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H M TO VISIT RUSSIA

Muscat - His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik will embark on a state visit to the Russian Federation on Monday.

A statement was issued by Diwan of Royal Court to this effect reading as follows:

'In response to an invitation received by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik from President Vladimir Putin of the Russian Federation, His Majesty the Sultan will go on a state visit to the Russian Federation on April 21-22.

'The visit comes within the context of promoting relations between the Sultanate of Oman and the Russian Federation in a manner that meets aspiration of the two countries.

'The visit will discuss areas of cooperation between the two countries in various spheres and ways of boosting these to serve the joint interests.

'During the visit, the two leaders will exchange views on current regional and international issues.'

His Majesty the Sultan will be accompanied by a high-ranking



official delegation comprising H H Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs, Sayyid Khalid bin Hilal al Busaidi, Minister of Diwan of Royal Court, Gen Sultan bin Mohammed al Nu'amani, Minister of Royal Office, Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidi, Foreign Minister, Dr Hamad bin Said al Aufi, Head of

Visit to discuss areas of cooperation between the two countries in various spheres and ways of boosting these to serve joint interests

Private Office, Abdussalam bin Mohammed al Murshidi, Chairman of Oman Investment Authority, Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, Jamal bin Hassan al Mosaawi, Secretary-General of National Museum, and Hamoud bin Salim al Tuwaih, Ambassador of Oman to Russia.

See also Page 02

Iran, US hold 'constructive' talks in Rome, agree to meet again

Rome, Italy - The second round of negotiations between Iran and the United States ended in the Italian capital Rome on Saturday with both sides agreeing to meet again next week to continue the talks.

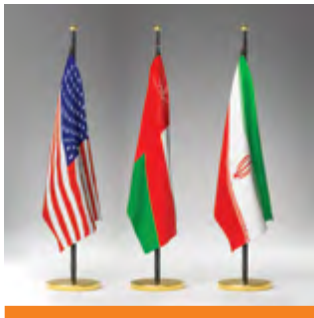
The Islamic Republic's civilian nuclear programme and lifting American sanctions against the country were on the agenda of discussions in Rome.

The Iranian delegation was led by Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi and the US President Donald Trump's Middle East envoy Steve Witkoff.

Araghchi said technical discussions at the level of experts will begin in Oman on Wednesday before another round of talks.

"Naturally, experts have more time to delve into the details and work on designing a framework for an agreement. Then, next Saturday, we will meet again in Oman to review results of the experts' work and assess how close we are to the core elements of an agreement," he said.

Iranian state media described



The talks are gaining momentum and now even the unlikely is possible

H E SAYYID BADR AL BUSAIDI

the talks as 'constructive'. 'As a result of this constructive atmosphere which has been created, the three delegations from Iran Oman and the US will hold more indirect talks,' state television said. The talks were a follow-up of negotiations held last week in Muscat.

Oman Foreign Minister H E Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidi mediated the talks again, shuffling between the two delega-

tions to convey messages in Rome.

Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Esmail Baqaei said the talks continued to be conducted indirectly, as in Muscat, and H E Sayyid Badr had a busy day conveying messages between the two delegations.

In a statement, Oman's Foreign Ministry said, 'It is only in dialogue and clear communication that we will be able to achieve a mutually credible agreement and understanding for the benefit of all concerned regionally and internationally'.

Following the talks, H E Sayyid Badr posted on X, "I would like to thank the Iranian Foreign Minister and US Presidential Envoy for their highly constructive approach to the talks today. These talks are gaining momentum and now even the unlikely is possible."

The talks are being held after President Trump wrote to Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei requesting negotiations be opened into a deal between Tehran and Washington.

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1001

Visa-free travel to Russia on the cards for citizens

Startup develops AI-powered device to aid deaf and mute

First-ever visit by a Sultan of Oman to Moscow aims to deepen ties, expand cooperation

Muscat - His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik's state visit to the Russian Federation on Monday will mark a significant step in advancing Oman-Russia bilateral relations, with a focus on expanding cooperation in economic, trade, investment and energy sectors, including renewables.

A summit between His Majesty the Sultan and Russian President Vladimir Putin at the Kremlin comes as the two countries celebrate the 40th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations, which began on September 26, 1985. Officials said the talks will explore new avenues of partnership as Oman and Russia seek to strengthen ties in key sectors.

Hamoud bin Salim al Tuwaih, Oman's Ambassador to Russia, described the visit as "historic", it being the first by a Sultan of Oman to Moscow. "It reflects the sultanate's keenness to strengthen relations with the Russian Federation," he said.

He added that the visit "will



The visit will witness the signing of ten agreements and memoranda of understanding, including mutual visa exemption for ordinary passport holders and establishment of Omani-Russian Joint Committee

HAMOUD BIN SALIM AL TUWAIH

open new horizons for cooperation in economic, commercial, cultural, tourism and educational fields".

Diplomatic engagement between the two sides has gained momentum in recent years through high-level exchanges and regular political consultations. Among these was a meeting between President Putin and HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth, when energy and tourism were highlighted as

key sectors for collaboration.

By the end of 2024, trade between the two countries reached over RO133mn (US\$346mn). Omani exports include mineral products and fertilisers, while imports from Russia comprise iron products and foodstuffs.

There were 277 registered companies in Oman with Russian participation in 2024, valued at more than RO11.6mn. These firms operate in wholesale and retail, professional services, IT, construction, hospitality, logis-

tics, mining, and financial sectors.

Tuwaih said His Majesty the Sultan's visit will witness the signing of ten agreements and memoranda of understanding, including mutual visa exemption for ordinary passport holders and establishment of Omani-Russian Joint Committee. Agreements are expected in fisheries, trade, media, climate and diplomacy.

"Concluding these agreements is a vital step in expanding cooperation in areas such as trade, energy, education and

tourism," Tuwaih said.

He emphasised the growing tourism potential between the two nations, supported by the upcoming visa exemption. In 2024, around 11,000 Omanis visited Russia, a 70% increase from the previous year, while, 44,000 Russian tourists visited Oman.

Tuwaih also highlighted the growing cooperation in education and culture, including student exchanges and institutional collaborations, as well as long-standing museum partnerships. Parliamentary ties are also being developed to support legislative dialogue between the two countries.

Oleg Vladimirovich Levin, Russia's Ambassador to Oman, said the visit would "open new paths for cooperation in various sectors".

He called it "an ideal opportunity to deepen trust between the leaderships" and enable the signing of key agreements. He stressed that the visit would allow both countries to align on pressing international issues and reinforce their positions at multi-lateral forums, including the United Nations.

Both sides are looking to move beyond trade in raw materials and pursue joint ventures in logistics, infrastructure, high technology and agriculture. Russia aims to tap into Oman's strategic location, while Oman looks to benefit from Russian expertise in energy and innovation.

A student-led startup in Oman has developed an AI-powered device to support communication for the deaf and mute, earning international recognition and attracting global investor interest.

The company, Sirius, created a system called Language, which includes smart glasses that convert sound into readable text and then into speech. The setup is supported by a smartwatch and a digital app also designed to address literacy challenges, allowing users to interact more easily with the wider community.

The innovation won a silver medal at Geneva International Exhibition of Inventions held from April 9 to 13.

Lian Saeed al Rahbi, one of the innovators behind the project, said the idea was prompted by real-life needs of people with hearing and speech impairments.

"The product was born out of a personal connection and a desire to address a real social need," Lian said. "We conducted an in-depth study of the community's requirements before developing the system."

She added that feedback from users during trials helped the team refine the device. "The confidence we saw from users was the greatest encouragement. We now have a fully functional digital model and we're working on a



The product was born out of a personal connection and a desire to address a real social need

LIAN SAEED AL RAHBI

long-term plan to market it."

According to Lian, international investors have expressed interest in the device, which she described as "a tech breakthrough with a purely Omani youthful touch". The team is reviewing commercial proposals to determine the best route to take the device to a global audience.

"We want to build a future that promotes innovation, inclusion and dignity," she said, urging young inventors to be confident and committed. "Never give up. You must believe in your abilities to achieve your dreams through hard work and determination, because creativity knows no limits."

The team hopes to begin large-scale manufacturing of the device soon, with focus on accessibility and maintaining high production standards.



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Oman moves towards global recognition of protected areas

Our Correspondent Muscat

In cooperation with International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), Environment Authority hosted a two-day workshop in Muscat last week to introduce a programme called 'Green List of Protected Areas'. The initiative aims to enhance management of nature reserves in Oman by aligning these with internationally recognised standards of excellence.

The IUCN Green List is a global certification system that assesses performance of protected areas against 17 criteria and 50 indicators covering governance, planning, management and conservation outcomes.

The workshop introduced mechanisms required for nomination, evaluation and listing of Omani nature reserves under this global programme.

Dr Abdullah bin Ali al Amri, Chairman of Environment Authority (EA), said the workshop reflects the sultanate's commitment to biodiversity protection and sustainable development. He described the Green List ini-



Sulaiman bin Nasser al Akhzami

tiative as a culmination of ongoing efforts to improve protected area management and align practices with international benchmarks.

"This step supports the national goal of enhancing the quality and effectiveness of our nature reserves," said Amri. "It promotes global recognition, improves administrative performance and ensures community engagement in environmental management."

Sulaiman bin Nasser al Akhzami, Director General of Nature Conservation at EA, highlighted the sultanate's remarkable biodiversity, which includes more than 15,000 species of terrestrial and marine

flora and fauna, many rare or endemic.

Oman currently has 31 declared nature reserves, representing a range of ecosystems including coasts, deserts, mountains, plains and valleys.

Akhzami noted that nomination files for several protected areas have already been submitted for consideration in the IUCN Green List. These include the Al Saleel Nature Reserve, which has passed the first stage of the global evaluation, Arabian Oryx Reserve and the Daymaniyat Islands Nature Reserve.

The workshop explored progress on including these sites in the Green List by compiling the required documentation and engaging with key stakeholders. It also outlined criteria and stages necessary for achieving IUCN certification, which includes demonstrating effective governance, community involvement and measurable biodiversity outcomes.

"This ambitious step underscores Oman's determination to elevate the management standards of its protected areas and boost their international profile," Akhzami added.

Hotel revenues increase 12.7% to RO59mn

Our Correspondent Muscat

Oman's 3- to 5-star hotels posted revenues of RO59mn in 2025 till the end of February, marking a 12.7% increase from RO52mn during the same period last year, according to figures released by National Centre for Statistics and Information.

The growth in revenue is attributed to a 3.6% rise in number of guests to 458,433 by the end of February 2025 compared to 442,468 in 2024. Hotel occupancy rates rose from 60.8% in February 2024 to 67.9% in February 2025, an increase of 11.7%.

Guest from key international markets showed significant growth. The number of visitors from the Americas rose 9.2% to 16,130, while those from Africa surged 55% to 3,244. Guests from Asia increased 8.1% to 60,375, and those from Oceania climbed 53.4% to 9,735.

European tourists made up the largest share with numbers rising 8.7% to 173,455. Visitors from GCC countries rose 6.5% to 27,505. However, the number of Omani hotel guests decreased 3.1% to 137,465.

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Oman Airports to help launch, operate Karbala Airport in Iraq

Karbala, Iraq - Oman Airports has signed a strategic cooperation agreement with Iraq's Teebat Karbala Company to support setting up and initial operations of Karbala International Airport, a key project in Iraq's air transport sector.

The agreement was formalised on Saturday by H E Saeed bin Hamood al Mawali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology and Chairman of Board of Directors of Oman Airports, and Hassan Rashid Jawad al Abayji, Chairman of Teebat Karbala Company.

The partnership is part of broader civil aviation cooperation between Oman and Iraq. It aims to develop airport infrastructure and improve operational capacity in line with international

aviation standards.

As part of the agreement, a team of Omani technical, administrative and operations personnel will be stationed in Karbala for 15 months. Their responsibilities will include preparing the airport for its initial phase of operations and training local staff. The deployment is expected to ensure the airport meets international benchmarks in terms of safety, service and efficiency.

