming thrill for being a part of such a mega event as part of the golden jubilee celebration. Further, he appreciated the zeal and efforts of the students and teachers.

INDIA

Congress to organise protests against Amit Shah's remarks

New Delhi - The Congress party is going to organise nationwide protests on December 24 against the remarks of Union Home Minister Amit Shah on B R Ambedkar.

All party Members of Parliament (MPs) and Central Working Committee (CWC) members are also going to hold press conferences Sunday and Monday on Shah's comments.

General Secretary (Organisation) K C Venugopal has issued a circular to all party leaders. The circular, accessed by ANI, mentions that a 'Babasaheb Ambedkar Samman March' will be taken out in every district of the country.

The march will start with garlanding a statue of Ambedkar and will continue till a memorandum is submitted to respect District Magistrates (DM).

In the press conferences, the MPs and CWC members are set to address reporters in their respective constituencies.

During the Parliament winter session, which concluded on Friday, INDIA bloc MPs took out multiple protests since Home Minister Amit Shah's remarks in Parliament on December 18, criticising Congress for making it a 'fashion' to take Ambedkar's name. "If they had taken the name of God so many times instead of Ambedkar then they would have got heaven for seven



Samajwadi Party supporters take out a protest rally demanding the resignation of Union Home Minister Amit Shah, in Kanpur on Saturday (ANI)

lives," Shah had said.

Congress lashed out at the BJP and Shah, demanding an apology and his resignation for his remarks, calling it an 'insult' to Ambedkar. During the protests in Parliament, BJP took out parallel protests to Congress, in turn accusing the BJP of insulting the legacy of India's first Law Minister.

During the protests of both sides, a face-off occurred at the

premises of Parliament, injuring two BJP MPs, Pratap Sarangi and Mukesh Rajput. Moreover, Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge alleged that he was pushed too.

Kharge alleged that BJP MPs pushed him while trying to enter Parliament during a face-off.

Addressing a press conference with Rahul Gandhi, Mallikarjun Kharge, who is Leader of Opposition in Rajya

Sabha, alleged that Amit Shah interacted with the media without looking at facts about his remarks pertaining to Ambedkar.

"The statements that the government and especially the Prime Minister and Union Home Minister Amit Shah are making about Dr B R Ambedkar are very sad and he (Amit Shah) addressed the press conference yesterday without looking at the facts. They should look at the

facts before abusing Jawaharlal Nehru or Dr B R Ambedkar," he said.

Meanwhile, Bahujan Samaj Party Chief Mayawati on Saturday called for a nationwide protest on December 24 against Amit Shah's remarks on Babasaheb Ambedkar. In a series of posts on X, Mayawati said that Shah's remarks have hurt the hearts of the people.

ANI



This file photo shows ISRO launching the PSLV-C59 mission with ESA's Proba-3 satellites, in Sriharikota on December 5 (ANI)

ISRO, ESA sign deal to collaborate in human spaceflight

New Delhi - The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) and the European Space Agency (ESA) have signed an agreement to collaborate on activities related to astronaut training, mission implementation, and research experiments.

The agreement was signed by ISRO Chairman S Somanath, who is also Secretary, Department of Space (DoS), and Dr Josef Aschbacher, Director General of ESA.

According to ISRO, the agreement establishes a framework for cooperative activities in human space exploration and research, focusing on astronaut training, support for experiment development and integration (including the use of ESA facilities on the International Space Station), human and biomedical research experiments, as well as joint educational and outreach initiatives.

For the upcoming Axiom-4 mission, where ISRO's Gaganyatri and an ESA astronaut will be part of the crew, the two agen-

cies are collaborating to implement experiments proposed by Indian Principal Investigators for the ISS. ISRO stated that efforts are also underway to participate in ESA's human physiological studies, technology demonstration experiments, and joint educational outreach activities.

In his remarks, S Somanath emphasised ISRO's roadmap for human spaceflight activities and noted that the recent approval of the Bharatiya Antariksh Station (BAS) offers a valuable opportunity to develop interoperability between human spaceflight platforms. Dr Aschbacher expressed his gratitude to Dr Somanath for addressing the ESA Council and highlighted that the agreement serves as a strong foundation for cooperation between the two agencies.

The leadership of both organisations expressed satisfaction with the progress of joint activities for the Axiom-4 mission.

ANI

Arvind Kejriwal announces Dr Ambedkar scholarship scheme for Dalit students

New Delhi - Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) national convener Arvind Kejriwal on Saturday announced the Dr Ambedkar Scholarship for the higher education of Dalit students.

Kejriwal stated that under this scholarship scheme, the Delhi government will cover the expenses of Dalit students after they gain admission to top universities across the world. Government employees from the Dalit community can also avail of this scholarship.

Addressing a public event, AAP national convener Arvind Kejriwal said: "I want to ensure that no person from the Dalit community is deprived of higher education, for this, I am announcing the Dr Ambedkar Scholarship. Now any student from the Dalit community who wants to study in top universities across the world, the Delhi government will bear their ex-



I want to ensure that no person from the Dalit community is deprived of higher education

ARVIND KEJRIWAL

penses after the admission of the students...This scholarship

will also be applicable to government employees from the Dalit community."

He added that this scholarship is a response to BJP and Union Home Minister Amit Shah, who disrespected Dr B R Ambedkar. "We are giving an answer to BJP and Union Home Minister Amit Shah who disrespected Dr B R Ambedkar by announcing the Dr Ambedkar Scholarship," he said.

ANI

A COLD WINTER MORNING IN CAPITAL CITY



Commuters ride bicycles amid low visibility due to dense fog on a cold winter morning, in New Delhi on Saturday (ANI)

PM Modi arrives in Kuwait to 'strengthen ties' across sectors

Kuwait City, Kuwait - Prime Minister Narendra Modi arrived in Kuwait to a warm welcome on Saturday. He is on a two-day visit to the Gulf nation.

This is the first visit of an Indian Prime Minister to Kuwait after 43 years.

On his arrival, Modi was received by Kuwait's first Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defence and Interior, Sheikh Fahad Yousef Saud Al-Sabah, along with the country's Foreign Minister Abdullah Ali Al-Yahya, and several other dignitaries.

Modi said the visit will strengthen India-Kuwait friendship across various sectors.

"Landed in Kuwait to a warm welcome. This is the first visit by

an Indian PM in 43 years, and it will undoubtedly strengthen the India-Kuwait friendship across various sectors. I look forward to the programmes scheduled for later today and tomorrow," Modi said in a post on X.

Ministry of External Affairs spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said the visit is 'a new chapter in the making'.

Later, Modi interacted with members of the Indian diaspora at the hotel in Kuwait City. He also watched a cultural performance by artists.

He also met 101-year-old ex-IFS officer Mangal Sain Handa.

"This is an experience of a lifetime. PM Modi said he especially came here to meet him



(Mangal Sain Handa). We are grateful to Prime Minister Modi," said the son of the ex-IFS officer, Dilip Handa.

His son, Pradeep Handa re-

called that PM Modi had sent a letter of congratulations to the ex-IFS officer on his 100th birthday. "I have been in Kuwait for almost 40 years. I am the Gen-

eral Manager of one of the largest banks in Kuwait... The National Bank of Kuwait... It is very exciting, I got a call from the Ambassador that PM Modi wants to meet your father. On my father's 100th birthday, the Prime Minister had sent a letter of congratulations to him as well," he said.

"We are overwhelmed to welcome Prime Minister Narendra Modi here. He is a visionary leader," said a member of the Indian diaspora.

An artist who performed at the arrival of Modi at the hotel said that it was a proud moment for her entire team and a 'big achievement'.

"Prime Minister Narendra

Modi saw our performance. It is a very proud moment. It is a big achievement for us. On behalf of our entire team, we are thankful to Prime Minister Modi. He asked us our names... We are very happy," said the artist, who was also a member of the Indian diaspora. "All Indians in Kuwait are happy to welcome Prime Minister Narendra Modi here," said another member of the diaspora.

Modi also met with publisher Abdullateef Alnesef and translator Abdullah Baron, who published the Ramayana and Mahabharata in Arabic.

"I am very happy; it is an honour for me. Mr Modi is very happy with this. These books

are very important. He (Prime Minister Modi) signed both the books," Abdullateef Alnesef, the book publisher, said. "It took two years to translate the Ramayana and Mahabharata into the Arabic language," he added.

"From both the books we got to understand the Indian culture," Abdullah Baron, translator of the book, said.

During his visit, Modi will attend the opening ceremony of the 26th Arabian Gulf Cup as a special guest of the Emir of Kuwait. He will also interact with the Indian diaspora at the 'Hala Modi' community event at the Sheikh Saad Al Abdullah Sports Complex.

ANI

‘Displeased’ Sahel juntas make life more difficult for human rights NGOs

Niamey, Niger - Niger’s military junta says that recent reports published by global human rights organisations like Human Rights Watch (HRW) and Amnesty International seek to discredit the country. Niger’s armed forces claim that such reports by are one-sided and that they do not reflect efforts to reconcile security and fundamental rights.

Numerous NGOs continue to regularly denounce human rights violations in Niger, particularly in the area of political repression and the handling of terrorist threats in the Sahel region. But how much truth is there to that criticism?

No official ban - yet

Some media recently reported that the work of HRW and Amnesty had been banned in Niger on account of displeasing the military rulers of the country, who claim their biggest focus is to protect human rights through their ongoing fight against terrorist groups. However, both non-governmental organisations (NGOs) confirmed with DW that no official ban had yet been imposed on them.

It is important to highlight that HRW and Amnesty do not have their own offices in Niger but work together with local informants instead. They also stated



The heads of state of Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso formed the Alliance of Sahel States in Niamey to break away from what they call Western influence

that they plan to continue to do so in future. However, since the coup d’etat in Niger in July 2023, when General Abdourahamane Tiani seized power, the military government has already suspended around 200 local and international organisations for allegedly violating rules.

The Nigerien branch of the NGO Transparency International, which fights corruption worldwide, says it is not surprised by these restrictive atti-

tudes. “Those in power do not want to be informed about what is going on in their countries. They prefer to remain silent,” Transparency International Secretary Wada Maman told DW.

“It is not true that human rights are protected and that the international laws signed by Niger are accepted.”

Working for each other

However, the pro-government

group Debout Niger sees things differently, stating that the junta’s criticism of the NGOs is justified.

The leader of the organisation, Ismael Mohamed, told DW: “These groups are discrediting Niger,” adding emphatically that ‘all organisations and countries in the world should know that anyone who tries to interfere in Niger’s affairs will be thrown out of the country.”

This is why NGOs still working on the ground in Niger have become extremely cautious: Abdoul Aziz from the youth education NGO Mojedec thinks that the government and NGOs should talk to each other in order to find common ground and avoid disputes: “No things that defame our country (should) be written. Both sides should be listened to.”

“We urge the government of Niger to work with the NGOs.”