Abayji described Karbala International Airport as one of the most vital aviation projects in Iraq. "This agreement reflects a significant step in strengthening

Omani navigator's manuscript added to Unesco list

Muscat - Unesco has inscribed *Nuniyah al Kubra (The Great Nuniyah)*, a manuscript by the 15th century Omani navigator Ahmad ibn Majid ibn Muhammad al Sa'di, in its Memory of the World Programme marking the second such recognition for an Omani manuscript.

Considered one of the most significant Omani contributions to navigation and marine science, the manuscript contains detailed information on ancient shipping routes and maritime geography. While earlier scholars limited their division of the Earth to seven regions in the northern hemisphere, Ibn Majid expanded the concept by adding seven regions in the southern hemisphere.

The *Great Nuniyah* also documents societies encountered by Ibn Majid and his crew, along with observations of marine environments and life. The manuscript also features anchoring techniques used during voyages.

Ibn Majid was born in 1421 and died in 1500. He based his maritime activities out of Ras al Hadd and is credited with advancements in navigational tools, including developments in the magnetic compass.

In 2017, Oman's first manuscript to be inscribed was *The Mine of Secrets in Oceanography* by navigator Nasser bin Ali al Khadouri.

Oman Air restructuring in progress, Omanisation up

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman Air has completed a key phase of its strategic workforce restructuring, part of a broader transformation plan aimed at strengthening its financial performance and long-term viability.

Over the past 18 months, the airline worked closely with stakeholders to align its workforce with industry standards and strategic priorities. As part of the plan, Oman Air offered affected employees several options, including end-of-service benefits, internal redeployment opportunities and recruitment assistance within the broader aviation sector.

The company allocated RO15mn to support impacted employees, underlining its com-

Con Korfiatis

mitment to balancing financial restructuring with employee welfare.

As a result of the restructuring, Oman Air reduced its expatriate workforce by 487 positions and increased its Omanisation rate to 79.4% in 2024, up from 74.8% the previous year. The move, the airline said, reflects its efforts to empower and invest in Omani talent across its operations.

Of the 415 employees made redundant, 74 were reassigned within Oman Air, while 87 were offered roles within the wider aviation sector. Another 293 opted for a voluntary resignation package, with compensation covering 12 to 24 months.

Oman Air continues to coordinate with Ministry of Labour and General Federation of Oman Workers to assist those who have not taken any of the available options.

Con Korfiatis, CEO of Oman Air, said he was proud of the company's success in redeploying a significant number of affected employees. "We remain committed to building an airline that contributes to the development of Oman's aviation sector and creates lasting value for the country and its people," he said.

Omani Olympic Museum to open today, showcase nation's sporting legacy

Muscat - Oman Olympic Committee (OOC) will inaugurate the Omani Olympic Museum on Sunday at its headquarters in Ghubra under the patronage of H H Sayyid Dr Adham bin Turki al Said.

The museum marks a key step in OOC's efforts to document the evolution of sports in Oman and promote Olympic values. It combines interactive exhibits with historical records, offering a platform that highlights Omani athletes' achievements in regional and international competitions.

Designed to preserve Oman's sporting memories

and strengthen national identity, the museum features medals, sports equipment, digital displays and audio-visual content tracing the development of sports in the sultanate.

"The museum reflects Oman's presence in the Olympic arena and serves as an inspiration for the next generation," the OOC stated. It presents stories of successful Omani athletes and aims to support youth by showcasing role models who have contributed to the country's sports history.

The museum also high-

lights Oman's participation in the global Olympic movement and its cooperation with organisations such as International Olympic Committee, Olympic Council of Asia, and Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth.

The facility includes sections on the history of the Olympic Games, Olympic torches and OOC memorabilia. It has sections dedicated to Omani women in sports, Paralympic disciplines and memorable moments from past games. A gift shop featuring Olympic-themed products is also part of the museum.

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Bank Muscat digital transformation on

Bank Muscat places significant emphasis on digital transformation to achieve excellence in the banking sector and offer innovative services that meet the needs of individual and corporate customers.

By adopting the latest technologies and keeping pace with the rapid developments in the realm of financial technology, the bank continues to update and improve its services, aiming to provide customers with a secure, efficient, and effective banking experience when initiating their banking transactions, a press release said.

With the rapid evolution of the digital sector, it has become essential for the banking sector to play a leading role in offering banking solutions that facilitate customers' businesses. In this context, Bank Muscat is one of the first banking institutions to embrace the latest digital solutions, ensuring customers have access to innovative banking services that allow them to conduct transactions in a seamless and secure manner.

To highlight the latest developments in this area and as part of a series of media visits which the bank periodically organises, Bank Muscat held a media meet with a group of journalists and media representatives, with the aim to introduce them to the bank's digital banking solutions and information technology services. The event comes to highlight the bank's dedication to embracing digital transformation concepts as part of its strategy focused on providing the best digital banking services to customers.

The media meet featured two presentations outlining the bank's roles in fields of digital banking as well as information technology. During the detailed presentation on the Bank's digital banking, the audience were introduced to the digital facilities offered to them through the bank's Internet Banking and Mobile Banking platforms. These include services like opening banking accounts, applying for and renewing debit cards, and requesting for credit cards, as well as payment, money transfer, and investment solutions.

Further to that, the audience were introduced to the services recently fed into the bank's platforms such as the Eidiya payment online feature through QR code. The bank's role in implementing information technology projects and leveraging digital technologies and modern information systems for customer service was highlighted during the IT-focused presentation, addressing different subjects including the bank's strategy in investing in information technology and its achievements in implementing IT projects and programmes.

Focus was also placed on the project innovation aspects which the Information Technology Division at Bank Muscat implements. This media meet provided an opportunity for the audience to have conversations with the bank's officials and strengthen partnership with various media outlets which stand as an important component of the bank's growth and success.

Speaking about the media visit, Abdullah Hamood al Jufaili, assistant general manager, Digital Banking at Bank Muscat, expressed his appreciation and gratitude to all media institutions and journalists for their ongoing collaboration and interest in learning about the latest updates on the bank's contributions to enhancing customer experiences through innovative digital banking services. "The bank is committed to applying digital transformation concepts and investing in modern technologies."

Al Maha Petroleum attains ISO 27001:2022 certification

Al Maha Petroleum Products Marketing Co announced that it has officially been awarded the ISO 27001:2022 certification, the international standard for Information Security Management Systems (ISMS).

This achievement reflects the company's strong commitment to protecting information assets, ensuring data privacy, and implementing best-in-class security practices across the organisation, a press release said.

On this occasion, Al Maha extends its sincere appreciation and gratitude to all employees and team members whose dedication and collaboration made this milestone possible.



Gulf College holds graduation

Gulf College celebrated the graduation of its 24th and 25th cohorts on April 14 and 15 with a total of 676 graduates receiving their Master's, Bachelor's with Honours, and Diploma in Higher Education, in various specialisations, through academic affiliation with Cardiff Metropolitan University in the United Kingdom.

The graduation ceremony for the 24th cohort was held under the patronage of Dr Saif Bin Abdullah Bin Suleiman al Haddabi, undersecretary of the Ministry of Higher Education, Research, and Innovation for Research and Innovation, a press release said.

The 25th cohort ceremony was under the patronage of Azan Bin Qasim Bin Mohammed al Busaidi, undersecretary of the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism for Tourism, and took place at the main auditorium of Gulf College's campus in South Mabeela.

The ceremonies commenced with a recitation from the Holy Qur'an, followed by a speech from Prof Ali al Badi, dean of the College, who said, "Gulf College has undertaken concerted efforts to design and develop new academic programmes aimed at enhancing students' skills and preparing a generation of innovative and creative professionals. These graduates are well-equipped to meet the evolving needs of both local and international labour markets, contribute meaningfully to economic development, and apply their knowledge to address real-world challenges. They are also empowered to conduct scientific research and studies across a range of disciplines, aligned with their specialisations, in pursuit of practical and forward-thinking solutions."

Subsequently, the patrons of the ceremony and the university delegation, joined by Dr Issa Sabeel al Balushi, Chairman of the Board of Directors, and Prof. Ali Al-Badi, Dean of the College, honoured the top graduates and distributed certificates to the graduates who earned their Master's, Bachelor's with Honours, and Diploma in Higher Education.

The celebration concluded with commemorative group photos of the graduates alongside the ceremony's patron.



Dhofar Islamic leads Islamic Banking sector

The Islamic banking sector in Oman has seen a transformative journey since its inception over a decade ago. Today, it plays a pivotal role in driving economic growth, financing critical projects, and aligning with Oman Vision 2040.

Amor Said Mohamed al Amri, DGM and head of Retail Banking Dhofar Islamic, highlighted the sector's robust growth stating, "Over the last ten years, Islamic banking in Oman has matured significantly, gaining a growing share of the market. This progress reflects the expertise, visionary leadership, and ability to innovate while meeting the needs of society and investors alike."

"Dhofar Islamic, formerly known as Maisarah Islamic Banking, has emerged as a key player in Oman's Islamic banking sector. Its recent rebranding signifies a renewed commitment to innovation and customer-centricity. The new Dhofar Islamic identity embodies a blend of heritage and modernity, symbolised by our logo's transition from a single star to a galaxy of capabilities, reflecting our core values of ethical banking, transparency, and excellence."



Al Injaz hosts carnival | Athar, MOH sign pact to fund hospital equipment

Al Injaz International Private School was abuzz with the vibrancy of its carnival event, captivating students, families, and community members in equal measure with a plethora of intriguing activities. The eagerly-awaited event brought the school community together for an afternoon of pleasure, laughter, and memories to last a lifetime.

The carnival featured a wide range of thrilling games that had something for all, from children to adults, ranging from jumping castles to a haunted house in the form of a Horror Hospital, to horse rides and face painting. One of the highlights of the evening was the heart-thumping raffle draw, giving visitors a chance to win some fantastic prizes which also created a festive atmosphere.

Music concerts and a movie corner added to the carnival appeal, with talented students performing and a selection of family movies projected on an enormous wall, a press release said.



In collaboration with the Ministry of Health (MoH), the Health Endowment Foundation (Athar) signed an agreement on Tuesday at the Ministry's headquarters in Al Khuwair with Al Jisr Foundation for Charitable Work. The agreement provides funding for the purchase of medical equipment for Al Buraimi Hospital, with a total value of RO250,000.

This initiative comes as part of Athar's ongoing efforts to support healthcare institutions, with the aim of enhancing the quality of medical services provided to patients and strengthening the hospital's capacity to deliver specialised healthcare, a press release said.

The agreement was signed on behalf of the Athar Foundation by Dr Fatma Mohammed al Ajmi, CEO of the Oman Medical



Specialty Board and Board member of Athar. Representing the Ministry of Health was Dr Majid bin Rashid al Maqbali, director general of Health Services in Al Buraimi Governorate. Dina bint Fawzi al Khalili, director general of Al Jisr Foundation, signed on behalf of the charitable Foundation.

In a statement, Hilal bin Hamad al Sarmi, executive director of the Health Endowment Foundation (Athar), praised the continued collaboration of Al Jisr

The agreement was signed by Dr Fatma Mohammed al Ajmi, CEO of the Oman Medical Specialty Board and Dr Majid bin Rashid al Maqbali of MoH

Foundation for addressing essential healthcare needs across various governorates of the Sultanate of Oman and supporting health projects implemented in these regions.

He emphasised that this ongoing partnership reflects a spirit of social solidarity and embodies humanitarian values.



US willing to recognise Russian control over Crimea: Report

Washington, D.C., US - The United States is ready to recognise Russian control over Crimea as part of a peace agreement between Russia and Ukraine, CNN reported, citing an official familiar with the proposed framework.

The peace proposal includes an immediate ceasefire between the two countries. The framework was shared with the Ukrainian and European officials in Paris on Thursday.

A phone call regarding this proposal also took place between US Secretary of State Marco Rubio and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, CNN reported, quoting sources.

However, there are some pieces that still need to be filled out, and the US is planning to work with Europe and Ukraine on that next week in London, the source said.

Russia annexed Crimea in 2014 following a military invasion - a move widely condemned as illegal by the international community.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky has repeatedly refused to cede the territory to Russia.

Meanwhile, Donald Trump also signalled that the US may

'take a pass' on its efforts to broker a peace deal between Russia and Ukraine if either side makes negotiations too difficult, CNN reported.

"If, for some reason, one of the two parties makes it very difficult, we're just going to say, 'You're foolish, you're foolish. You're horrible people', and we're just going to take a pass," Trump said.

Despite the warning, Trump expressed cautious optimism about securing a deal, CNN reported. "I think we have a really good chance of getting it done. It's coming to a head right now," he added.

Trump's remarks came after a statement by US Secretary of State Marco Rubio, who suggested abandoning the peace efforts in Ukraine within 'days'.

Speaking in Paris after high-level talks with European, Ukrainian, and Russian officials, Rubio stressed the urgency of determining whether the war can be ended or not.

"We need to determine very quickly now, and I'm talking about a matter of days, whether or not this is doable," he told reporters before departing Paris.

ANI

Tunisia: Opposition leaders get jail terms up to 66 years



Relatives of the opposition figures stage protests outside the court in Tunis

Tunis, Tunisia - A court in Tunisia sentenced opposition figures, businessmen and lawyers to jail terms of 13 to 66 years after they were found guilty of conspiring against state security, state media reported on Saturday.

The opposition said the charges were fabricated and that the trial was a symbol of President Kais Saied's authoritarian rule.

What do we know about the case?

State news agency TAP first reported the sentences that ranged from 13 to 66 years, citing a judicial spokesperson as saying they were enforced immediately.

Forty people were prosecuted

in the case, although more than half of them fled abroad after being charged.

Tunisian media outlets reported that the defendants were found guilty of 'conspiracy against state security and belonging to a terrorist group'.

Authorities say the defendants tried to destabilise the country and overthrow Saied.

Many of those jailed were vocal critics of the president, including Nejib Chebbi, the leader of the main National Salvation Front opposition coalition.

Chebbi told reporters before Friday's sentencing that the trial proved that Tunisian authorities wanted to 'criminalise the opposition'. Others include Chebbi's

Dozens of opponents of President Kais Saied were imprisoned for 13 to 66 years for national security offenses. Their trial was labelled a 'farce' and part of a clampdown by the country's authoritarian ruler

brother, Issam Chebbi, the leader of the centrist Republican Party, Ghazi Chaouachi, the head of the centre-left Democratic Current party, and Abdelhamid Jelassi, from Ennahda, an Islamic democratic movement.

A former head of intelligence, Kamel Guizan, was also one of the defendants. Speaking just before the sentencing hearing, defence lawyer Ahmed Souab

described the trial as a 'farce'.

The trial began in March, but was postponed twice. Journalists and civil society groups were barred from attending.

Staging a sweeping power grab

After Tunisia emerged as the only democracy from the Arab Spring, Saied was elected on a populist anti-corruption platform

in 2019. Two years later, he staged a sweeping power grab, dissolving the parliament and ruling by decree.

Since then, Saied has overseen the dismissal of the judiciary and the arrest of his main political rivals. He was reelected in October in a first-round vote described by observers as a sham, amid a record low turnout.

Human rights groups have repeatedly raised concerns about Saied's rule. In a recent report, Human Rights Watch said Tunisia has seen an 'increased reliance on arbitrary detention and politically motivated prosecutions to intimidate, punish and silence its critics'.

DW

DRC: 148 dead in boat accident

Kigali, Rwanda - The death toll hit 148 from a boat accident in the Democratic Republic of Congo earlier this week, an official said on Friday.

The accident occurred late on Tuesday in Mbandaka in Equateur province.

Senator Jean-Paul Boketsu Bofili of Equateur province said 500 people were on board the motorised wooden boat when it capsized after catching fire.

The dead include children, he told reporters, adding that hundreds remain unaccounted for, while more than

The dead include children and hundreds remain unaccounted for, while more than 150 people were rescued with varying degrees of burns

150 victims were rescued with varying degrees of burns. He said several charred bodies were recovered from the

burned boat.

Media reports indicated that the fire was ignited when a woman was cooking food aboard the boat.

Authorities had earlier put the number of dead at 50.

The HB Kokolo boat used to connect passengers from the port of Bolenge in Equateur province to a major market in Ngbondolo village which serves several territories, according to media reports.

Water transport is common in Congo due to impassable roads.

Anadolu Agency

US top court halts deportations under 1798 wartime law

Washington, D.C., US - The US Supreme Court ordered early on Saturday the Donald Trump administration to halt the deportation of alleged Venezuelan gang members from Texas under the Alien Enemies Act, a wartime law dating back to 1798, local media reported.

In a brief order, the court said the government 'is directed not to remove any member of the putative class of detainees from the United States until further order of this court', according to NBC News.

The decision comes as litigation over the legality of these removals continues, with the



The decision comes as litigation over the legality of these removals continues

justices awaiting action from a lower appeals court.

Justices Clarence Thomas and Samuel Alito dissented from the order, signalling a split within

the court's conservative wing.

The detainees, currently held at Bluebonnet Detention Center in Anson, Texas, are accused by the administration of being

members of the Tren de Aragua gang.

On Friday, observers reported at least one charter bus arriving at the facility, hinting at possible preparations for deportations.

Officials are attempting to deport them using the centuries-old wartime law, though critics argue it is being misapplied outside of a formal war context.

The detainees' legal team, led by the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), argues that the administration is misusing a law historically applied only during declared wars with foreign nations.

Anadolu Agency

Trump's funding cut threat raises concerns for various US universities

Washington, D.C., US - US President Donald Trump's threat to cut federal funding for universities, including Harvard, has raised concerns for school administrators.

The threats to freeze funding, which began when his administration announced an investigation into US\$8.7bn in grants given to Harvard by various organisations 'to ensure the university is in compliance with federal regulations, including civil rights responsibilities', have sparked concerns for universities and higher education associations.

According to media reports, some universities and educational institutions, including Princeton University and Mas-



sachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), have criticised the Energy Department's (DOE) decision to impose a 15% spending cap on 'indirect costs' for research funding.

In an interview with Newsweek magazine, Robin

Kaler, vice president of the University of Illinois, and an unnamed official from Michigan State University, shared their opinions on the matter.

Kaler said the DOE's decision runs afoul of long-standing regulatory frameworks. He argued

that the 15% spending cap threatens the scientific and economic future of the US. "Facilities and administrative (F&A) costs are critical to funding the vital support systems for the university's research, including the physical space, support staff, electricity and other essential infrastructure that helps to make research possible," said Kaler.

"DOE's policy setting a 15 per cent cap on F&A costs jeopardises research that drives new ideas for a more beneficial and prosperous future. The federal action would hinder progress, harm our national security, and threaten our competitiveness with other nations," Kaler said.

Anadolu Agency

A SUCCESSFUL LAUNCH IN CHINA



A modified Long March-6 carrier rocket carrying six Shiyuan-27 satellites blasts off from Taiyuan Satellite Launch Center in north China on Saturday. The Satellites entered the preset orbits successfully (Xinhua)

Israeli airstrikes kill 25 more Palestinians across Gaza Strip

Gaza City/Ankara - At least 25 Palestinians were killed in Israeli airstrikes across the Gaza Strip on Saturday, as the Israeli army continues its genocidal campaign in the Palestinian enclave.

According to medical sources and eyewitness accounts, the Israeli airstrikes targeted a home, displacement tents, and groups of civilians in various parts of Gaza.

In Khan Younis city, 13 Palestinians were killed in four Israeli airstrikes.

The first strike targeted a tent housing displaced members of the Qadi family in the Mawasi area, killing five people.

The second targeted a tent belonging to the Abu Nadda family in the same area, killing four people, including two children, according to a medical source.

The third strike hit a home belonging to the Abu Shnaila family, killing two Palestinians and injuring several others, mostly women and children, according to a civil defence statement.

The fourth hit the Ma'an area in eastern Khan Younis where a woman and her son were killed.

Eyewitnesses also reported that army vehicles opened fire east of the Al-Qarara area in Khan Younis.

Two Palestinians from the Al-Bayouk family were killed in artillery shelling on the Al-Nasr neighbourhood in eastern Rafah,



southern Gaza, where Israeli artillery continued bombing the eastern and western areas while also demolishing residential buildings in these regions.

In the central Gaza Strip, two Palestinians were killed in two Israeli airstrikes targeting Deir al-Balah, and Al-Bureij camp, according to a medical source.

Two more Palestinians from the Al-Hajj family were killed

when Israeli forces targeted a group of civilians in Nuseirat refugee camp, central Gaza.

In Gaza city, a medical source confirmed the killing of two Palestinians and the injuries of four others in an Israeli airstrike on a tent housing displaced people near Abu Hasira Street, close to Gaza Port.

In northern Gaza, four Palestinians were killed in an Israeli strike on the Al-Attatra area, west of Beit Lahia, according to a medical source.

Death toll surges to 51,157

Israeli airstrikes on the Gaza Strip killed at least 92 more Palestinians during the last 48 hours, bringing the death toll from Israel's genocidal war since October 2023 to 51,157, the Health Ministry said on Saturday. A ministry statement said that 219 more injured people were transferred to hospitals, taking the number of injuries to 116,724 in the Israeli onslaught.

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

The Israeli army resumed its deadly offensive on the Gaza Strip on March 18 and has since killed 1,783 people and injured 4,683 others despite a ceasefire and prisoner exchange agreement that took hold in January.

Anadolu Agency

Ukraine's deserters returning to the front

Ukraine had registered about 123,000 investigations into soldiers going absent without leave (AWOL)

Kyiv, Ukraine - "What crime did I commit? I had family problems!" exclaimed Kosjantyn, who deserted his post in the Ukrainian army. "By the way," he added, "it's a crime that I never received rehab or compensation when I was wounded!"

Kosjantyn is just one of the roughly 21,000 Ukrainian soldiers classified as deserters who voluntarily returned to military service in March to avoid legal punishment.

The deadline for returning was set for early March. At the start of the year, Ukraine had registered about 123,000 investigations into soldiers going absent without leave (AWOL) or deserting their units.

Authorities can't keep up with number of deserters

The number of soldiers leaving their posts grew so high in 2023 and 2024 that investigators couldn't keep up, completing inquiries into only about 7% of cases. That led to the tacit acceptance of a deal in which authorities promised not to prosecute deserters as long as commanders could convince them to return to duty.

The deal was enacted into law in the fall of 2024, when parliament made it possible for draft dodgers and deserters to report back to the army for duty as a way of avoiding prosecution.

Ukraine's laws were changed in December, giving soldiers until January 1, 2025, to comply. The deadline was then extended until March.



The root causes of desertion - physical and psychological exhaustion - won't change for Ukrainian soldiers any time soon

The number of soldiers leaving their posts grew so high in 2023 and 2024 that investigators couldn't keep up, completing inquiries into only about 7% of cases

Exhaustion and conflict with superiors

"My name's Jewhen. I'm a soldier in the Ukrainian army. I'm reporting back to duty after deserting,"

said a 38-year-old training with the 59th Assault Brigade, which is fighting on the front lines at the eastern city of Pokrovsk.

"I'm from Mariupol and have

been fighting for 10 years. The war has destroyed me, it took everything, my whole family. But I'm tough... and I have a deep sense of justice," said Jewhen.

Jewhen had deserted his unit, the 109th Territorial Defence Brigade, which he first joined when Russia launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.

"I had problems with my former commander. He didn't like

me and used to send me out on suicide missions, but I always came back. Then I deserted," he explained.