Reports of arbitrary arrests

One of the reasons why HRW and Amnesty are currently in the spotlight is the fact that they have been denouncing the arrest of Nigerien activist Moussa Tiangari at the beginning of December, which they have decried as being arbitrary

Tiangari, who is the secretary general of the organisation ‘Alternatives Espaces Citoyens’ (AEC), known for its critical

stance towards the military authorities, was arrested in the capital Niamey by armed men who reportedly were posing as police officers. “They forced their way into our house,” HRW quoted Tiangari’s wife as saying. To protect her safety, her name was not given.

“They ordered him to follow them quietly because they didn’t want anyone to know what was going on,” the wife added, according to HRW.

Drissa Traore, the secretary-general of the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), stressed that people like Tiangari do ‘not belong in prison, nor do several other Nigeriens, who were unjustly arrested by the government, including former president Mohamed Bazoum and his wife’.

In neighbouring Mali, there are also mounting accusations of critical voices being silenced through such arbitrary arrests.

A close confidant of the regime-critical imam Mahmoud Dicko, named Youssouf Daba Diawara, was also recently imprisoned on charges of ‘resisting legitimate authority’ after taking part in an unauthorised opposition demonstration. He was then released at the beginning of October.

DW



French troops begin withdrawal in Chad

Bamako, Mali - France began withdrawing soldiers on Friday from Chad, according to the Chadian Defence Ministry, after N’Djamena abruptly ended military cooperation with the former colonial power last month.

“The General Staff of the Armed Forces informs National and International Opinion that after the withdrawal of French fighter planes from Chad, the beginning of troop withdrawal has just begun today,” it said the statement. “This sequential withdrawal of Combat Units will be carried out in conjunction with the transport of logistics.”

Chad gave Paris six weeks to remove 1,000 soldiers and their equipment by January 31.

The Chadian Foreign Ministry announced on November 28 the

end of military cooperation with France, which withdrew fighter jets from Chad after a disagreement last month.

French soldiers and fighter aircraft have been stationed in Chad almost continuously since the country’s independence in 1960, helping to train the Chadian military. Chad was the last country to host French military units in Africa’s Sahel region after Paris withdrew units from Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger.

France’s relations with Mali and Burkina Faso deteriorated after military administrations took power in those countries in 2020 and 2022.

Residents in Mali and Burkina Faso protested French presence in their countries.

Anadolu Agency

Germany: Death toll from deadly car attack at Christmas market rises to 5

Berlin, Germany - The death toll from the deadly car attack at a Christmas market in the German city of Magdeburg rose to five, according to reports on Saturday.

Citing security sources, German public broadcasters ARD’s WDR and NDR television channels said that over 200 others have been injured.

According to the German media, the 50-year-old perpetrator had been living in Germany since 2006 and had permanent residency in the country.

It was reported that he worked as a doctor in the city of Bernburg and his social media accounts contained Islamophobic messages, support for the far-right AfD party, with outlandish claims that German authorities were ‘chasing Saudi asylum seekers to destroy their lives’ and ‘Germany wants to Islamise Europe’.

The man had posted on social media, expressing ‘concerns about the rise of Islam in Germany’.

He wrote in June a post about German police using ‘dirty tactics’ against him and other critics



The attack occurred on Friday in the popular Christmas market at Magdeburg’s city centre. Videos on social media showed a dark car speeding into the crowd, sending people fleeing in panic

of Islam to ‘destroy their anti-Islam activism’.

The attack occurred on Friday in the popular Christmas market at Magdeburg’s city centre. Videos on social media showed a dark car speeding into the

crowd, sending people fleeing in panic and causing chaos at the festive gathering.

The perpetrator was arrested after the attack.

Police maintained a heavy se-

curity presence at the Christmas market and cordoned off the area to secure the crime scene. Local authorities urged residents to avoid the area while investigations were ongoing.

Anadolu Agency

Canada: Opposition vows to bring down Trudeau government

Hamilton, Canada - The leader of the New Democratic Party (NDP) pledged on Friday to submit a motion of non-confidence against Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau’s government at the next House of Commons sitting.

“Justin Trudeau failed in the biggest job a Prime Minister has: to work for people, not the powerful. To focus on Canadians, not themselves,” NDP leader Jagmeet Singh wrote on X as he shared a letter he wrote.

Saying that the Liberal party does not ‘deserve another



Calls for Justin Trudeau to resign became louder after the widely-disputed resignation announcement of Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland

chance’, Singh said: “That’s why the NDP will vote to bring this government down, and give Canadians a chance to vote for

a government who will work for them. No matter who is leading the Liberal Party, this government’s time is up.”

“We will put forward a clear motion of non-confidence in the next sitting of the House of Commons,” he said while calling on Trudeau to resign.

Jagmeet Singh accused the Canadian premier of an inability to fix health care, build affordable homes and lower bills for citizens.

“I have always fought for people. I fought like hell to get dental care, free birth control

and diabetes medication. I didn’t give up when Justin Trudeau said no. And I won’t let Pierre Poilievre take it all away,” he said, referring to the Conservative party leader who he said would ‘give CEOs and big business anything they want, and make callous cuts to pay for it. They will cut health care, child care, housing and people’s pensions’.

“Canadians can come together and build a country where we take better care of each other. A country where we create good jobs. Stand up to

the threats of Trump’s tariffs. And where everyone has a chance to succeed,” he said.

Calls for Trudeau to resign became louder after the widely-disputed resignation announcement of Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland earlier this week. Freeland described her resignation as the ‘only honest and viable path’.

Her resignation comes amid political tensions over the government’s fiscal policy and Canada’s response to US economic pressures.

Anadolu Agency

Israel leaves Palestinian bodies for stray dogs, says Gaza Civil Defence

Gaza City/Jerusalem - Gaza's Civil Defence reported on Saturday that Israeli forces killing Palestinians and leaving their bodies in the streets where stray dogs feed on them is a clear violation of international law.

In a statement, the Civil Defence explained that Israeli forces have repeatedly targeted rescue teams and ambulances, specifically when they attempt to approach the bodies of those killed.

It emphasised that Israel has also obstructed efforts to recover the bodies of thousands of Palestinians who have died under the rubble of homes destroyed in Israeli airstrikes.

It added that it had found several Palestinian bodies that had been reduced to skeletons.

In other instances, it described seeing stray dogs feeding on the bodies in several neighbourhoods, including Zeitoun, Shujaiya, Tel al-Hawa, the Jabalia area, Tal al-Zaatar, Beit Hanoun, and parts of the eastern areas of Khan Younis and Rafah.

Stressing that these actions by Israel constitute violations of the Geneva Conventions, it called on the signatory countries to 'take immediate action to ensure Israel's compliance with international law'.

They urged the international community, including the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the World



The Civil Defence said that Israel has also obstructed efforts to recover the bodies of thousands of Palestinians who have died under the rubble of homes destroyed in Israeli airstrikes

Health Organization (WHO), to 'pressure Israel to follow proper protocols for handling the bodies of the deceased during wartime'.

'Killed civilians'

Meanwhile, Israeli soldiers revealed on Friday that the army killed Palestinian civilians who entered previously targeted buildings in the Gaza Strip, according to a media report.

The *Haaretz* newspaper in Israel said the army 'does not routinely update its list of targets in Gaza, nor does it indicate to forces on the ground which structures are no longer being used' by fighters. "As a result, anyone - including noncombatants - who enters such a building risks being attacked," it said.

The army claimed that its reported death toll of fighters only

includes individuals confirmed as such. However, 'testimonies from soldiers who served in Gaza suggest a different reality'.

A targeting officer from an Israeli combat brigade told *Haaretz* that, according to the guidelines, 'an active building will always remain an active building, even if the 'terrorist' there was killed six months ago'. A senior officer corroborated those claims, stating

that 'there were targets that suddenly came back to life'.

"So if someone decides to go into a building in search of a hiding place, the building will be struck," said the officer.

In some areas, such as the Netzarim corridor in central Gaza, instructions were reportedly given to target 'anyone who entered a building regardless of who they are, even if they were

just looking for shelter from the rain," according to soldiers' testimonies. Another discharged officer from the 252nd Division said snipers were authorised to consider civilians entering specific areas as fighters. "We're killing civilians there who are then counted as 'terrorists'," he said.

The army spokesperson's 'announcements about casualty numbers have turned this into a

competition between units. If Division 99 killed 150 (people), the next unit aims for 200', he added.

The daily noted that 'earlier this week, Gaza's Hamas-run health ministry announced that the death toll in Gaza since the beginning of the war has exceeded 45,000 people'.

"Information published by the ministry has previously been verified by international organisations and governments and found to be credible," it added.

The *Haaretz* report emphasised that 'Israel disputes the figures. However, Israel is not itself counting or publishing the number of civilian Palestinian deaths in the current conflict, unlike in previous wars'.

Death toll in Gaza surges to 45,227

At least 21 more Palestinians were killed in Israeli attacks in the Gaza Strip, bringing the overall death toll since last year to 45,227, the Health Ministry in the enclave said on Saturday.

A ministry statement added that some 107,573 others were injured in the ongoing assault.

"Israeli forces killed 21 people and injured 61 others in three massacres of families in the last 24 hours," the ministry said.

"Many people are still trapped under the rubble and on the roads as rescuers are unable to reach them," it added.

Missile fired from Yemen hits Israel, injures 16

Jerusalem - Israeli emergency services said on Saturday that 16 people were injured when a rocket fired from Yemen hit Tel Aviv overnight. An attempt to intercept the rocket had failed, according to the Israeli military.

Yemen's Houthis later claimed responsibility for the strike, their second such attack in a matter of days. They said it was carried out with a ballistic missile and targeted 'a military target of the Israeli enemy'.

The Israeli rescue service Magen David Adom reported that 16 people suffered minor injuries from broken glass windows and were receiving medical treatment.



Israeli civil defense members conduct investigation after a missile hit residential area in Tel Aviv on Saturday

Houthi attacks on Israel

The Iran-backed Houthis have launched repeated rocket attacks on Israel in solidarity with Palestinians since the Gaza war began over a year ago, most of which have been intercepted.

Saturday's strike came just

two days after the Houthis fired a missile at Israel that damaged a school. In return, Israel bombed ports in Yemen and the country's capital, Sanaa.

According to the Times of Israel newspaper, the Houthis have fired about 200 rockets and 170 drones at Israel in the past 12 months. The Houthis have also

attacked ships in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden.

Netanyahu vows repercussions

Soon after retaliating for Thursday's attack, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu warned the Houthis of severe repercussions.

"After Hamas, Hezbollah, and the Assad regime in Syria, the Houthis are almost the last remaining arm of Iran's axis of evil," he said in a statement. "The Houthis are learning and will learn the hard way, that those who strike Israel will pay a very heavy price for it."

DW

Pakistan military courts sentence 25 civilians over May 2023 riots

Islamabad, Pakistan - Military courts in Pakistan have sentenced 25 civilians over their alleged involvement in riots and attacks on army installations in May last year, the military said on Saturday.

In a statement, the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR), the Pakistan Army's media wing, said that in light of the Supreme Court's recent decision, the Field General Court Martial, in first phase, sentenced 25 accused after examining all evidence, affording all legal rights to the accused.

"All convicts retain the right to appeal and other legal recourses, as guaranteed by the law and the Constitution," said ISPR.