Jewhen said he lived in Dnieper for a month and a half and found an illegal job. "I chilled a bit because I hadn't taken a vacation in years," he added.

In the end, he turned himself over to the military police. "I told them that I had been AWOL and that I wanted to return," he said.

The next day, he and others like him were taken to a reserve battalion that regularly hosts recruiters from different brigades. In the end, Jewhen decided to join the 59th Assault Brigade and was quickly sent back to the front.

"I have to fight. I'm a soldier from head to toe," said Jewhen when asked what motivated him. "If you're sent from the front to a big city... it's really strange and difficult to see how life goes on.

"From the outside, it's as if there is no war. Shops, restaurants... Maybachs, Jeeps, Porsches ... people are living their lives and don't understand what's happening on the front."

Army satisfied to see soldiers return

Jewhen is training with a dozen other deserters who have returned to the army. Their commander, known as Whitey, has empathy for his new soldiers, most of whom he said had good reason for temporarily shirking their duties.

"Often replacements can't be found, so soldiers are stuck at the front indefinitely, or they have to get home to deal with family issues," said the commander, adding that soldiers are sometimes erroneously listed as deserters after they have received medical treatment but haven't returned to their unit within 48 hours.

The commander also said deserters who return are serious about fulfilling their duties if they are treated like any other soldier.

"Most have already served and seen combat. They are better trained than new recruits. They're also more motivated. It's easier to work with them," he said.

New recruits were assigned to Whitey's brigade last fall, when the Russians stepped up their push toward Pokrovsk. He told DW at the time that they were poorly trained and lacked fighting spirit.

DW

US to bring down forces in Syria, says Pentagon

Washington, D.C., US - The Pentagon announced on Friday that it is consolidating US forces in Syria under the Combined Joint Task Force - Operation Inherent Resolve, reducing troop numbers to less than 1,000 in the coming months.

"Recognising the success the United States has had against ISIS, including its 2019 territorial defeat under President Trump, today the Secretary of Defence directed the consolidation of US forces in Syria under Combined Joint Task Force - Operation Inherent Resolve to select locations in Syria," spokesman Sean Parnell said in a statement.

The consolidation reflects the 'significant' steps the US has made toward degrading the operational capability of the Daesh/ISIS terror group regionally and globally, Parnell added.

"This deliberate and condi-



tions-based process will bring the US footprint in Syria down to less than a 1,000 US forces in the coming months," he stressed.

Stressing that in the last 10 years, the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS has made 'major gains', Parnell said US Central Command (CENTCOM) launched dozens of airstrikes in the last year to further degrade the capabilities of Daesh/ISIS.

CENTCOM will 'remain

Parliament speakers raise their voices against Israel's offensive on Gaza

Istanbul, Turkey - Parliament speakers of 13 countries who gathered on Friday for the Groups of Parliaments in Support of Palestine meeting in Istanbul condemned Israel's attacks on the Gaza Strip that have been going on for almost 18 months.

They urged global organisations to take action to halt the attacks by Tel Aviv.

Malaysian Parliament Speaker Tan Sri Dato Johari bin Abdul said her country will continue to show unwavering support for Palestine's independence and sovereignty, and condemned the killing of civilians.

Palestine is not merely a matter of foreign policy for Malaysia, said Abdul, adding it is a matter of humanity and equally, a matter of conscience and awareness.

Pakistan's Parliament Speaker Serdar Ayaz Sadiq stressed that the Palestinian issue is not a po-



litical matter but a test of conscience, and that the sense of justice, freedom and dignity has been stripped from the Palestinian people.

Sadiq noted that Israel has been obstructing humanitarian aid convoys, deliberately continuing to bomb the region, and killing the staff of humanitarian organisations.

Indonesian Parliament Speaker Puan Maharani under-

lined that what Palestine needs most is justice, and pointed out that parliaments must be part of the solution within the scope of their authority.

Maharani said as parliamentarians, they do not have the luxury of remaining silent, and their responsibility is not only to their constituents, but also to justice, humanity and peace.

In a video message, Spanish Parliament Speaker Armengol

Socias stated that what has been happening in Gaza since October 2023 constitutes 'a crime against humanity'. "Following a two-month ceasefire, Israel violated the truce and continued to bomb the people of Gaza, kill more children, destroy health centres and blow up ambulances carrying aid workers. The massacre has reached an even more unbearable level," she said.

Anadolu Agency

INDIA

NTA announces JEE Main 2025 results

New Delhi, India - The National Testing Agency (NTA) on Saturday announced the results of the Joint Entrance Examination (JEE) Main 2025 Paper 1 (BE/BTech), with 24 candidates securing a perfect 100 percentile.

This year's JEE Main was conducted in two sessions - January and April - with a massive turnout.

A total of 15,39,848 unique candidates registered across both sessions, while 14,75,103 appeared. In the January session alone, 13,11,544 students registered and 12,58,136 appeared. For the April session, 10,61,840 registered and 9,92,350 took the exam.

The computer-based examination was conducted in 13 languages across 300 cities, including 15 international locations such as Dubai, Singapore, Doha, and Washington, D.C.

Of the 24 students who achieved 100 percentile, Rajasthan produced the highest number with seven toppers, followed by Maharashtra and Telangana (four each) and Uttar Pradesh (three).

ANI

Trump's visa crackdown fuels anxiety among Indian students

In majority of revocations, there is no indication that affected students had a role in pro-Palestinian protests

New Delhi, India - At least 1,024 international students at US colleges, universities and university systems have had their visas revoked or their legal status terminated since late March, according to a review of university statements and correspondence with school officials by The Associated Press.

The administration of US President Donald Trump said it should be allowed to deport noncitizens over involvement in pro-Palestinian activism. But in the vast majority of visa revocations, colleges have said there is no indication affected students had a role in protests.

OPT programme hopes unravel

The United States issues the bulk of its foreign skilled worker



India has surpassed China to become the country sending the most international students to the United States

visas (H-1B) to students from India, many of whom are drawn to the US because of OPT (Optional Practical Training) programmes in STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics). OPTs allow graduates to remain in the US for an additional two years after completing their studies.

One Indian student on a STEM OPT, who was recently approved for an H-1B visa, told DW he was arrested 'while helping out an injured friend because he could not drive'.

He explained that he was

charged with driving under the influence in January, but pointed out that he was not convicted. After searching for a job for more than two years, he finally received an offer letter, but lost it because his visa had been revoked.

"I took out a massive loan to study in the US which I still have to repay. I worked hard for four years and I am at a stage of settling down. If I lose all of this over a mistake, then what is the point?" he said. "What am I supposed to tell my aging parents back home?"

Students scrambling for help

The visa crackdown, widely seen as part of Trump's immigration agenda, is fuelling anxiety among Indian students hoping to study in the US.

The speed and scope of the federal government's efforts to terminate the legal status of international students have stunned colleges and universities across the US.

The US Department of Homeland Security has terminated the visas of 22 international students at the University

of Michigan, according to a statement issued earlier this month.

The university has 'reached out to affected individuals who ... are required to leave the country immediately. We are working closely with offices, colleges and schools from across the university, to ensure the impacted individuals understand their options and have access to resources', the statement said.

"For the last two weeks, we are tirelessly working to help the students," said Ravi Lothumalla, a US-based education consul-

tant who is also counselling Indian students on their student visa revocations and helping them connect with lawyers.

Chand Parvathaneni, a Texas-based immigration attorney, whose firm has consulted nearly 40 students facing visa revocations, noted that 'most of these cases are of minor violation charges'.

He said many charges don't warrant deportation and don't imply guilt, noting that, 'the government has not given the students a chance to respond back'. DW

Alert on surge in booking scams targeting pilgrims

New Delhi, India - In a nationwide alert, the Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C), under the Ministry of Home Affairs, on Saturday warned the public about a sharp rise in online booking frauds, particularly those preying on religious pilgrims and unsuspecting tourists.

The cyber frauds are being executed through convincing yet fake websites, social media pages, WhatsApp accounts, and even sponsored advertisements on major platforms like Google and Facebook.

"The I4C has alerted the public about online booking frauds, especially those targeting religious pilgrims and tourists across the country. These frauds are being perpe-



trated through fake websites, deceptive social media pages, Facebook posts, and paid advertisements on search engines like Google," MHA informed through a statement.

According to I4C, these scams typically lure victims with offers like helicopter book-

ings for Kedarnath and the Char Dham yatra, guest house and hotel accommodations, online cab or taxi services, and religious holiday packages.

While the websites and profiles appear legitimate, users who make payments often receive no confirmation

or service, and are unable to contact the service providers afterwards.

To protect citizens, I4C urged the public to remain vigilant; verify the authenticity of websites before making any payments; be cautious of clicking on sponsored or unfamiliar links on Google, Facebook, or WhatsApp, use only official government websites or trusted travel agencies for bookings; report suspicious sites via the National Cybercrime Reporting Portal (www.cybercrime.gov.in) or call 1930 in case of fraud.

To tackle the menace, I4C is employing a multi-pronged strategy like scam signal exchange to flag and remove suspicious content. ANI

SURYA KIRAN SHOW ENTHRALS STUDENTS



Indian Air Force's Surya Kiran Aerobatic Team (SKAT) enthrals the students by performing during an air show, at Namkum Army Ground in Ranchi on Saturday (ANI)

PM Narendra Modi to visit Saudi Arabia this week, first in his 3rd term

New Delhi, India - Prime Minister Narendra Modi will embark on a visit to Saudi Arabia this week at the invitation of Prince Mohammed bin Salman, Crown Prince and Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

According to the Ministry of External Affairs, the upcoming April 22-23 visit will be the first visit of the Prime Minister to the country in his third term.

Previously, he has travelled to the Saudi kingdom twice in 2016 and in 2019.

The visit follows the State Visit of Mohammed bin Salman to New Delhi in September 2023 to attend the G20 Summit and co-chair the first meeting of the India-Saudi Arabia Strategic Partnership Council.

India and Saudi Arabia share



This file photo shows PM Narendra Modi and Crown Prince of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, at Hyderabad House in New Delhi on September 11, 2023 (ANI)

close and friendly ties with a long history of socio-cultural and trade contacts. As strategic

partners, the two countries share strong bilateral relations across various areas, including

political, defence, security, trade, investment, energy, technology, health, education, cul-

ture and people-to-people ties.

India's relations with the Kingdom have evolved into a stronger and enduring partnership in the past decade, expanding into many strategic domains, with growing investment commitments, broadening of defence cooperation and intensive high-level exchanges across sectors, the MEA statement said.

The visit of PM Modi reflects the importance India attaches to its bilateral relationship with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

It will provide an opportunity to further deepen and strengthen multi-faceted partnership, as well as to exchange views on various regional and international issues of mutual interest, according to the MEA.

The visit follows the one by Mohammed bin Salman to India in September 2023 to attend the G20 Summit and the first meeting of the Strategic Partnership Council

The Prime Minister's upcoming visit comes at a time when the US and Iran are holding talks with Washington seeking a deal on the latter's nuclear programme and tensions in West Asia with the Hamas-Israeli

conflict.

PM Modi's visit also comes ahead of the expected visit of US President Donald Trump to Saudi Arabia next month.

India and Saudi Arabia established diplomatic relations in 1947. In 2010, the bilateral relationship was elevated to a Strategic Partnership.

There have been regular high-level exchanges between India and Saudi Arabia. Beginning 2024-till date, there have been 11 Ministerial-level visits from India to Saudi Arabia from India to Saudi Arabia from India to Saudi Arabia. Saudi Foreign Minister and Saudi Minister of Industry and Mineral Resources visited India in November 2024 and February 2025 respectively.

ANI

OMAN'S AL MAZRUI, SOOMAR DELIGHTED TO COMPETE IN QATAR

Experienced co-drivers show their mettle in Qatar Off-Road Championship

Muscat - Omani co-drivers Mohammed al Mazrui and Taha Soomar were happy to compete at the the Qatar Off-Road Championship.

While Al Mazrui was in the co-driver seat with Emirati driver Noura al Jassasi in a Can-Am Mavericks T2, Taha Soomar partnered with Qatar's Ahmed Al Mohannadi.

Al Mazrui has extensive experience as a navigator on the roads and stages of the Gulf rallies, having been an assistant and navigator for many Omani competitors in the Sultanate's rallies and the Middle East rallies in Qatar, Jordan and across the region.

"I am happy to participate in the Qatar off-road Rally," said Al Mazrui. The Qatar Rally is not new to me, and I have participated in many events here, especially the Middle East Championship. I have good experience in the local stages.

Al Mazrui partnered with driver Zakaria Al Amari in the Qatar International Rally 2025, where they were able to lead the Group (N) category in a Subaru Impreza. Al Mazrui, who also has extensive experience with Can-Am cars as a driver and navigator, seeks to achieve a distinctive result in his first participation



Mohammed al Mazrui (L) and Taha Soomar



I am happy to participate in the Qatar off-road Rally. The Qatar Rally is not new to me, and I have participated in many events here, especially Middle East Championship

MOHAMMED AL MAZRUI

with the Al Jassasi.

The vast experience of the other navigator, Taha Soomar, in international participations with various drivers will also play a vital role in leading his team towards the appropriate tracks in the rally and achieving the first places if possible. Soomar has

LaLiga to have five teams in 2025-26 Champions League

Madrid, Spain - Spain's LaLiga will be represented by at least five teams in the Champions League next season after Italy's Lazio were eliminated from the Europa League on Thursday while Athletic Bilbao progressed to the semi-finals.

LaLiga earned the second of two European Performance Spots handed out by UEFA, which go to associations "with the best collective performance by

England's Premier League was the first to secure an extra berth in Europe's top competition

their clubs" in UEFA competitions.

England's Premier League was the first to secure an extra berth in Europe's top competition, on top of the four granted to the top four teams in the domestic table.

Villarreal are fifth in the LaLiga standings, with 51 points from 30 matches.

They are three points ahead of sixth-placed Real Betis and eight in front of Celta Vigo and Mallorca, with all three clubs having played one more game than Villarreal.



Lionel Messi

No comparison: Messi dismisses Argentina-Mexico rivalry

Miami, US - Lionel Messi has poured cold water on the idea of a heated rivalry between Argentina and Mexico, saying that the alleged tensions between the teams simply do not exist.

Video footage of an incident in the dressing room after the Mexico v Argentina group match at the 2022 Qatar World Cup appeared to show Messi nudging Mexico captain Andres Guardado's jersey, sparking a media storm.

"They put themselves in a po-

sition of having a rivalry with us that doesn't really exist," Messi told Simplemente Futbol.

"There is no comparison between Argentina and Mexico and I don't know where it comes from."

Messi insisted his relationship with the country remained positive.

"I've always felt very loved by the Mexican people, I've never disrespected anyone," he said.

The eight-times Ballon d'Or winner recalled his decisive goal

against Mexico in Qatar, describing it as a huge relief that revitalised his team's campaign on a day when the Mexican supporters dominated the stands.

"The goal I enjoyed the most in Qatar was the one against Mexico. Not because of the fans, far from it. It was a huge relief and gave us the chance to be ourselves again," said Messi, who has scored four goals against Mexico since 2006 and never lost to them in six meetings.

Humanoid robots compete with humans in Beijing half-marathon

BEIJING, China - Twenty-one humanoid robots joined thousands of runners at the Yizhuang half-marathon in Beijing on Saturday, the first time these machines have raced alongside humans over a 21-km (13-mile) course.

The robots from Chinese manufacturers such as DroidVP and Noetix Robotics came in all shapes and sizes, some shorter than 120 cm (3.9 ft), others as tall as 1.8 m (5.9 ft). One company boasted that its robot looked almost human, with feminine features and the ability to wink and smile.

Some firms tested their robots for weeks before the race. Beijing officials have described the event as more akin to a race car competition, given the need for engineering and navigation teams.

"The robots are running very well, very stable ... I feel I'm witnessing the evolution of robots and AI," said spectator He Sishu, who works in artificial intelli-



Tiangong Ultra, from the Beijing Innovation Center of Human Robotics, won the humanoid robot half-marathon title with a time of 2h40m

gence.

The robots were accompanied by human trainers, some of whom had to physically support the machines during the race.

A few of the robots wore running shoes, with one donning boxing gloves and another wearing a red headband with the words

two state-owned enterprises, while tech giant Xiaomi's robotics arm and leading Chinese humanoid robot firm UBTECH have equal share in the rest.

Tang Jian, chief technology officer for the robotics centre, said Tiangong Ultra's performance was aided by long legs and an algorithm allowing it to imitate how humans run a marathon.

"I don't want to boast but I think no other robotics firms in the West have matched Tiangong's sporting achievements," Tang said, adding that the robot switched batteries just three times during the race.

Some robots, like Tiangong Ultra, completed the race, while others struggled from the beginning. One robot fell at the starting line and lay flat for a few minutes before getting up and taking off. One crashed into a railing after running a few metres, causing its human operator to fall over.

Zverev beats Griekspoor to reach Munich semifinals

Munich, Germany - Home favourite Alexander Zverev rallied for a 6-7 (6), 7-6 (3), 6-4 quarterfinal win Friday against Dutchman Tallon Griekspoor at the BMW Open in Munich, Germany.

Griekspoor served for the match at 5-4 in the second set before the top-seeded Zverev dug deep to finish in 3 hours and 14 minutes.

Closing in on his third Munich title, Zverev's opponent in Saturday's semifinal will be unseeded Hungarian Fabian Marozsan, a 6-3, 7-6 (4) winner over Belgium's Zizou Bergs.

The other semifinal pits No. 2 seed Ben Shelton against No. 5 Francisco Cerundolo of Argentina. Shelton struck seven aces and never faced a break point in a 6-4, 6-3 defeat of Italy's Luciano Darderi. Cerundolo moved on with a 6-2, 6-4

victory against Belgium's David Goffin.

Meanwhile in Spain, top-seeded Carlos Alcaraz moved closer to his third Barcelona title with a 7-5, 6-3 quarterfinal win against No. 5 seed Alex de Minaur of Australia.

Alcaraz fell behind 3-1 in the opening set before finding his form and advancing to the semifinals against seventh-seeded Frenchman Arthur Fils, who had a 2-0 lead over Stefanos Tsitsipas when the third-seeded Greek retired due to an injury.

No. 6 seed Holger Rune of Denmark and unseeded Russian Karen Khachanov meet in the other semifinal. Rune took down No. 2 Casper Ruud of Norway 6-4, 6-2 and Khachanov advanced with a 6-4, 7-5 victory against Spain's Alejandro Davidovich Fokina.



Marcus Thuram

Big blow for Inter Milan as Thuram suffers thigh injury

Milan, Italy - Inter Milan striker Marcus Thuram has a thigh injury, the Serie A leaders said on Friday as they wait to see if he can recover in time for their Coppa Italia semifinal against AC Milan next week.

The Frenchman, Inter's top scorer in Serie A with 14 goals, is likely to miss Sunday's Serie A match at fifth-placed Bologna, Italian media reported as the club confirmed Thuram underwent medical tests this morning.

"The tests revealed fatigue in the adductor muscles of his left thigh. His condition will be assessed day by day," Inter said in a statement.

Champions Inter lead the Italian top-flight standings on 71 points after 32 games, three

ahead of Napoli.

They host Milan in the second leg of their Italian Cup semi-final on Wednesday, after the first leg ended in a 1-1 draw.

Inter, one of eight teams who have won a league, cup and European Cup treble, could repeat the feat this season.

They face Barcelona, another treble-winning side, in the Champions League semifinals after advancing to the last four of Europe's elite club competition with a 4-3 aggregate win over Bayern Munich.

Thuram, who has started 26 league games and missed only one this season, recently dropped out of the France squad due to an ankle injury.

CITY IN NICO TIME

O'Reilly's late goal helps Pep Guardiola's side beat Everton

Liverpool, England - Manchester City moved a step closer to Champions League football next season as Nico O'Reilly and Mateo Kovacic scored in the final five minutes to secure a 2-0 win over Everton in their Premier League clash at Goodison Park on Saturday.

City move up to fourth with 58 points from 33 matches, four points ahead of sixth-placed Chelsea and Aston Villa in seventh, but they have played a game more. The top five qualify for the Champions League next season.

O'Reilly stabbed the ball home from four metres after connecting with Matheus Nunes's low cross before Kovacic drilled in the second from the edge of the box to make sure of the win.

It was hard work for City for 85 minutes as they battled to create clear-cut chances, while home defender James Tarkowski struck the post with a header from a corner in the first half for Everton, who remain 13th with 38 points from 33 games.

There will be relief for City manager Pep Guardiola as his side came up against the fired-up hosts in a hostile atmosphere in the third-last league game at the famous old ground before Everton move to a new stadium on the banks of the River Mersey.

The home side had their moments and their manager David Moyes can take some positives out of the game but, as has been the case for much of the season, Everton lacked quality in the final



Manchester City's Nico O'Reilly scores against Everton on Saturday

third to punish their opponents.

They came closest in the first half when Tarkowski struck the post with a header from a corner, before Jake O'Brien headed off the line to keep out Kevin De Bruyne's goal-bound shot.

City goalkeeper Stefan Ortega made a superb point-blank save to stop Jarrad Branthwaite's header as Everton made a bright start to the second period.

But they lost Tarkowski to injury in the 52nd minute, with the centre back having started every Premier League game since his arrival on Merseyside, a run of 109 in a row, and after that the best chances fell to City.

Forward Omar Marmoush could not capitalise on Everton substitute Michael Keane's error when the latter tried to head the ball back to Jordan Pickford, as

the keeper came out smartly to smother the Egyptian's shot.

But the visitors tightened their grip on the game in the closing stages and once O'Reilly opened the scoring the fight went out of the home side.

Meanwhile, Brentford recorded their first home Premier

League win since December with a 4-2 win over Brighton, who had Joao Pedro sent off and also had Jan Paul van Hecke stretchered off with a head injury.

Bryan Mbeumo was the man at the heart of the victory for the Bees, scoring two and setting up Yoane Wissa for another.

There will be relief for City manager Pep Guardiola as his side came up against the fired-up hosts in the third-last league game at the famous old ground

Amorim to fast track youngsters in Premier League

Manchester, England - Manchester United boss Ruben Amorim will fast track his younger players by giving them more game time in the Premier League as they focus on the Europa League - their last hope of qualifying for the Champions League next season.

United are 14th in the Premier League, 17 points from the top five, but advanced to the semi-finals of the Europa League on Thursday with a sensational 7-6 aggregate victory over Olympique Lyonnais.

Amorim has already used de-



Manchester United manager Ruben Amorim celebrates their win against Olympique Lyonnais in the Europa League on Thursday

fenders Harry Amass and Ayden Heaven, both 18, in several games this season while 17-year-old forward Chido Obi has made three appearances.

All three players are now set to play more minutes in the Premier League as Amorim looks to win the Europa League title that will give them a direct ticket to next season's Champions League.

"It's not the best moment or the best season to put some kids to play because they need a strong base to really show what they can do. But in this moment

we need to do it, sometimes you have surprises," Amorim told reporters.

"Ayden just played and I can be honest, we did it because we had injuries in that moment. But today, I think Ayden is my player so when he is ready and facing the competition in the team, he is ready to play.

"Amass did really well (against Lyon). Chido, when he played, he played quite well. It's a difficult moment, it's not the right moment for the kids to play, but if we have to do it we will do it."

It's time to go: Maresca rallies Chelsea for Champions League push

London, England - Chelsea's players must embrace the pressure they are under and make the most of the few matches they have left to turn around their season, manager Enzo Maresca said ahead of a Premier League meeting with rivals Fulham on Sunday.