The military courts awarded sentences from two years to 10 years of rigorous imprisonment to 25 civilians, mostly supporters of former Prime Minister



Imran Khan's party Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI).

Around 85 civilians have been in military custody since May 2023.

The arrests followed violent incidents on May 9, which included attacks on military installations after the arrest of former Prime Minister Khan in a corruption case.

"Promulgation of the sentences of remaining accused is also being done and will be announced shortly as and when

the due process is complete," the military said.

The latest development came after Pakistan's top court on December 13 conditionally permitted military courts to issue verdicts in cases involving civilians arrested for their alleged role in violence in May last year. However, according to the court order, these decisions will remain contingent on the Supreme Court's final ruling in the pending cases.

Anadolu Agency

ICC arrest warrant against Assad 'just matter of time', says expert

Ankara, Turkey - A 'strong' arrest warrant by the International Criminal Court (ICC) against Syria's deposed leader Bashar Assad is 'just a matter of time', according to a Turkish expert.

Levent Ersin Oralli, an academic at Ankara Haci Bayram Veli University, told Anadolu that Syrian ousted leader Bashar Assad clearly violated the Rome Statute and would be tried at the ICC for 'oppressing and subjecting the Syrian people to inhumane treatment'.

Evidence, which was obtained after the fall of the Baath regime on December 8 from prisons and mass graves used as torture centres by the collapsed regime would remove barriers to prosecuting Assad and allow for a strong indictment to be prepared,

Oralli added.

Since Syria is not a party to the Rome Statute, the ICC's founding treaty, the court lacks direct jurisdiction over the country.

For the ICC to intervene, Syria must either accept the ICC's jurisdiction or the UN Security Council (UNSC) must refer the case to the court. In the past, a resolution proposed by France for such a referral was vetoed by Russia.

Oralli noted that during the regime's rule, challenges such as security risks and dangers in the region made evidence collection difficult. He stated that with the regime's fall, the area has been opened to all actors within the framework of international law, including the ICC.

The scholar underlined that in



cases where there is no attack on another country or its citizens, the legal process proceeds based on 'discipline'. However, acts that violate international law, such as mass killings and extrajudicial executions, as seen in Syria, always have consequences, added Oralli.

For his part, Fadel Abdulghany, the head of the Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR), said that Syria was ruled under dictatorship during Assad's tenure, which prevented his prosecution.

Abdulghany added that it is

now easier to file a case against Assad, who has become a fugitive. "Assad is shielded by alliances with powerful states like Russia and Iran, which have vetoed attempts at UN Security Council referrals to the ICC," said Nousha Kabawat, head of the In-

If a new government in Syria recognises the ICC's jurisdiction, it could pave the way for Assad's crimes to be prosecuted

ternational Centre for Transitional Justice's Syria programme.

Is it possible to prosecute Assad?

Under Article 12(3) of the Rome Statute, a state that is not a party to the Statute can submit a declaration to the ICC accepting its jurisdiction. In other words, if a new government in Syria recog-

nises the ICC's jurisdiction, it could pave the way for Assad's crimes to be prosecuted.

Besides, UNSC member states can apply to the ICC to investigate Assad's crimes, provided there is no veto.

Oralli said that international law comes into play when crimes such as genocide, serious human rights violations, or the use of chemical and biological weapons occur during civil wars, as in Syria. He noted that the allegations against the Assad regime meet these criteria.

"The atrocities committed by Hitler were against his own people. Trials in the Tokyo courts were the result of atrocities committed against Southeast Asian nations."

Anadolu Agency

Malaysia to launch new search for missing flight MH370

Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia - Malaysia will launch a new search for the wreckage of Malaysia Airlines flight MH370, which disappeared 10 years ago, Transport Minister Anthony Loke announced on Friday.

Government ministers 'agreed in principle to accept the proposal from Ocean Infinity' to search a new area of 15,000sqkm in the southern Indian Ocean.

"The proposal for a search operation by (US-based exploration company) Ocean Infinity is a solid one and deserves to be considered," Loke told reporters.

The company will receive US\$70mn if wreckage found is substantive, Loke said.

No results from 2 previous searches

Ocean Infinity conducted the last search for the plane, which ended in 2018. This followed an underwater search by Malaysia,



Australia and China in a 120,000sqkm area of the southern Indian Ocean. However, the searches have yielded no significant results.

"Our responsibility and obligation and commitment is to the next of kin," Loke said.

"We hope this time will be positive, that the wreckage will be found and give closure to the families," the minister added.

More than 150 Chinese passengers were on the flight. Their

families are seeking compensation from Malaysia Airlines, Boeing, aircraft engine maker Rolls-Royce and insurance group Allianz, among others.

Malaysia Airlines flight MH370, a Boeing 777 with 239 people on board, went missing on March 8, 2014, en route from Kuala Lumpur to Beijing.

The plane's last transmission was about 40 minutes after takeoff from Kuala Lumpur for Beijing. Shortly after

that, its transponder was turned off, making it difficult to track.

Analysis of satellite data indicated that the plane likely crashed somewhere in the southern Indian Ocean, off the coast of Western Australia.

Debris, some confirmed and some believed to be from the plane, has washed up along the coast of Africa and on islands in the Indian Ocean.

DW

US avoids shutdown with last-minute funding bill



With a 366-34 vote, the House on Friday night approved the new plan from House Speaker Mike Johnson that would keep federal operations temporarily funded

Washington, D.C. US - Both houses of US Congress passed a three-month funding bill that will avert a government shutdown that would have disrupted everything from law enforcement to national parks.

The Democratic-controlled Senate, in an 85-11 vote, passed the bill to continue funding the US government 38 minutes after it lapsed at midnight local time (0500 UTC/GMT).

Earlier on Friday night, with a 366-34 vote, the House approved the last-minute plan from House Speaker Mike Johnson that will now keep federal operations and disaster aid temporarily funded.

The passing provided immediate relief for about 800,000 federal workers who were at risk of being sent home for the Christmas holidays without pay.

Johnson had said Congress would 'meet our obligations' and not allow federal operations to

The Democratic-controlled Senate, in an 85-11 vote, passed the bill to continue funding the US government 38 minutes after it lapsed at midnight

cease ahead of the winter holidays. Democratic Majority Leader Chuck Schumer told the Senate that it was 'good news that the bipartisan approach in the end prevailed ... It's a good outcome for America and the American people'.

Week of tense negotiations

The late-night vote followed a frantic week that saw President-elect Donald Trump and tech billionaire Elon Musk - who is set to be Trump's efficiency czar - defeat an initial bipartisan deal, which threw Congress into disarray. That sparked two alternative slimmed-down bills, which failed

to pass. Following the criticism from his own party, Republican House Speaker Mike Johnson was forced to spend much of Friday trying to find a last-ditch agreement that would keep government agencies running.

There had been uncertainty about the outcome after Trump pushed his demand for the inclusion of a rise in the debt ceiling in the deal. If not, he posted early on Friday, let the closures 'start now'.

However, Trump's final demand wasn't included in the final legislation. It was reduced from the original 1,500-page bill that had included much-derided pay hikes for lawmakers, among

other promises. The White House said President Joe Biden intended to sign the bill into law.

Funding includes storm relief

The legislation extends government funding till March 14 and provides US\$100bn for disaster-hit states and US\$10bn for farmers. The bill also extends agricultural and food aid programmes that were due to expire at the end of the year.

Johnson said on Friday that Republicans would have more power to influence government spending next year, when they will have majorities in both chambers of Congress and Trump will hold the presidency.

"This was a necessary step to bridge the gap, to put us into that moment where we can put our fingerprints on the final decisions on spending," he said after the vote.

The House Speaker added

that Trump 'was certainly happy about this outcome, as well'.

The federal government spent roughly US\$6.2tn last year and has more than US\$36tn in debt.

Congress will now need to act by the middle of next year to authorise further borrowing.

The incoming president has vowed to slash the federal budget and fire thousands of employees when he takes office next month. He is also counting on Republicans to help him pass a big tax relief package.

Musk will head a budget-cutting task force under Trump's second administration but he will hold no official position in Washington. The billionaire, who trashed the original funding plan in a series of often-inaccurate social media posts this week, has been accused of interfering in the process, with questions raised over how an unelected citizen can wield so much power.

DW



Trump appoints vocal critic of Pope Francis as envoy to Vatican

Washington, D.C., US - US President-elect Donald Trump appointed Brian Burch, an outspoken conservative and president of CatholicVote who is a vocal critic of Pope Francis, as the US ambassador to the Vatican.

The Vatican, often referred to as the 'Holy See', serves as the headquarters of the Roman Catholic Church, and is led by Pope Francis.

"I am pleased to announce that Brian Burch will serve as the next United States Ambassador to the Holy See," Trump wrote on Truth Social on Friday.

Stating that Burch, a vocal critic of pope, is a 'devout' Catholic, US President-elect added that Burch has earned 'numerous' awards, and shown 'exceptional' leadership, contributing to the growth of one of the largest Catholic advocacy organisations in the US.

He also praised Burch for his impact on Catholic voter support in November's elections, adding: "He represented me well during the last Election, having garnered more Catholic votes than any Presidential Candidate in History!"

"Brian loves his Church and the United States - He will make us all proud," noted

Trump, extending his congratulations to Burch and his family. For his part, Burch said on X that the Catholic Church is the 'largest' and 'most important' religious institution globally, adding that its relationship with the US has 'vital importance'.

He also expressed commitment to working with leaders within the Vatican and the

Brian Burch, an outspoken conservative and president of CatholicVote is a vocal critic of Pope Francis

new administration to uphold the dignity of all people and advance the common good.

Burch has long expressed criticism of the Francis papacy and, on some occasions, criticised his governance.

After Pope Francis' 2023 decision permitting priests to bless individuals in same-sex unions, Burch criticised the move, accusing the pope of causing 'confusion' within the Catholic Church.

Anadolu Agency

AT THE WORLD'S LARGEST ICE-AND-SNOW THEME PARK



Tourists visit the Harbin Ice-Snow World, the world's largest ice-and-snow theme park, in Harbin, the capital city of northeast China's Heilongjiang Province, on Saturday (Xinhua)

Thailand hosts ASEAN talks to tackle political, security crisis in Myanmar

Bangkok, Thailand - Thailand this week hosted two separate regional meetings in an attempt to tackle the political and security crisis in Myanmar.

The first gathering involved Myanmar's ruling military junta and its neighbours, including China, Bangladesh, Laos and India, while the second included the 10-member Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

All neighbouring countries agreed that direct engagement and dialogue with Myanmar is 'critical' and 'necessary', Thailand's Foreign Ministry spokesperson Nikorndej Balankura said at a press conference in Bangkok.



"They see the value of meeting regularly," Balankura added. "And they share the same understanding, more so than other countries, because they are direct neighbours directly impacted by the situation in Myanmar."

Talks doomed to fail?

Myanmar's foreign minister on

Thursday briefed participants on the outline of the junta's political roadmap and plans toward holding an election.

Critics have dismissed the election plans as a sham.