Maresca's side, seeking to return to the Champions League after two dismal seasons, have fallen to sixth place in the league

standings after disappointing draws with Brentford and relegation-threatened Ipswich Town.

The London club also suffered a shock 2-1 defeat to Polish side Legia Warsaw in the second leg of their Europa Conference League tie on Thursday, but advanced to the semi-finals of the competition with a 4-2 aggregate win.

Asked if it was a bad time for



Enzo Maresca

Chelsea to be playing Fulham in a derby, Maresca told reporters: "No, in this moment, there is no bad time. In this moment, there is only a right time to play any game.

"We have six Premier League games, plus the two Conference League semi-final games. So at the moment, we have eight official games to play, and all of them, it's a good time to play.

"It's all important. We cannot decide in which moment. Now is the moment to go if we want to reach something."

Chelsea have been lacking in firepower in recent weeks with attackers Cole Palmer and Nicolas Jackson both enduring extended goal droughts.

Maresca said the club will only be able to finish in the top five if the duo can rediscover their form.

‘Win against Real tells us we can compete against any opposition’

London, England - Arsenal's superb performances against Real Madrid prove they can compete against the best but manager Mikel Arteta said on Friday that they had little time to celebrate as they look to delay Liverpool's coronation as Premier League champions.

Arsenal beat Real Madrid in both quarter-final legs to advance 5-1 on aggregate but the achievement of reaching a first Champions League semi-final since 2009 could lose its sheen if they suffer defeat at Ipswich Town on Sunday.

With a 13-point lead and six games left, Liverpool need two wins to clinch a second Premier League title but can lift the trophy this weekend if Arsenal lose and Arne Slot's side beat Leicester City.

"We'll make sure that we win the game and that doesn't happen," a smiling Arteta told reporters.

"For a short period of time, we had a lot of happy faces around the club, but immediately you have to switch it off and focus on Ipswich in the Premier League.

"(The victory over Real tells us) we can compete in any context against any opposition. Now the next step is consistency."

While reeling in Liverpool seems almost impossible, Arsenal will also be looking over their shoulder with third-placed Newcastle United now four points behind them.

Ipswich, on the other hand, are desperate for a victory with relegation almost certain for the team

t h a t earned back-to-back promotions.

Kieran McKenna's side are 18th in the standings, 14 points from the safety zone.

"I understand where they are at the moment and they're playing at home. It's one of the few chances they have (to survive)," Arteta said.

"For us it's a big game, we need to win matches in the Premier League to maintain the position we are in and to push into the last few games with some hope.

"We know how tough it's going to be, they are very well organised. What Kieran and his staff have done is remarkable."

Earlier, Arteta said his side's big win over Real can boost the club's appeal to top targets in the close season transfer window.

Arteta has been keen to sign a striker since January, though stand-in centre forward Mikel Merino has impressed. Arsenal have so far been linked with Sporting's

For a short period of time, we had a lot of happy faces around the club, but immediately you have to switch it off and focus on Ipswich

MIKEL ARTETA



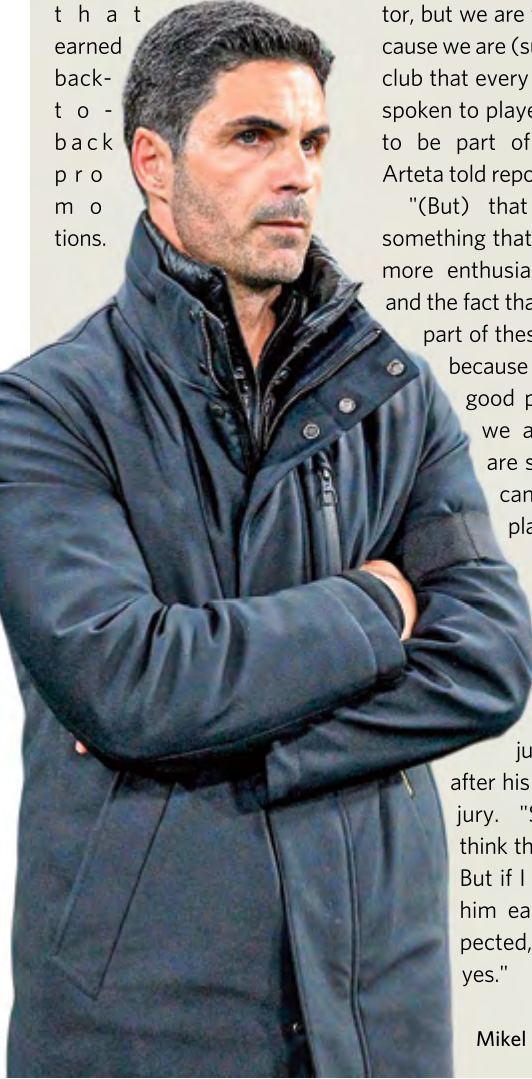
Viktor Gyokeres, RB Leipzig's Benjamin Sesko and Athletic Bilbao's Nico Williams.

"Maybe that is another factor, but we are very lucky because we are (such) a football club that every time we have spoken to players, they want to be part of (our club)," Arteta told reporters.

"(But) that is probably something that can generate more enthusiasm or belief, and the fact that 'I want to be part of these nights now' because the club is in a good place. Overall, we are ready, we are strong and we can attract any player."

Arteta also hinted forward Kai Havertz's season may not be over, just two months after his hamstring injury. "Semifinals? I think that's too close. But if I had to bet on him earlier than expected, I would say yes."

Mikel Arteta



Manor Solomon scored the winner as Leeds United returned to the summit with a 1-0 win at Oxford United

Leeds, Burnley close in on return to Premier League

Watford, England - Leeds United and Burnley both took a massive step towards a return to the Premier League with narrow victories on Friday as the Championship season reaches an enthralling climax.

Burnley briefly topped the standings after a 2-1 victory over Watford before Leeds returned to the summit thanks to a 1-0 win at Oxford United.

With three games left, both teams could wrap up automatic promotion on Monday.

Leeds forward Manor Solomon scored what turned out

to be the winner after 33 minutes, blasting a shot into the roof of the net from close range after a Jayden Bogle pass.

Burnley fell behind at Watford but Zian Flemming equalised and Josh Brownhill's second-half strike secured the points against a Watford side who ended with nine men after Moussa Sissoko and Edo Kayembe were sent off.

Burnley are now unbeaten in 30 league games.

Leeds have 91 points from 43 matches, level with Burnley but with a superior goal difference.

Third-placed Sheffield United

kept alive their hopes of automatic promotion with a 2-0 home win over relegation-threatened Cardiff City to move on to 86 points.

If Leeds beat Stoke City on Monday and Burnley defeat Sheffield United, both will secure promotion to the top flight.

"It's a massive three points for us. We knew the challenge coming here; a good side, a physical team and that was proven today," Burnley manager Scott Parker said.

"I was pleased with our mentality and our calmness in that

moment, really, because I think anyone in the stadium could see the game became very, very physical."

Watford went ahead in the eighth minute when Rocco Vata's swerving cross was nodded home by Mamadou Doumbia.

Burnley replied on the stroke of halftime after a rapid counter-attack was finished off by Flemming's diving header.

Burnley dialled up the pressure after the interval and grabbed the winner in the 58th minute through Brownhill's close-range header.



BUTTLER TURNS SHOWSTOPPER

England batsman bosses the chase to power Gujarat to the top

Ahmedabad, India - It got tight for Gujarat Titans (GT) in the end, but Jos Buttler's unbeaten 97 ensured their first successful chase of a 200-plus total in Ahmedabad. It was also the first time Delhi Capitals (DC) ended up being unsuccessful in defending a 200-plus total.

Buttler stitched partnerships of 60 with B Sai Sudharsan and 119 with Sherfane Rutherford after keeping wicket for 20 overs on a hot afternoon.

Mukesh Kumar's wide yorker dismissed Rutherford and left GT needing ten off the final over. The tension was short-lived as Mitchell Starc missed the wide yorker and Rahul Tewatia slog swept the first ball of the last over over midwicket for six. He then squeezed the next ball past the keeper for four to complete the chase with four balls to spare.

Buttler takes down Starc
Buttler was hit on the groin early in his innings by a length ball from Starc, but he overcame that blow and cleared the bound-

aries.
When Axar Patel brought Starc back in the 15th over, hoping for reverse swing from around the wicket, there wasn't any. The lengths were good, and the line was outside off, but Buttler scythed the ball with ease, finding gaps in front of and behind point.

A change of angle made no difference. Starc went full and was driven through mid-off. A bouncer drew a top-edged pull, but it did not carry to Vipraj Nigam running in from deep backward square leg. That 20-run over brought the required rate down to nine from 11.

GT are top heavy. Their plan is for one of the top three to bat deep into the innings, and it was Buttler's turn today on a batting-friendly pitch.

He came in early in GT's chase of 204 after Shubman Gill had gifted his wicket looking to pinch a quick single to Karun Nair at midwicket. Buttler then set up exhibition of fours through the off side alongside Sai Sudharsan.

Axar and Vipraj came on to bowl in the powerplay but did not find turn and were taken for three sixes and a four. Sai Sudharsan got boundaries off front and back foot against Mukesh Kumar as GT scored 67 in the powerplay.

Kuldeep Yadav had Sai Sudharsan pulling to deep midwicket with his third ball. Rutherford then started slowly as the required rate rose. The mounting pressure was released when Rutherford sliced a drive against Kuldeep that sailed over long-off. Mohit Sharma was introduced in the 13th over to replicate the role he performed for GT in previous years. He started with two slower bouncers but they sat up and Rutherford pulled them for sixes.

Buttler drilled a full ball from Mohit through mid-off to bring up his 32-ball fifty.

Gill won the toss in the afternoon and put DC in to bat. With Faf du Plessis not having recovered and DC leaving out Jake Fraser-McGurk, DC paired up Abhishek Porel with Karun Nair at the top.

Porel's boundaries in the first over - drive on the up over mid-off and help-along flick behind



Jos Buttler scored an unbeaten 97 off 54 balls to steer Gujarat Titans home

TODAY'S MATCHES

MATCH 37

2 PM



PUNJAB KINGS
VS
ROYAL CHALLENGERS BANGALORE

MATCH 38

6 PM



MUMBAI INDIANS
VS
CHENNAI SUPER KINGS

square - showed that the bounce on the pitch was even. Porel, though, couldn't capitalise on the start as he fell to a full toss from Arshad Khan.

KL Rahul's shift in approach then kept DC ticking. Rahul cut Siraj for four and pumped him down the ground for six. His innings, though, was cut short on 28 off 14 balls by an outswinging yorker from Prasidh Krishna. Nair fell for 31 off 18 balls when he glided Prasidh to deep third.

A pristine cover drive from Tristan Stubbs off Prasidh brought up DC's hundred in the ninth over. But he and Axar were relatively sedate after that during their 53-run stand off 36 balls.

Wadhera helps Punjab beat Bengaluru in low-scoring thriller

Bengaluru, India - Horror for the batters, fantasy for the bowlers - it was a mash-up of genres at the M Chinnaswamy Stadium on Friday night and it kept the viewer guessing. The climax went the way of Punjab Kings (PBKS) thanks to Nehal Wadhera's sparkling unbeaten 33 off 19 balls. The heavy lifting, though, was done by their bowlers after Shreyas Iyer won the toss and put Royal Challengers Bengaluru (RCB) in to bat in the rain-affected 14-overs-a-side affair.

Arshdeep Singh bowled consistent lengths, Yuzvendra Chahal was back to looping the ball and looking for spin, and Marco Jansen used his height to good effect. Together, they reduced

RCB to 42 for 7. RCB could have been bowled out for under 49, their lowest total, but Tim David's 26-ball 50 not out ensured they nearly doubled that and that they weren't bowled out.

Josh Hazlewood made a modest chase of 96 tougher than it seemed on a pitch that offered steep bounce. PBKS might have feared being hit by a comeback similar to the one they delivered to Kolkata Knight Riders (KKR) three days ago, but they didn't rush the chase and were able to target bowlers in the end, which got them through.