David Scott Mathieson, who is an independent analyst working on conflict and human rights issues on Myanmar, said the

talks are unlikely to produce any results.

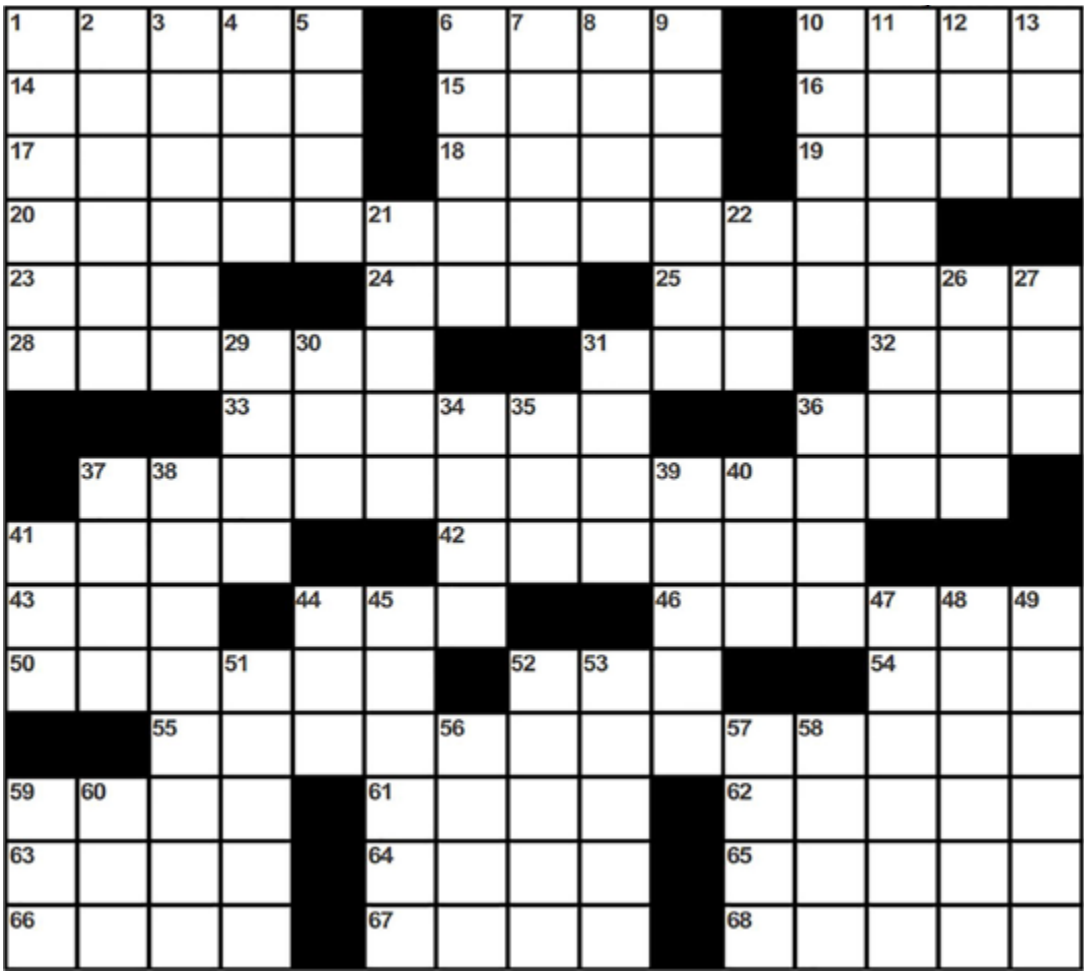
"Unless the Myanmar military is serious about peace, these talks will be extremely limited. You can't approach any diplomacy on Myanmar without a clear understanding that the military is the root cause of all the problems," he told DW.

Mathieson stressed that the junta's claims to hold elections shouldn't be taken seriously.

"No one should be taking these claims seriously. This is a trap of diplomacy. If any interlocutor takes election preparations seriously, they have doomed the country to prolonged conflict," he underlined.

DW

DAILY CROSSWORD



ACROSS

- 1) Computer code for characters
- 6) Component of E=mc²
- 10) 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 precursor
- 24) Tome
- 25) Jewelry fasteners
- 28) Word seen before "special"
- 31) Ship's designation
- 32) "Do the Right Thing" plzeena owner
- 33) '50s Kenyan rebel
- 36) Fashion label
- 37) Lyrics from 20-Across
- STRUT
- 41) Tennyson's "Geraint and. . ."
- 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
This isn't a day to make firm commitments, Aries, especially concerning relationships. Today's atmosphere highlights unification and reconciliation, but don't take this as a sign that you're now bound for life. Proceed carefully before making any long-term decisions. If you're about to take a big step at work or in your personal life, try to delay your decision until your thoughts are clearer.



LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22
The element of water predominates today. You will likely be aware of it by the strong tides of feeling in your household, Leo. Some family members may be unhappy. They may need more independence or look to you for more attention and affection. It's hard to strike the right balance, as you will discover. Do your best to satisfy everyone, making sure that your own needs don't get overlooked.



SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21
This dreamy day is tailor made to your sensibilities. You may find it hard to focus on the daily issues when you're caught up in your fantasies. Go ahead and give in to the day's dreamlike state. Write in your journal or spend some time rummaging around in the attic. You'll be amazed at what you find. Expect to spend hours looking through scrapbooks and reliving your childhood.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

- 1. The mountainous Kyrgyz Republic borders which of these countries?
A. The Socialist Republic of Vietnam
B. The Republic of Lithuania
C. The Republic of Kazakhstan
D. The Russian Federation
- 2. The rumba was originally danced where?
A. Canada
B. Spain
C. Cuba
D. Greece
- 3. Which player made a comeback to international tennis in 2006 after 4 years?
A. Steffi Graf
B. Martina Hingis
C. Gabriela Sabatini
D. Kim Clijsters

Answers: 1. C 2. C 3. B



TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20
You're so upbeat and optimistic by nature that it's difficult for you to accept certain failures. That may be what you're thinking today as you reflect on recent humanitarian efforts. Try not to take such a short-sighted attitude. You're making a difference, even though it may not always be apparent. Continue on this path. Ultimately, you will see how worthwhile the journey is.



VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22
There's a carefree, almost childlike atmosphere to today that suits you just fine, Virgo. You've been working extraordinarily hard lately and need to relax and unwind a bit. This is a day for doing cartwheels across an open field. You aren't the only one who feels this way - it's positively contagious. Make the most of this wonderful feeling. This is a day for play not work.



CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19
Your artistic side likes to communicate with people who are a shade off normal. You call them eccentric - other people call them crazy! From your viewpoint, the crazier the better! You feel such people add interest to the lives of anyone they come in contact with. Take a look in the mirror. You may see that you're such a person. Your energy and creativity add sparkle to others' lives.



GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21
You're usually very good at concentrating and getting your chores done, even when chaos reigns around you. This likely won't be the case today. Even you will come under the influence of the erratic. It's too hard to get much done with all the commotion. Don't fret about your lack of productivity. This is one day. Relax and have some fun. Tomorrow you can get down to work.



LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22
This is a day for rest and relaxation, Libra. Take advantage of the calm atmosphere to center yourself and focus on what's important in your life. You've been going at full speed, and it's possible that your family feels somewhat neglected. Spend some quality time with loved ones, if possible. They miss you and will welcome your company. Other concerns come and go, but family is forever.



AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18
You're conscientious where your health is concerned. You're one of the rare few who exercise and eat nutritious meals. Today you might want to expand your repertoire of medical remedies. If you've been struggling to shake a cold or allergy, consider some alternative medicines. They're moving more into the mainstream. Chinese herbs and acupuncture could just be what the New Age doctor ordered!



CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22
You have strong psychic vision, Cancer. Some people might say that you're prophetic, but your gift is a combination of creativity and intuition. You can use this to benefit others, and in fact have often done so. You're known for your good advice. Have some restraint today. People are listening closely to what you say. If you advise someone to do something crazy, they might do it!



SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21
You're on top of the world today, Scorpio. Enjoy the view! You're unstoppable. Friends and family alike revel in your good mood. You're materially and spiritually generous, and by day's end people could be lined up to partake of the bounty. Try to curb your enthusiasm and use some discretion. It would be better to give more to a worthy few than give less to many.



PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20
This is bound to turn into a silly day if you let it, Pisces. Your best bet is to give in to the strange patterns at work. Communication seems blocked at every turn. You can expect technical difficulties like phone malfunctions or computer crashes. You and your mate will speak in two different languages. No one seems able to get a point across. Don't fight it. Just laugh. All will be normal again tomorrow.

KIDS COLOURING



BOGGLER

I	S	S	A
A	L	S	O
U	R	S	I
E	B	L	T

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.

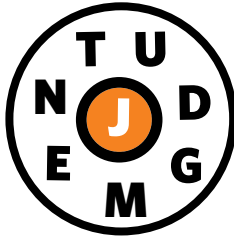
SOLUTION
20-25 words: Excellent,
15-20 words: Very good,
10-15 words: Good,
5-10 words: Average

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

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

WORD BUILDER



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

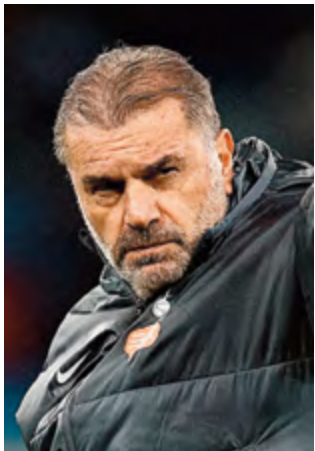
Rules: Words should be at least four letters long, proper nouns and duplicates don't count

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER

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



Arne Slot (L) and Ange Postecoglou



Liverpool’s Slot heaps praise on Postecoglou and Tottenham ahead of crucial match

Liverpool, England - While Liverpool lead the Premier League table, boss Arne Slot says it is still too early in the season to evaluate their title chances.

The Reds have a two-point lead over second-placed Chelsea after 15 games and are six points ahead of Arsenal, with a game in hand over both after their match at Everton was postponed due adverse weather conditions caused by Storm Darragh.

“Judge the table after 19 games (the halfway point) because then everyone has played the same opponents,” Slot told reporters on Friday. “Probably we had a bit of luck, for example Arsenal had a lot of red cards in the beginning of the season that’s why they dropped points.

“We have now received a red card and we dropped points. We now have Tottenham away which Arsenal had at the begin-

ning of the season, Chelsea already played there. “Don’t look at it where you were in the season, it is about where you are at the end of the season.”

Liverpool travel to Tottenham on Sunday.

The Dutchman is a fan of Postecoglou and his team, he said, adding he would love to see Spurs win the Europa League.

“I hope, hope, hope he wins a trophy. Not the League Cup but I am completely a fan of his team for the Europa League. People talk about trophies, trophies, trophies and that is so important.

“For me his brand of football is more important and if he can combine it with winning something that would be so good for football in general because then people can stop talking about ‘is it too attacking?’ How on earth can you play too much attacking football?”

VILLA COMPOUND MAN CITY’S MISERY

Duran, Rogers on target to inflict another loss on City

Birmingham, England - Aston Villa inflicted more misery on shell-shocked Manchester City on Saturday, defeating them 2-1 in the Premier League with goals from Colombian forward Jhon Duran and former City forward Morgan Rogers.

Villa rose above City into fifth place in the Premier League table, and the title holders dropped provisionally to sixth with their ninth loss in 12 games across all competitions.

Pep Guardiola’s team could fall to as low as ninth by the end of the weekend and have just one victory to show from that 12-game stretch.

In a rip-roaring start, Villa almost scored inside 20 seconds when Duran pounced on a poor ball by Josko Gvardiol but his shot was pushed away by a diving Stefan Ortega. Ortega made another fine save from the corner that followed, batting Pau Torres’ shot away off the crossbar.

The narrow miss was a portent of things to come. Duran, 21, got the home side on the score sheet in the 16th minute when Youri Tielemans sent a sumptuous through ball to Rogers,



Aston Villa’s Jhon Duran (R) celebrates with Morgan Rogers after scoring against Manchester City on Saturday

whose unselfish pass found Duran free to fire home.

It was another statement for a permanent spot in the starting 11 by former Villa super-sub Duran, who started for the third successive league game, and has scored in all three. He also had a goal chalked off for offside on Saturday.

City have conceded the opening goal in nine leagues games this season. Only lowly Wolves,

Southampton and Leicester have done so more times (12).

Villa Park erupted again in the 65th minute when Rogers latched on to a pass from captain John McGinn and finished with a low hard shot, leaving Guardiola to shake his head in frustration.

“It’s like a beast, really,” Rogers told TNT Sports of City. “Because obviously they haven’t had the results and we knew they would come out firing and they would

They haven't had the results and we knew they would come out firing and they would want to win. We knew if we stuck to the game plan, and we showed our quality we would cause problems

MORGAN ROGERS

want to win the game. We knew if we stuck to the game plan, and we showed our quality we would cause problems, and to a man, I thought we were outstanding.”

Phil Foden pulled one back for City in stoppage time with his first league goal of the season after a mistake by Villa’s Lucas Digne, but it was too little too late

for the visitors.

Foden had City’s best chances, including one in the first half that tested Villa’s World Cup winning goalkeeper Emi Martinez after a one-two with Rico Lewis.

“We are disappointed, it’s not good enough,” City striker Erling Haaland told TNT. “It’s not good enough from me.”

Chelsea’s James back in training but Maresca ‘won’t rush’ his return

London, England - Chelsea defender Reece James is back in training after recovering from a hamstring injury, though manager Enzo Maresca said they would not rush his return.

The 25-year-old, who underwent surgery on the same injury 12 months ago, has made just four appearances this season. The Chelsea captain has been out since suffering the injury in training last month.

After five consecutive wins in the Premier League, second-placed Chelsea, trailing leaders Liverpool by two points, visit Everton on Sunday following the Merseyside club’s takeover by the Friedkin Group.

“He will be back but that doesn’t mean that he’s going to be with us on Sunday or next Sunday,” Maresca told reporters on Friday.

“The plan is part of the session to be with him and from there to try to build the right condition for him and finally he can be back with us.”



Reece James is back in training after recovering from a hamstring injury

Maresca confirmed that injured midfielder Romeo Lavia will “struggle to play on Sunday” and defenders Wesley Fofana and Benoit Badiashile remain side-

lined with long-term injuries.

Maresca added that Ben Chilwell and Carney Chukwuemeka could request moves in the January transfer window due to

a lack of playing time.

Former captain Chilwell was frozen out by Maresca when he took charge this season. The 27-year-old has made just one appearance in the League Cup this term, while Chukwuemeka has featured four times in the Conference League and once in the League Cup.

“Each player is a bit different situation, so we’re going to see if some of them are coming and knocking on the door to say I want to leave or something like that. We will try to find a solution,” the Italian coach said.

Chelsea were defeated 2-0 on their visit to Goodison Park last season and a win there on Sunday would put the London club top of the table for a few hours at least, before Liverpool take on Tottenham Hotspur later in the day.

“I don’t think (my players) can have some pressure about the consequences of the win (on the standings). Because first of all, you have to win,” Maresca said.



Ivan Juric

Southampton set to sign Juric as new manager

Southampton, England - Premier League bottom side Southampton have agreed a deal with Ivan Juric to take over as their new manager, British media reported on Friday.

Southampton had sacked their previous manager Russell Martin on Sunday, following a 5-0 loss to Tottenham Hotspur that at the time extended their winless run to six matches.

Juric, who previously managed AS Roma, was dismissed in November after only 12 matches in charge, following poor results.

Southampton, who have only five points after 16 league games, visit eighth-placed Fulham on Sunday.



Mason Mount was injured in the Manchester derby

Man Utd’s Mount is going to be out for ‘several weeks’, says Amorim

Manchester, England - Manchester United’s Mason Mount will miss “several weeks” of action after he hobbled off early in the Manchester derby, manager Ruben Amorim has said.

Mount, who has missed several games since his move to United last year, lasted only 14 minutes in the derby where United stunned City 2-1.

The 25-year-old, signed from Chelsea for an initial fee of 55 million pounds (\$69.03 million), has made only four Premier League starts this season.

“Several weeks, I don’t know the exact date, but it’s going to be for a long (time). It’s part of football and you have to continue,” Amorim told reporters, adding that alleviating his injury issues was not under his control.

“What I can do is to help Mason to teach him how to play our game when he’s recovering. Try to use that time for him to think about different things.

“The worst part is that we

don’t have time to train like we should do when you are recovering from a lot of injuries.

“We are always travelling, have games, we don’t have all the team together so this makes it really hard to recreate the games before they come to the (actual) game.”

Victor Lindelof was also injured in Thursday’s 4-3 League Cup quarter-final loss at Tottenham Hotspur, with the defender substituted at halftime.

“He was recovering, he was training really well, we push him, making all the sprints he should do before coming to a game but a game is a completely different world,” Amorim said.

“It’s really hard for a player to be out for so long and he’s trying really hard. The same as Antony. If they try really hard we will help them until the end.”

Amorim confirmed Marcus Rashford would be available for Sunday’s home game against Bournemouth.

Everton manager Dyche says he has new owners’ backing

Liverpool, England - Everton manager Sean Dyche said he has the support of the club’s new owners but that he needs to deliver on the field to prove himself.

Friedkin Group completed the takeover of the Premier League club on Thursday, in the middle of a season where the team has struggled on the pitch, sitting 16th in the table with only three wins in 15 matches.

“You’ve got to win games, that doesn’t change and I’m well aware of that,” Dyche told reporters on Friday.

“They mentioned that during this period of buying the club they’ve done a lot of homework

and they understand the challenges that I’ve been through and we have collectively been through.”

Dyche said Everton’s new executive chairman, Marc Watts, had expressed his support for the manager, who led the club through a tumultuous 2023-24 campaign where they fought to avoid relegation after being docked eight points for breaching the league’s financial rules.

“He said, ‘We’ve got no reason to question you. Every reason to support what you’ve been doing and hopefully support it further going forwards,’” Dyche



Sean Dyche

said.

“The obvious caveat is what I’m saying, not what they’re saying. I know you’ve still got to win games. While you’re winning games, hopefully, you continue to build a relationship. And that’s when they go, ‘Right, you’re our guy or you’re not our guy.’”

Watts said the new administration understood that the club had faced significant challenges on and off the field for several years.

“Our immediate priority is stabilising the club and improving results on the pitch,” he wrote in an open letter published on the club’s website.



AC Milan's Tijjani Reijnders celebrates his goal against Verona

Reijnders goal hands Milan victory against Verona

Verona, Italy - AC Milan won 1-0 at Hellas Verona on Friday as Tijjani Reijnders' second-half strike proved decisive in a keenly-contested Serie A clash.

The visitors scored in the 56th minute as Reijnders made a well-timed run to evade the defence before expertly guiding a first-time shot into the top corner.

Milan are seventh with 26 points, 11 behind leaders Atalanta. Verona are 17th with 15 points.

Reijnders said the victory was crucial following Milan's goalless draw at Genoa.

"Very important, the last game we didn't win, so we had to answer in this one and it

was difficult, but now we have the three points and can celebrate Christmas," he told DAZN.

Verona went closest to scoring in the first half and Milan manager Paulo Fonseca suffered another injury blow when forward Rafael Leao was forced off due to what looked like a thigh problem, adding another name to a lengthy list of absentees.

After Reijnders scored, Milan, with just one win in their last five league matches, resorted to time-wasting tactics.

Tempers flared and a member of the Verona coaching staff was sent off for dissent during stoppage time.

CHRISTMAS COMES EARLY FOR BAYERN

Bavarians return to winning ways in Bundesliga with 5-1 thrashing of Leipzig

Munich, Germany - Bayern Munich stamped their authority over the Bundesliga in commanding style by hammering fourth-placed RB Leipzig 5-1 on Friday in a game that featured two goals in the opening two minutes for the first time in the league's history.

Having lost their first league match of the season to Mainz last week, Bayern delivered a commanding performance against a Leipzig side who struggled to build any attacking momentum.

Bayern top the standings on 36 points, seven clear of Bayer Leverkusen, who play Freiburg on Saturday. Eintracht Frankfurt are third on 27, ahead of Leipzig on goal difference.

It is the 26th time Bayern have topped the table at Christmas, having won the title in 23 of the 25 previous occasions they did so.

The game had a remarkable start when Harry Kane's neat backheel sent Michael Olise clear and he crossed for red-hot Jamal Musiala to tuck in after 28 seconds.

Leipzig hit back almost immediately as Lois Openda escaped



Bayern Munich's Konrad Laimer celebrates after scoring against RB Leipzig on Friday

We had a great start and despite the quick equaliser, everyone saw that we were determined to win today. The players felt that the Mainz game was our worst performance.

JOSHUA KIMMICH

down the right and his cross was swept home by Benjamin Sescó - the first time in Bundesliga history that two goals have been

scored in the first two minutes.

Bayern dominated the rest of the game and got their second in the 25th minute as former Leipzig

man Konrad Laimer scored his first Bayern goal, side-footing in a volley from a clever Olise cross.

Joshua Kimmich smashed home a trademark long-range shot after 36 minutes to give the hosts a deserved 3-1 halftime lead, as Leipzig failed to muster another effort on goal.

"We played a very good game," said Kimmich, whose goal was a superb 25-yard shot.

"We had a great start and de-

spite the quick equaliser, everyone saw that we were determined to win today. The players felt that the Mainz game (Bayern's first defeat of the season last week) was our worst performance. Things were completely different today."

The visitors showed a bit more attacking intent in the second half without looking dangerous as Bayern continued to create chances.



Paulo Fonseca

Fonseca pleased with Milan's character

Verona, Italy - AC Milan manager Paulo Fonseca acknowledged the challenges posed by missing players and recent form but expressed satisfaction with his team's hard-earned Serie A win at Hellas Verona on Friday.

"The first half was somewhat inevitable with so many players missing and not winning the most recent match, so we were sluggish," Fonseca told DAZN.