After being asked bat and with not 20 overs to play with, RCB looked to get off to a positive start. Phil Salt drove the first ball



Nehal Wadhera

down the ground for four. Cross-batted and aerial shots were fraught with danger right from the start. Both Salt and Virat Kohli were out pulling, the former off a length ball and the latter to a shorter ball after walking down the pitch.

Arshdeep, who came into this game with two powerplay wickets this season, doubled his tally.

Rajat Patidar whipped Arshdeep and Xavier Bartlett for a four and a six over the leg side, while Liam Livingstone looked to end the four-over powerplay on a high. He charged at Bartlett and was out trying to slap a length ball, with Priyansh Arya running back from cover point to take the catch.

RCB's were reduced to 26 for 3. Jitesh Sharma swung at Jansen but was beaten both times and, in the following over, Patidar top-edged a pull off Chahal which landed safely at midwicket. Jitesh wasn't as lucky next ball as he found deep backward square with a slog sweep.

Two balls later, Krunal Pandya was the third batter out on the pull. He couldn't extend his arms fully and feathered a shortish ball from Jansen onto his helmet and it popped right up for a caught and bowled. Chahal, who was back to slowing down his speeds and teasing the batter, struck again by looping the ball wide of Patidar's off stump and having him slash to long-off.



Abdul Samad of Lucknow Super Giants plays a shot en route to his 10-ball 30 against Rajasthan Royals. Samad hit four sixes and his late blitz helped Lucknow make 180 for 5 from their 20 overs

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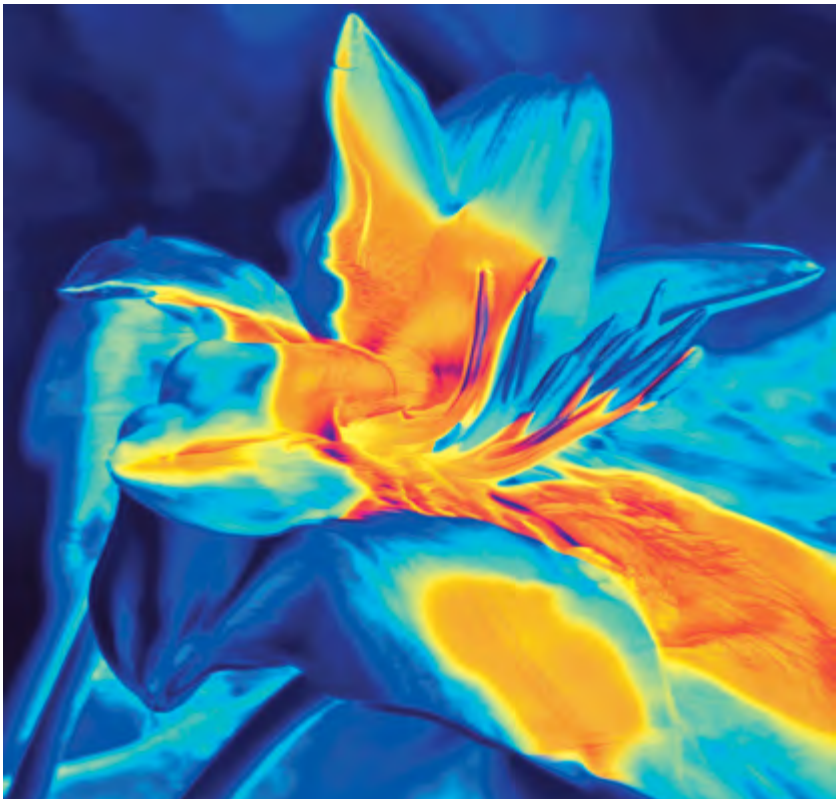
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The New Normal, 2025
(Courtesy: Y7)

ART DUBAI 2025

Art Dubai, the Middle East’s leading international art fair, which opened its 2025 edition on Friday, concludes today at Madinat Jumeirah. This year’s programme features over 120 gallery presentations drawn from 65 cities and five continents, alongside an ambitious programme of commissions and installations, talks and conferences, and special events



Peju Alatise, Headshot, 2024
(Courtesy: Rele London Gallery)

Creative conclave

Art Dubai, the leading commercial platform for art and artists from lesser-represented geographies since its foundation in 2007, has a unique model that is a catalyst and engine for the growth of Dubai’s cultural scene and creative economy.

Pablo del Val, Art Dubai’s artistic director, said, “Art Dubai’s programme continues to go from strength to strength. This year’s line-up reflects the rapid maturing of the cultural scene in the Gulf region. Dubai is a unique, global city, one which is home to communities and peoples from all over the world, with different languages and traditions and, as we approach our twentieth year, the fair has become the main platform and commercial marketplace for galleries and artists from these scenes and

International-regional participation

The 2025 edition of the fair sees continued strong representation from artists and art centres across the Middle East, the African continent, and West and South Asia. The continued expansion and development of Dubai’s cultural scene, and the city’s status as the Gulf region’s financial and commercial hub is also reflected in the number of Dubai-based exhibitors (over 20) and the growing number of Emirati, UAE and GCC-based artists showing at the fair.

Art Dubai is committed to placing untold regional art histories in dialogue with global art movements, and each year invites international academics and art historians to curate specific sections of the fair. Each year, Art Dubai invites esteemed international and regional curators to oversee specific sections of the fair.

Bawwaba exclusively features gallery presentations of artworks made in the past year or specifically for Art Dubai, presenting artists who hail from across the Global South. Bawwaba 2025 is curated by the writer and curator-at-large at Kunsthau Zürich, Mirjam Varadinis. Across her extensive curatorial career, many of Varadinis’s projects have addressed evolving formats of contemporary curating, asking the question ‘How can we imagine new forms of coexistence, both amongst people and with our planet?’. The section shows artists who reflect on their own displacement in our current climate, and imagine new models of living together.

Modern presentations

Art Dubai Modern features presentations by the region’s modern masters, reinforcing Art Dubai’s commitment to art historical research and under-explored art histories. The 2025 edition is curated by Magali Arriola and Nada Shabout and features nine presentations exploring common concerns and empathies between West Asia and North Africa. Highlights include important presentations by New Vision Group, Bertina Lopes, and Mehdi Moutashar. This year, for the first time, Art Dubai Modern expands its remit to include Latin America, with the inclusion of Venezuelan artist Dario Pérez Flores.

Art Dubai Digital is a unique curated section of Art Dubai that is dedicated to the pioneering artists, collectives, galleries and platforms who are shaping today’s digital art world. This year is the fourth edition and is curated by Gonzalo Herrero Delicado. It is entitled ‘After the Technological Sublime’ and features presentations that examine how artists and creative practitioners are working with advanced technologies – including artificial intelligence, virtual and augmented reality – to interrogate the key environmental, social and political challenges of our time.

Reflecting Dubai’s ongoing commitment to innovation and new technologies, Art Dubai Digital is complemented by an annual Digital Summit – presented in strategic partnership with Dubai Culture – that convenes international and local industry leaders to discuss and debate the expanding digital art ecosystem and Dubai’s unique place within it.

Commissions and installations

Since its foundation in 2007, Art Dubai has played an important institutional role in the growth of the local and regional cultural scenes, shaping and delivering high-impact cultural programming through long-term, year-round partnerships with institutions, business and government.

Art Dubai’s 2025 programme underscores the fair’s commitment to providing significant commissioning opportunities for local and international artists; convening the world’s brightest creative minds through innovative talks and conference programming; and supporting scholarship and professional development programmes to develop the region’s future cultural leaders.

Highlights of this year’s programme include a new series of performances and sculptural installations with Mexico-based artist Hector Zamora, inaugurating a new co-commissioning partnership between Art Dubai and Alserkal Avenue, a major new digital commission by Mohammed Kazem, presented by Julius Baer, and experiential installations by leading international artists including Breakfast, Ouchhhh Studio and Ania Soliman.

The programme a two-day Global Art Forum, commissioned by Shumon Basar and curated by Y7 under the title The New New Normal. Across two days and featuring many of the world’s foremost thinkers, technologists, artists, and forecasters, the programme examines how change keeps changing, often making everyday life feel more unsettling and unpredictable.



BREAKFAST (Courtesy: BREAKFAST Studio)

(L to R) Hala Khayat, Shumon Basar, Pablo del Val, Benedetta Ghione. (Photo by Cedric Ribeiro)



Ouchhhh Installation. (Photo by Cedric Ribeiro)



The fair has become the main platform and commercial marketplace for galleries and artists from these scenes and geographies. We are proud to champion these voices, supporting a more diverse and global art world

PABLO DEL VA

geographies. We are proud to champion these voices, supporting a more diverse and global art world.”

Held under the patronage of Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid al Maktoum, Vice President and Prime Minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai, the fair is held in partnership with ARM Holding and is sponsored by Swiss Wealth Manager Julius Baer. The Dubai Culture & Arts Authority (Dubai Culture) is the strategic partner of Art Dubai and Art Dubai Digital.

Exhibitors in Art Dubai’s Contemporary, Bawwaba, Modern and Digital sections number over 120 and have representation in more than 65 cities. The 2025 edition welcomes 30 first-time participants and the geographic breadth of the exhibitor line-up reflects Art Dubai’s role as a gateway for discovery, learning and exchange, as well as its ongoing commitment to showcasing art and artists from less-represented geographies.

Study of a Woman
in a White Cap,
Rembrandt van Rijn,
circa 1640



Young Woman
Seated at a Virginal,
Johannes Vermeer,
circa 1670-75 T



MASTERPIECES AT H'ART

LEIDEN COLLECTION

REMBRANDT'S STUNNING SKETCH OF A LION WILL BE SOLD AT AUCTION TO FUND WILDLIFE CONSERVATION EFFORTS. 'YOUNG LION RESTING' IS AMONG DOZENS OF DUTCH GOLDEN AGE ARTWORKS FROM THE LEIDEN COLLECTION THAT ARE NOW ON VIEW AT THE H'ART MUSEUM IN AMSTERDAM, THE NETHERLANDS



Self-Portrait with Shaded Eyes, Rembrandt van Rijn, 1634

A new exhibition in Amsterdam brings together 75 paintings from the Leiden Collection, a stunning assortment of art from the Dutch Golden Age.

Highlights of the show include 18 artworks by Rembrandt van Rijn, including a drawing of a lion that will be sold to fund wildlife conservation efforts.

The H'ART Museum's 'From Rembrandt to Vermeer, Masterpieces From the Leiden Collection' marks the first time that so many works from the Leiden Collection—including all 18 of its Rembrandts—have been publicly displayed in the Netherlands.

Owned by collectors Thomas and Daphne Kaplan, the more than 200 paintings and drawings represent one of the world's largest private collections of 17th-century Dutch art, according to a statement.

"The idea was born to bring all the Rembrandts from this remarkable collection to the Dutch capital in celebration of Amsterdam's 750th anniversary," Annabelle Birnie, the H'ART Museum's general director, disclosed.

"It is thanks to this special partnership [with the Leiden Collection] that we are able to share these masterpieces with the city and the Netherlands."

The Leiden Collection

Born in the Dutch city of Leiden in 1606, Rembrandt developed a reputation as one of the Netherlands' most famous artists during his lifetime. He's known for his dramatic treatment of light and shadows, particularly in group portraits like The Anatomy Lesson of Dr Nicolaes Tulp (1632) and The Night Watch (1642).

"The character and spirit of the Dutch people, as seen through

portraiture, constitutes a major component of this exhibition," says the museum in the statement. "One continually senses the indomitable spirit of the Dutch people as one walks through the show, not only when marveling at Rembrandt's formal portraits of wealthy burgers, but also when viewing his expressive tronies (character studies) of men and women from a range of social classes."