"Without so many players at the moment and our current form, I am satisfied with the victory, which was the most important thing. It was a much-deserved win."

Girona cruise past Real Valladolid

Girona, Spain - Goals from David Lopez, Abel Ruiz and Arnaut Danjuma secured Girona a 3-0 LaLiga home win over relegation-threatened Real Valladolid on Friday, snapping their six-game winless run across all competitions.

Girona moved up to eighth place with 25 points. Valladolid remained second-bottom on 12 points, four adrift of the safety zone.

The hosts dominated proceedings and took the lead just past the half-hour mark when Miguel Gutierrez's free kick deflected off Lopez and into the top corner of the net.

"It's not the best goal of my career but at the end of the season it counts," said centre back Lopez.

"We have played good games at home. Today we dominated the entire match.

"We have to take it one game at a time. This gives us more peace of mind and we're satisfied."

Ruiz doubled the advantage with a close-range header from a



Girona's Arnaut Danjuma celebrates his goal against Real Valladolid

It's not the best goal of my career but at the end of the season it counts. We have played good games at home. Today we dominated the entire match.

DAVID LOPEZ

Gutierrez cross in the 39th minute before substitute Danjuma netted a first-time effort nine minutes from time, the Dutch winger's first goal for Girona.

The visitors failed to pose any threat, managing just one shot in the match, as they suffered their 12th defeat in 18 league games and their first under new coach Diego Cocca.

"We will believe until the end. Next year we have to be all together and have a lot of self-criticism," Valladolid right back Lucas Rosa said.



Gianni Infantino

Infantino 'very pleased' with women-only crowd at Iran's top-flight clash

FIFA President Gianni Infantino has offered "heartfelt gratitude" to Iranian authorities for allowing tens of thousands of female fans to attend a top-flight soccer match between Sepahan against Persepolis this week.

Monday's Pro League clash at Isfahan's Naqsh-e Jahan Stadium, which home team Sepahan won 2-1, was played in front of a crowd made up exclusively of women and girls.

That decision came after a Sepahan cheerleader led insulting chants about female Perse-

polis fans at a previous clash between the clubs at Tehran's Azadi Stadium in May.

The Iranian Football Federation fined both clubs and ordered that their next two meetings be played in front of only female fans.

In comments posted by FIFA on social media on Thursday, Infantino said he was "very pleased" that some 45,000 women and girls had been allowed to attend the latest edition of one of Iran's fiercest club rivalries.

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Mechanical Engineer with 3 years experience in Automotive and Manufacturing industry with good knowledge of AutoCAD and CATIA. Available now. Contact : +968 99467878, Email : jamesmathew240@gmail.com

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

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BIRTHDAY WISHES



KOUSHIK DUTTA

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Vinayak Shukla scored an unbeaten 52 off 29 balls for Oman but it proved in vain as Kuwait won by three wickets

Oman’s title defence ends as Kuwait set up Gulf Cup final with UAE

Muscat - Defending champions Oman exited the T20 Gulf Cup Cricket Championship after a three-wicket loss to Kuwait in the final league match at the ICC Academy in Dubai, UAE, on Friday.

The victory propelled Kuwait into Saturday’s final against hosts UAE, who topped the league standings with four wins and eight points. Kuwait’s progression to the final was sealed by a superior Net Run Rate (NRR) over Saudi Arabia after both teams finished the league stage with six points from three wins. Kuwait’s NRR of +0.525 was significantly better than Saudi Arabia’s -0.166, confirming their spot in the title decider.

Oman coached by Duleep Mendis, entered the tournament with a revamped squad. Despite flashes of brilliance, they struggled to find consistency, suffering close defeats to Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Kuwait, which ended their title defence.

In their final game on Friday, Oman battled first and posted a competitive total of 143/8 in 20 overs. Wicketkeeper-batter Vinayak Shukla stood out with a commanding unbeaten 52 off 29 balls, hitting three boundaries and as many sixes to provide a late surge. Skipper Jatinder Singh contributed a steady 27 off 25 balls, while opener Karan Sonavale added 20 off 26 deliveries.

However, a mid-innings collapse, triggered by disciplined bowling, restricted Oman from reaching a more imposing total. From 50/1 in ninth over, Oman slipped to 88/6 in 15 overs. But Shukla stayed unbeaten to help Oman reach a challenging total.

Kuwait’s bowlers delivered a well-rounded performance, as Meet Bhavsar picked 2 wickets for 22 runs and Adnan Idrees claimed 2 for 13 in his two overs. Mohammed Aslam and Yasin Patel kept things tight, ensuring Oman’s batters struggled to find rhythm.

GHAZANFAR STARS IN AFGHANISTAN’S WIN

Teenage spinner takes 5-33 in series victory against Zimbabwe

Harare, Zimbabwe - Teenage spinner AM Ghazanfar took 5-33 as Afghanistan defeated hosts Zimbabwe by eight wickets in the third and final one-day international on Saturday to claim the series 2-0 after the opening game was washed out by rain.

After electing to field first, Afghanistan took advantage of Zimbabwe’s brittle batting line-up to bowl the home side out for 127 in 30.1 overs, with Ghazanfar, 18, and Rashid Khan (3-38) leading the way. Sean Williams top scored with 60.

Zimbabwe were dismissed for 54 in the second ODI, so it was an improvement, but never a total to trouble the tourists, who cruised to their victory target for the loss of two wickets in 26.5 overs at the Harare Sports Club.

Opener Sediqullah Atal scored 52 from 50 balls after making 104 in the second fixture.

The teams will now play a two-match test series starting on Thursday, which includes Zimbabwe’s first home Boxing Day test since a draw with England in 1996, and just their fourth ever.

Afghanistan’s win was set up by 18-year-old offspinner Ghazanfar. He bowled his quota of ten overs unchanged starting from the seventh, and finished with his second ODI five-for in just 11



Afghanistan’s AM Ghazanfar proved too hot to handle for Zimbabwe batsman

After electing to field first, Afghanistan took advantage of Zimbabwe’s brittle batting line-up to bowl the home side out for 127 in 30.1 overs, with Ghazanfar and Rashid Khan (3-38) leading the way

games. Shahidi chose to bowl first after winning the toss, and his bowlers proved the decision right. Afghanistan’s seamers were getting appreciable swing even after the powerplay, while their spinners almost magically turned the ball both ways.

Eight of the ten wickets went to Ghazanfar and Rashid, who got 3 for 38. That, though, was a result of both batters not reading them well, and the on-field umpires making debatable calls - perhaps not reading the bowlers

well either. In a series where the teams don’t have DRS to turn to, Craig Ervine and Ben Curran walked back unhappy. Even Sikandar Raza shook his head on being given out lbw off Rashid, but whether he did that because he was disappointed with the umpire or with himself... who can tell.

Zimbabwe’s innings featured a mini-collapse as well as a big crumble. But before either of those, Afghanistan’s new-ball bowlers Fareed Ahmed and Az-

matullah Omarzai kept a tight leash on opening batters Curran and Joylord Gumbie. Twenty-two of the first 28 balls were dots; there were four more to start the seventh over, after which Zimbabwe lost three wickets for five runs in next to no time.

It started with Gumbie top-edging an attempted sweep off Ghazanfar to short fine-leg. Next over, Omarzai got one to seam away from Ervine, who was squared up as the ball went past. Ervine was given out caught behind, but there was no visible nick. Ghazanfar then got his second when he trapped Curran in front for 12 in the ninth over, although the first impression was that the ball was heading down the leg side.

Senior hands Raza and Williams briefly rebuilt thereafter.



Sam Konstas

Australia replace Sweeney with Konstas for Boxing Day Test

Sydney, Australia - Australia have dumped Nathan McSweeney after three tests and rushed uncapped teenager Sam Konstas into the squad for the Boxing Day test against India in the search for more runs from the top order.

Makeshift opener McSweeney scored 72 runs from 212 deliveries at an average of 14.4 over six innings as Australia were thrashed in the series opener, won handsomely in the second test and drew the third in Brisbane this week.

Konstas has been scoring runs for fun in first class cricket this season, including a century against an Indian selection in the tour match in Canberra.

The 19-year-old also became the youngest player to score a half-century in the Big Bash League on his debut, making 56 from 27 balls for Sydney Thunder.

"Sam gets a call up to the Test squad for the first time. His style of batting offers a point of difference and we look forward to watching his game develop further," said head selector George Bailey. "We remain confident Nathan has the ability and temperament to succeed at Test level in the future."



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2024

CXO AWARDS 2024

CORPORATE LEADERS HONoured

A GLITTERING celebration of corporate leadership took place on Wednesday at Sheraton Oman Hotel in Muscat, where the inaugural Business Today CXO Awards 2024 honoured 31 of Oman's top-performing C-level executives. The prestigious gala ceremony, attended by over 200 corporate leaders from Oman's key sectors, was an evening of celebration, inspiration, and recognition of exceptional leadership.

The ceremony was graced by H E Sayyid Dr Munther al Busaidi, Vice-Chairman of the Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-Up Unit, as the Chief Guest. H E Sayyid Dr Busaidi and Saleh Zakwani, Executive Chairman of Apex Media, presented the awards to the deserving winners.

In his welcome speech, Zakwani said, "Apex Media has always been at the forefront of recognising and celebrating the corporate leaders who have been driving business success and contributing to the broader economic development of our country. The CXO Awards aim not only to recognise individual excellence but also to underscore Oman's broader commitment to fostering a culture of innovation, leadership and sustainable growth in alignment with Vision 2040."

Organised by Interactive Apex and Muscat Daily, the Business Today CXO Awards is a premier corporate recognition event honouring top-performing executives across industries.

The awards celebrate not only individual excellence but also the transformative impact of visionary leaders who drive progress within their organisations and industries. The awards serve as a

tribute to those who have demonstrated exemplary leadership, innovation, and commitment to shaping the future of business.

The winners were selected from C-level executives responsible for overseeing key functions within their organisations across various sectors. Recipients were evaluated on both qualitative and quantitative factors, including leadership excellence, demonstrated by their ability to lead teams and drive organisational success. They were also judged on their contributions to setting and achieving strategic objectives, initiating

and the right systems, but we need that one person who makes it all work and connects the dots."

Speaking about the essence of leadership, H E Sayyid Dr Busaidi provided a perspective on what it takes to be a true leader. "There are three main pillars," he explained. "First, a leader must set the direction and tell us where to go. Second, they must guide us on how to get there, focusing on the best paths to success. And third, they must bring out the best in us - fostering talent and making people the best versions of themselves."

As part of his speech, H E Sayyid Dr Busaidi spoke directly to the business leaders in attendance, commending them for their achievements. "The leaders who have been awarded today, I am confident, have earned and deserved this recognition," he said. "I hope you continue this journey because leadership is not a destination; it's a continuous journey."

He also emphasised the importance of alignment with Vision 2040 as a key to future success. "For Vision 2040 to succeed, both the government and private sectors must align with its objectives," he explained. "And there must be a common platform where knowledge and experiences are shared, so we can learn from one another."

Another highlight of the evening was the keynote speech by Khalid Ansari, Founder and CEO of KMA & Partners, renowned for his innovative insights and thought leadership in the industry. Ansari emphasised the critical role of innovation and ethics in ensuring business sustainability and success. He delivered a powerful message about the fundamental importance of a company's value system, particularly in terms of integrity.

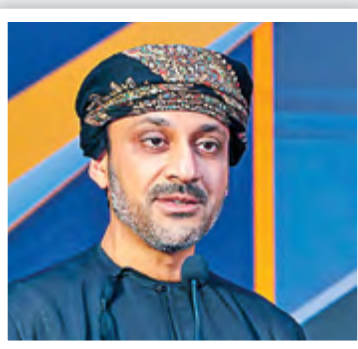
"Innovation remains the crucial driver of success in the business landscape," Ansari said, adding that "innovation comes with responsibility—and that responsibility is ethics." He argued that while cutting-edge technology and efficient processes are important, without a strong ethical foundation, businesses cannot achieve lasting success.

He stressed that integrity is the cornerstone of any thriving business. "You may have the best systems and processes, but without integrity, a company cannot be sustainable. For executives at the C-level, integrity is non-negotiable. It is something you cannot learn anywhere else or buy from outside - it must come from within and from the core values of the organisation."

Infiniti, represented in Oman by Al Hashar Automotive, was the event's official Luxury Auto Partner. The event also included an electrifying performance by the sensational music band 'Los Amigos'.



Saleh Zakwani
Executive Chairman
of Apex Media



Business leaders who have been awarded today, I am confident, have earned and deserved this recognition. I hope you continue this journey because leadership is not a destination; it is a continuous journey

H E SAYYID DR MUNThER AL BUSAIDI



tives that have significantly impacted their businesses or industries, exceptional financial performance, and significant achievements in industry growth, thought leadership and community development.

Delivering the opening address at the event, H E Sayyid Dr Busaidi emphasised the critical importance of leadership at every level of society, from families and sports teams to businesses and national governance.

"Leadership is what glues everything together," he said.

"We might have the right people





And the winners are...



CEO of the Year - Banking
Ahmed Al Musalmi
CEO of Sohar International

Ahmed Al Musalmi has been the driving force behind Sohar International Bank's remarkable success and achievements. His journey embodies the belief that nothing is impossible when you are unstoppable. These words resonate deeply with the remarkable journey of Sohar International. It is a journey fueled by an unstoppable determination to become the best bank in Oman, an unstoppable commitment to achieving extraordinary growth and market leadership, and an unstoppable vision to transform into a world-leading Omani service company.

At the heart of this success is Musalmi, a leader whose unwavering resolve has propelled the bank to new heights, whose relentless pursuit of excellence is reshaping the banking landscape.



CEO of the Year - Telecom
Talal Al Mamari
CEO of Omantel

Talal Al Mamari has been the Chief Executive Officer of Omantel since June 2014, bringing over 20 years of experience in the telecommunications and ICT industries. He has played a pivotal role in several key initiatives, including the privatisation of Omantel, the restructuring project that unified mobile and fixed operations, and the legal merger with Oman Mobile.

Under his leadership, Omantel implemented a transformational strategy focused on capacity building, fostering a dynamic work culture, revenue diversification, and the transition from traditional telecommunications to comprehensive ICT solutions. Additionally, Mamari led the acquisition of a controlling stake in Kuwait's Zain Group, positioning Omantel as part of the region's third-largest telecom group.



CEO of the Year - Oil & Gas
Mansoor Al Abdali
CEO of OQ Gas Networks

Mansoor Al Abdali has nearly 30 years of experience in the operations, maintenance, and engineering of oil and gas facilities, with particular expertise in pipeline management. Prior to joining OQ Gas Networks (OQGN) in 2009, he spent 15 years at PDO, where he was responsible for the inspection and maintenance of all PDO assets and operational sites, including oil and gas pipelines and terminal facilities.

As CEO of OQGN, Abdali has led the company's successful asset acquisitions from PDO and Madayn. He holds a bachelor's degree in mechanical engineering from the University of Manchester Institute of Science and Technology (UMIST), UK.



CEO of the Year - Islamic Banking
Ali Al Mani
CEO of Alizz Islamic Bank

Ali Al Mani is the CEO of Alizz Islamic Bank and a seasoned banker with over two decades of experience in the banking and financial sectors across Oman. An award-winning professional, Mani is renowned for his in-depth expertise in both conventional and Islamic banking. His experience and expertise spans a wide range of areas, including corporate and retail banking, operations, finance, project management, and banking technology.

With a proven track record of driving turnaround performances in highly competitive and challenging environments, Mani is known for his strong leadership skills and comprehensive understanding of both retail and Islamic banking.



CEO of the Year - Foreign Bank
Hussain Al Yafai
CEO, MD and Head of Coverage, Standard Chartered Oman

Hussain Al Yafai has led a major restructuring of Standard Chartered Bank Oman, enabling the bank to become the nation's leading provider of Corporate and Investment Banking services. In collaboration with teams across Standard Chartered's global network and the Omani government, he helped establish Oman's ESG framework, positioning the bank as a market leader in ESG advisory and finance.

Under his leadership, Standard Chartered has arranged over \$80bn in financing for Oman, supporting the national economy through debt capital markets, syndicated loans, ECA, and structured financing solutions.



CEO of the Year - Investments
Mohammad Al Farei
CEO of Zubair Investment

With over 20 years of experience in senior leadership roles, Mohammad Al Farei is the Chief Executive Officer of Zubair Investment, one of Oman's largest and most diverse business conglomerates.

Throughout his career, Farei has successfully managed a diverse portfolio of companies spanning multiple sectors, including automotive, investment, marketing, publishing, imaging, art, culture, and luxury goods. His passion and expertise are centred on driving growth and fostering innovation through strategic planning, financial management, operational excellence, and effective stakeholder engagement.



CEO of the Year - Investment Management
Mustafa Ahmed Salman
CEO of United Securities

Mustafa Ahmed Salman brings over 40 years of distinguished experience in the financial sector. His career spans 10 years in financial-related government roles and more than 30 years in the Omani, GCC, and international capital markets. He has been an active participant in the growth of the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) since its inception, playing a significant role in the development of Oman's capital market sector.

Salman's extensive expertise and leadership have had a profound impact on the financial industry in Oman and beyond. In addition to his role as CEO of United Securities, he currently serves as the Honorary Consul of the Australian Government to Oman and Chairman of Oman REIT Fund.



CEO of the Year - Petroleum Products Marketing
Hamed bin Salim al Maghdri
CEO of Al Maha Petroleum Products Marketing Company

Hamed bin Salim al Maghdri has been a transformative leader at Al Maha Petroleum Products Marketing Company since becoming CEO in 2019. Under his stewardship, the company is now the number one in Oman's fuels marketing sector, leading in net profits, share price, and retail station network.

In addition to his role at Al Maha Petroleum, Maghdri holds or has held several prominent positions on the boards of various energy companies, including Chairman of Al Rusail Power Company, Vice Chairman of SMN Holding Company, and Barka Power Company. He is also a director of JOMEL and Dhuruma Corporation in Saudi Arabia, and a member of various other boards.



CEO of the Year - Real Estate
Nasser Al Sheibani
CEO of Al Mouj Muscat

Nasser Al Sheibani joined Al Mouj Muscat in 2007 and served as Chief Financial Officer before being appointed CEO in 2015. Under his strategic leadership, first as CFO and then as CEO, Al Mouj Muscat has flourished, redefining urban living in Oman with an impressive portfolio of oceanfront residential properties, urban retail, a golf course and marina, luxury hotels, elegant business parks, award-winning architecture, and meticulously designed landscapes.

His leadership and commitment to Al Mouj Muscat have been instrumental in ensuring that it is now recognised as the country's premier oceanfront development, with the destination having won more than 20 international awards.



CEO of the Year - Data Center & Cloud Services
AbdulMonem Al Futaisi
CEO of Datamount

With over 18 years of experience in telecommunications, IT, and business management, AbdulMonem Al Futaisi, CEO of Datamount, has established himself as a prominent leader in the industry. He is renowned for his expertise in strategic planning, ICT operations, financial management, and international business development.

Futaisi has successfully led initiatives that drive revenue growth, operational efficiency, and customer satisfaction, earning a reputation as a forward-thinking leader in network infrastructure and security standards. Under his leadership, Datamount built Oman's largest 700-rack data centre, a significant milestone in the nation's digital transformation in line with Oman Vision 2040.



CEO of the Year - BPO (Business Process Outsourcing)
Mohammed Hamed Al Maskari
CEO of Infoline

Mohammed Hamed Al Maskari, CEO of Infoline, brings over 25 years of senior management experience to his role. Prior to joining Infoline, he served as the Director General of Knowledge Oasis Muscat and led the Information Centre at the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn).

Maskari has held several executive positions, including at Oman Information Technology Company, and has contributed to the boards of Omantel and The Research Council. He also served as the Regional President of WANA at the International Association of Science Parks and Areas of Innovation (IASP).



CEO of the Year - Cybersecurity

Maitham Al Lawati
CEO of PowerDMARC

Maitham Al Lawati is an Omani tech entrepreneur with a strong background in cybersecurity, having previously served as a CISO and EY advisor. Recognising gaps in email and domain name security, as well as the growing threat of brand impersonation in a post-COVID world, he founded PowerDMARC in 2020 to simplify protection for businesses globally.

Today, PowerDMARC secures over 100,000 domains across more than 90 countries, with the support of over 1,000 channel partners and five global office locations. The platform supports 11 languages and is fully bootstrapped, achieving 100x annual growth. PowerDMARC is now recognised as a top-rated DMARC platform globally and the leading DMARC provider in Japan.



CEO of the Year - Consumer Business

Sanjeev Awasthi
CEO of SARCO

Sanjeev Awasthi, a visionary and dynamic senior commercial executive, is the Chief Executive Officer of Al Seeb Technical Establishment (SARCO). With nearly three decades of experience, Awasthi has a proven track record of delivering exceptional results.

He has held high-profile leadership positions with prominent regional players across sectors such as air-conditioning, retail, consumer electronics and durables, as well as contracting and trading, throughout the Middle East markets. Prior to joining SARCO in April 2022, Awasthi served as CEO of AJM Kooheji Group in Bahrain.



CEO of the Year - Healthcare

Sameer Al Awam
CEO of Muscat Eye Laser Center

Sameer Al Awam, a visionary Qatari entrepreneur, is the driving force behind the success of Muscat Eye Laser Center. With a strong focus on innovation and a passion for excellence, he co-founded the clinic with world-renowned Dr Maria Clara Arbelaez, with the aim of transforming eye care in the region.

Under his leadership, the centre has become a global leader in advanced ophthalmology, renowned for its cutting-edge technology, exceptional medical expertise, and outstanding patient care. Awam's unwavering commitment to quality and innovation has earned Muscat Eye Laser Center numerous accolades, including being named Oman's Most Trusted Brand for over three years and recognised as the Best Specialist Centre in Oman.



CEO of the Year - Auto

S. Kasthurirangan
CEO of Towell Auto Group

S. Kasthurirangan has made significant contributions to Oman's dynamic and ever-evolving automotive market. For over two decades, he has successfully led the automotive division of WJ Towell Group, forging partnerships with global automobile brands such as Mazda, Geely, Lynk & Co, King Long, Bridgestone, TotalEnergies, Petronas, and GITI, to name a few.

Today, Towell Auto Group is renowned for offering high-quality products, backed by exceptional aftersales services. Under Kasthurirangan's leadership, the group's car rental and leasing business, known for its professionalism and ability to meet the diverse needs of its customers, has grown multifold, becoming one of the company's most profitable ventures.



CEO of the Year - FMCG

Murali Sundar
CEO of National Detergent Company

Murali Sundar has demonstrated exceptional leadership and strategic vision, transforming National Detergent Company (NDC) into one of the top 10 performing companies in Oman. Under his guidance, he has set the standard for excellence in the business world.

Over the past two years, Sundar's leadership has been characterised by unmatched strategic acumen and a relentless drive for success. His commitment to organic growth, operational excellence, and investments in innovative solutions has driven substantial revenue and profitability growth. Sundar's efforts have firmly positioned NDC as a leader in the cleaning solutions manufacturing and marketing industry.



CEO of the Year - Snacks Food Manufacturing

Rahul Shinde
CEO of National Biscuits Industries Company

Rahul Shinde is the CEO of National Biscuits Industries Company, a position he has held for over 14 years. Under his leadership, the company has achieved significant growth, expanding its market share and brand presence both locally and internationally. Shinde has driven strategic initiatives in innovation, product development, and customer engagement, solidifying National Biscuits' position as a leader in the food industry.

He modernised manufacturing processes, enhancing operational efficiency and reducing costs. Through his visionary leadership, National Biscuits has become a trusted name in the snack food sector, continuing to grow while maintaining its industry leadership.



CEO of the Year - Food Production

MOHAMMED AL HARTHY
CEO, Nitaj

Mohammed Al Harthy is a distinguished leader in multiple institutions across Oman, with over 25 years of cumulative experience in leadership, management, marketing, and entrepreneurship. Prior to joining Nitaj, he held senior roles in several prominent organisations, including Be'ah and Oman Shell, specialising in marketing and e-commerce.

Throughout his career, Harthy has made significant contributions across a wide range of key areas, including institutional restructuring, strategic planning, enterprise management, business development, policy and strategy formulation, institutional development, food security, laboratory management, and the creation of well-defined development programmes for the economic and financial sectors.



CEO of the Year - Logistics

ROY SCARIA
Country Manager, DHL Oman

Roy Scaria is the Country Manager for DHL in Oman, where he has devoted 26 years of his career to the organisation, including the past 12 enriching years in Oman. It is a great honour to receive this prestigious award and I would like to extend my heartfelt congratulations to Apex Media for organising such a remarkable event. This recognition serves as a powerful source of inspiration for business professionals like myself, emphasising our shared responsibility to continually strive for excellence. Moreover, it acts as a motivational beacon for aspiring young business leaders, encouraging them to pursue their ambitions with determination and resilience.



CEO of the Year - Non Banking Finance

Aftab Patel
CEO of Al Omaniya Financial Services Company

Aftab Patel is the founding CEO of Al Omaniya Financial Services, which has celebrated 26 years of successful operations. As a pioneer leader in the financial services industry, Patel has played a key role in the company's growth and success.

In 2016, Patel was named one of the 50 Best CEOs in the GCC in a ranking by INSEAD Business School and Deloitte, and was honoured with the Lifetime Achievement Award at the GCC Banking Summit. Over the past two decades, he has received numerous national and international accolades. Al Omaniya has also been recognised as the most trusted non-banking financial institution for two consecutive years, following an independent survey by Apex Media.



Chief Operating Officer of the Year - Manufacturing

Muhannad Al Lawati
Chief Operating Officer of Oman Cables

As Chief Operating Officer of Oman Cables, Muhannad Abdul Amir Al Lawati has made outstanding contributions through his exemplary leadership. He is a strong advocate for operational excellence, innovation, and sustainability. Under his leadership, the Oman Cables team has significantly enhanced safety and quality performance, improved operational efficiency, and bolstered the company's success and competitiveness in both local and export markets.

Lawati further honed his leadership skills by completing the National CEO Program in association with the International Institute for Management Development (IMD) and the Advanced Leadership Program in collaboration with Bocconi University.



Chief Human Resources Officer (CHRO) of the Year

Said Al Hashmi
Chief Executive People, Technology and Culture, OQEP

Said Al Hashmi serves as Chief Executive People, Technology & Culture at OQ Exploration and Production (OQEP). He is a results-oriented senior human resources practitioner with over 15 years of experience in both the energy sector and Oman's government sector.

Throughout his career, Hashmi has made significant contributions to talent attraction, development, and retention strategies across Oman, the Middle East, Southeast Asia, and Europe. He brings a deep commercial insight, along with a budget-oriented, analytical, and compliant approach to his responsibilities. Previously, Hashmi held the position of Deputy General Director of Professional Development at the Ministry of Education.



Chief Human Resources Officer (CHRO) of the Year

Faisal Al Mamari
Vice President of People, Technology, and Culture, OQ Gas Networks

With 23 years of experience in the energy sector, Faisal Al Mamari has led key projects, including the OQ Gas Networks IPO campaign and the expansion of V2 Trenching and Co LLC from Oman to regional operations, securing a contract in Qatar. He also revitalised the Supply Chain department at Oman Oil Company Exploration & Production LLC, playing a pivotal role in supporting the Bisat E&P oil production project.

Mamari has contributed significantly to major gas pipeline projects, doubling assets and increasing value through successful negotiations and relationship-building. In 2023, he was recognised as a promising leader for his exceptional leadership.



And the winners are...



CFO of the Year - Energy
Sabrina Al Bakri
Chief Executive Finance, OQ

Sabrina Al Bakri is the Chief Executive Finance at OQ Group, with over 20 years of experience in the finance sector, specialising in corporate finance solutions and performance reporting, including managing diverse and complex funding requirements.

Her career began at PDO and Shell, before she moved to Aabar Investments in Abu Dhabi, where she spent 10 years structuring finance solutions, including corporate bonds, multicurrency syndications, and exchangeable bonds. Bakri joined OQ Group in 2018, where she has played a key role in originating, evaluating, and structuring a range of finance arrangements, including corporate bonds, multicurrency syndications, term loans, and project financing.



Chief Financial Officer (CFO) of the Year - Telecom
Ghassan Khamis Al Hashar
CFO, Omantel

Ghassan Al Hashar, CFO of Omantel, has been instrumental in optimising the company's capital structure and liquidity. Notable achievements under his leadership include the sale of over 2,500 towers to Helios Towers plc for RO190.2mn and the monetisation of Omantel's headquarters, generating RO42.9mn through a Real Estate Investment Fund (REIF) structure while retaining control.

Hashar also led a successful Sukuk issuance to refinance US\$460mn in bonds, which was four times oversubscribed at favourable rates. Additionally, his leadership drove cost rationalisation programmes, delivering substantial savings and strengthening Omantel's financial performance.



Chief Sustainability Officer of the Year
Essam Al Sheibany
Group Vice President - QHSSE & Sustainability, Asyad Group

Essam Al Sheibany has spearheaded pioneering sustainability initiatives, positioning Asyad Group at the forefront of low-carbon logistics and green hydrogen development. Under his leadership, Asyad is advancing the Low Carbon Molecules Hub for eMethanol in Duqm and Salalah, forging strategic partnerships and completing initial feasibility studies.

Sheibany has been instrumental in integrating biofuels into public transport, launching smart mobility projects, initiating solar electrification, and exploring wave energy opportunities. These initiatives have established Asyad as a national leader in logistics driven by green hydrogen. Thanks to his guidance, Asyad Group has successfully reduced emissions by 6%.



Chief Information Security Officer of the Year
Dr. Haitham Al Hajri
CISO, Oman Housing Bank

Dr Haitham Al Hajri is a cybersecurity expert with 19 years of experience. As Chief Information Security Officer (CISO) at Oman Housing Bank, he plays a pivotal role in enhancing cybersecurity through strategic partnerships with critical infrastructure, regulators, and law enforcement.

His areas of expertise include incident response, governance, risk management, and the development of operational frameworks. Dr Hajri also leads complex projects and security awareness programmes, advocating for the integration of AI and machine learning to bolster cybersecurity defences. He holds a master's degree in digital forensics and a Ph.D. in cybersecurity management, along with a range of other professional certifications.



Chief Legal Officer of the Year
Majid Al Marzooqi
Chief Legal, Regulatory & Corporate Governance Officer, Ooredoo

As Chief Legal, Regulatory and Corporate Governance Officer, Majid Al Marzooqi guides Ooredoo Oman through the complexities of legal and regulatory compliance in the telecommunications industry. He ensures that Ooredoo adheres to the highest standards of corporate governance and oversees all board-related matters. In this role, Marzooqi plays a key part in shaping the company's strategies to align with an ever-evolving landscape, helping to maintain Ooredoo's leadership in legal, regulatory, and governance matters.

With over 21 years of experience in law, regulation, governance, and public relations across both the private and government sectors, he combines extensive legal expertise with strategic vision, making him a vital asset for Ooredoo.



Chief Compliance Officer of the Year
Mansoor Al Raisi
Chief Compliance Officer, Oman Arab Bank

Mansoor Al Raisi joined Oman Arab Bank in 2015 as Chief Compliance Officer. He began his career at the Central Bank of Oman as a Bank Examiner in 1988. He subsequently became head of the Banking Supervision Department in 1996 and was later promoted to Senior Manager, overseeing the Banking Examination Department.

In 2008, Raisi joined the National Bank of Oman as Chief Compliance Officer. He holds a BA in Business Administration from Rollins College, Florida, USA, and a Master's degree in Development Banking from the American University, Washington DC, USA.



Chief Risk Officer of the Year
SULAIMAN SAID AL LAMKI
General Manager - Chief Risk Officer, National Bank of Oman (NBO)

Sulaiman Said Al Lamki brings over 25 years of extensive experience in the financial sector, having worked with leading global financial institutions. Throughout his career, he has held senior leadership positions, covering a broad range of areas including risk management, structured finance, investment banking, investment management, sovereign wealth funds, and financial accounting standards and audit assurance.

He is a UK-qualified Chartered Accountant, which further complements his expertise in financial management and regulatory compliance.



Chief Internal Audit Officer of the Year
NASSER SAID AL LAMKI
GM - Internal Audit, Bank Nizwa

Nasser Said Al Lamki is a seasoned Chief Audit Executive with nearly three decades of experience in the banking sector across the Middle East. He brings a wealth of expertise in enterprise risk management, credit analysis, fraud detection, and cards management. Renowned for his strategic insight, he excels in navigating complex financial landscapes across various financial institutions.

At Bank Nizwa, Lamki champions a culture of accountability and ethical conduct while driving digital innovation in audit practices and control frameworks. His efforts have been instrumental in advancing Sharia-compliant banking, further solidifying the institution's leadership in the region.