Rembrandt is also famous for his extensive collection of self-portraits, which were coveted by many collectors of his day. As Thomas Kaplan tells DutchNews, the Dutch master "painted probably more self-portraits than any other artist."

"It's not because he was an egomaniac. It's because he was a celebrity, and his portraits sold well," Kaplan adds. "If you had a self-portrait of Rembrandt on your wall, it was as iconic to someone from the Netherlands as having an Andy Warhol Campbell's Soup Can, or a Cy Twombly."

However, Rembrandt didn't only draw portraits - and sometimes he even drew animals. Young Lion Resting (1638-42), which is now on display at the H'ART, depicts a big cat lying down, wearing a leash around its neck. Its front paws are crossed, and its wide eyes face forward.

Young Lion Resting was the first Rembrandt work Kaplan purchased. Its subject is especially significant to the collector, who co-founded Panthera, an organisation dedicated to preserving seven species of big cats, in 2006. Next year, he plans to sell Young Lion Resting at auction and donate the proceeds to the organisation.

"Wildlife conservation is the one passion I have which surpasses Rembrandt - and I want to attract more people to that cause," he tells the Art Newspaper's Martin Bailey.

Rembrandt likely observed the lion at an Amsterdam menagerie - a travelling exhibition of animals brought from North Africa to the Netherlands on trading ships of the Dutch East India Company. The artist may have later used the animal's likeness in portraits of St Jerome, who is often depicted alongside a lion (as he supposedly removed a thorn from its paw).

As Kaplan says, 'Rembrandt gives a greater interior life to a cat than most artists can to a human.'

'From Rembrandt to Vermeer, Masterpieces From the Leiden Collection' will be on view at the H'ART Museum in Amsterdam through August 24, 2025.

(Courtesy: smithsonianmag.com)



Young Lion Resting, Rembrandt van Rijn, circa 1638-42

H M's Netherlands visit boosts Oman's position as global green hydrogen hub

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The agreements signed by the Sultanate of Oman, represented by OQ Group, during the state visit of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to the Netherlands mark a pivotal moment in consolidating Oman's position as a global hub for the production and export of green hydrogen, and as a strategic partner in enhancing global energy security.

The agreements, signed by OQ in collaboration with Hydrom, the Port of Duqm, and a number of prominent European partners, pave the way for the establishment of the world's first commercial corridor dedicated to liquid hydrogen. This corridor will link the Port of Duqm with the ports of Amsterdam and Duisburg in Europe, representing a major turning point in the global flow of green hydrogen.

Dr Firas al Abduwani, Director General of Renewable Energy and Hydrogen at the Ministry of Energy and Minerals, explained that cooperation between Oman and the Netherlands began with the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the two countries' energy ministries at COP27 in Sharm El-



The agreement for liquid hydrogen corridor represents a strategic step towards strengthening Oman's position as a major global exporter of green hydrogen

ENG ABDULAZIZ AL SHIDHANI

Sheikh, Egypt in 2022.

"The cooperation focuses on several key areas, most notably the possibility of establishing hydrogen transport corridors between the two countries, with the Netherlands serving as a key

gateway for supplying Western Europe with renewable energy. It also includes collaboration in areas critical to the development of the energy and hydrogen sectors," he said in a statement to Oman News Agency.

He added, "The signing of an MoU to establish a commercial corridor for transporting hydrogen from the area under development at the Port of Duqm to the Port of Amsterdam builds on the agreement signed at COP28,

which launched a preliminary study into the economic and technical feasibility of a green hydrogen corridor. That was followed by a study conducted by a specialised consultancy, culminating in the agreement we witnessed in the Netherlands."

Eng Abdulaziz al Shidhani, Managing Director of Hydrogen Oman (Hydrom), said that the hydrogen corridor represents a strategic step towards strengthening Oman's position as a major global exporter of green hydro-

gen. He said it effectively translates Oman's strategic goal of transforming its geographical location into a vital link between East and West in the clean energy market.

He further said, "The economic significance of the corridor lies in unlocking substantial investments across the entire value chain - from production and infrastructure to shipping and distribution. It will also stimulate the growth of related industries, create job opportunities, and enhance in-country value. Internationally, it serves as an integrated model for cross-border cooperation and strengthens confidence in Oman's capacity to deliver safe and sustainable energy solutions."

Shidhani emphasised that reaching this agreement at this particular time boosts global confidence in Oman's green hydrogen ecosystem, led by Hydrom, and adds momentum to the third round of bidding for green hydrogen blocks. It also highlights Oman's commitment to turning its announced plans into real, actionable partnerships and ongoing projects.

He noted that the timing sends a clear message to global markets that Oman is not pas-

sively waiting for change, but is actively working with partners to create a new reality grounded in investment clarity, institutional alignment, and national readiness.

Shidhani explained that the liquid hydrogen corridor between Oman and Europe provides demand clarity - a key factor in accelerating production. "When producers have a clear export route, committed operators, and known end-users, they are better positioned to fast-track investments and project development phases. The involvement of major international partners also eases access to financing and expedites the integration of local production with global markets."

He stressed that the corridor would serve as a direct catalyst for project implementation, enabling Oman to meet its hydrogen production targets by 2030. According to the approved timeline, the first shipment of liquid hydrogen from Oman is expected to be dispatched to Europe by 2029. Engineering studies are currently underway, alongside the development of central facilities at the Port of Duqm and coordination with European partners to ensure infrastructure readiness along the corridor.

ACME's Duqm green hydrogen project receives first tranche of \$500mn funding

Our Correspondent
Muscat

ACME Group, which is developing a green hydrogen and ammonia project in the Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD), announced that it has received the first tranche of over \$500mn in funding for its green hydrogen and ammonia project in Oman.

The financing reflects strong confidence from international financial institutions in the project's viability, as well as in the role played by SEZAD in attracting high-quality investments in green hydrogen and clean energy sectors.

In a press statement, Dr Saeed bin Khalifa al Quraini, Director General of the Investment Development Sector at the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ) and official spokesperson for the Authority, said that securing this funding for ACME's Duqm project highlights international confidence in the projects underway in the region and reinforces Duqm's appeal as an investment destination.

He added, "ACME's project is



ACME's green hydrogen and ammonia project has now entered the implementation phase, with contracts signed and purchase orders issued for the required equipment and technology

one of the strategic initiatives in the green hydrogen sector and marks the first of its kind in Oman to secure the necessary funding and sign a long-term off-take agreement. This strengthens Duqm's leadership in the green hydrogen industry and supports the national strategy to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050, along with the government's broader energy transition objectives."

The secured financing, combined with the previously signed

off-take agreement, provides a solid financial foundation for the ACME project's continuity and long-term market commitment. This will enable successful and timely execution as planned.

The ACME Group's project aims to produce clean, renewable energy aligned with Oman's vision of becoming a leader in sustainable energy and reducing carbon emissions. The project has now entered the implementation phase, with contracts signed and purchase orders is-

sued for the required equipment and technology. Work is currently in progress, in collaboration with contractors and technical service providers, to complete the necessary infrastructure, demonstrating the commitment to meet timelines and commence pilot production of green hydrogen as scheduled.

Gursharan Jassal, Country Manager for ACME in Oman, expressed his appreciation for this milestone, stating, "Receiving the first tranche of funding reflects the trust international institutions have in the success of this project. This is a significant step not only for ACME but for the entire green hydrogen sector in Oman."

He added, "Securing both the funding and the long-term off-take agreement represents a crucial step towards realising the global green hydrogen vision - not only for Oman but for the broader energy market. With the support of our partners and contractors, we are steadily progressing towards producing the first batch of green hydrogen by the first quarter of 2027, marking the dawn of a new era in sustainable energy."

Oman to host conference of regional energy regulators

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman is set to host the annual conference of the Regional Association of Energy Regulators (RAER) on May 5 and May 6, with the participation of more than 250 experts and representatives from international member organisations, alongside a number of academics and specialists from both within and outside the sultanate.

This marks the first time the conference is being held in the Middle East, underscoring Oman's growing prominence in the international energy sector and reflecting increasing global confidence in its regulatory and legislative framework - particularly amid the strategic transformations the country is undergoing towards sustainability and renewable energy.

The event will feature a series of specialised dialogue sessions and interactive workshops, bringing together leading experts and policymakers from around the world. Bilateral meetings will also be held to explore opportunities for joint cooperation and poten-



This conference marks a significant milestone in Oman's journey towards sustainable energy transformation

DR MANSOUR BIN TALIB AL HINAI

tial partnerships across various segments of the energy sector.

Key topics to be discussed include improving the efficiency of regulatory systems, encouraging investment in renewable energy, and assessing the impact of technological advancements on the future of energy. These discussions aim to reinforce the conference's status as an international reference point in the field.

In a statement to Oman News Agency, Dr Mansour bin Talib al Hinai, Chairman of the Authority for Public Services Regulation, said that hosting this event represents a strategic opportunity for Oman to showcase its ongoing efforts to advance the transition to clean energy and to highlight its investor-friendly regulatory environment in this critical sector. These efforts align with the goals of Oman Vision 2040, which places strong emphasis on sustainability and diversification of energy sources.

Dr Hinai added that the conference serves as an international platform for exchanging expertise and discussing the latest developments in energy regulatory policy. It contributes to enhancing integration among member states and underscores Oman's role in building a sustainable, innovation-driven economy.

He further noted that hosting the conference marks a significant milestone in Oman's journey towards sustainable energy transformation, especially in light of the country's commitment to achieving carbon neutrality by 2050.

Mashreq's \$500mn debut sukuk attracts strong demand despite volatile market conditions

Muscat - Mashreq, one of the leading financial institutions in the MENA region, successfully priced its debut \$500mn 5-year sukuk offering with a profit rate of 5.03% per annum on Tuesday. The sukuk will be rated A by S&P and will be listed on Euronext Dublin.

The transaction marks Mashreq's successful return to the debt capital markets, following its last issuance in 2024. Notably, it is also the first deal from the CEEMEA region since the announcement of US tariffs on international trade partners, which triggered heightened volatility across global markets.

Despite a challenging market backdrop, Mashreq made the strategic decision to proceed with a public issuance, becoming the first and only issuer in the CEEMEA region to access the market following the tariffs announcement on April 2. Demonstrating confidence and clarity, the bank announced a capped issuance size of \$500mn, firmly communicating to investors that the transaction "will not grow."

The market responded positively, with the sukuk attracting significant demand from a diverse investor base across Europe, Asia, and the Middle East. The orderbook peaked at \$2.9bn - the largest ever for a Mashreq issuance - representing an oversubscription of nearly six times and drawing interest from over 90 investors.

In a press release, Mashreq's Group Chief Executive Officer, Ahmed Abdelaal, said, "We are pleased with the strong investor engagement and support for this landmark transaction. Being the first public issuance in the CEEMEA region since the onset of the trade war and the subsequent market dislocation, this sukuk issuance underscores the depth of investor confidence in Mashreq's credit profile, strategy, and long-term fundamentals. The substantial over-

subscription, despite ongoing market volatility, is a testament to our standing with global investors and reinforces our disciplined approach to market execution. This successful outcome not only supports Mashreq's growth ambitions into 2025 and beyond but also helps re-open the debt capital markets for regional issuers seeking to re-enter with confidence."

Salman Hadi, Mashreq's Group Head of Treasury and Global Markets, who led the issuance, stated, "We had strong conviction in Mashreq's credit fundamentals, which gave us the confidence to move forward with the transaction despite challenging market conditions. This strategic timing allowed us to benefit from a clear issuance window, resulting in significant investor demand."



OMAN ENHANCES BUSINESS CLIMATE



MINISTRY OF COMMERCE, INDUSTRY AND INVESTMENT PROMOTION ADVANCES TRADE, INVESTMENT AND WORKFORCE GOALS AMID STEADY ECONOMIC GROWTH

Muscat - The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) convened its annual media briefing on April 17, 2025, under the theme “Partnering for Synergy”. The event, aimed at highlighting key achievements and future priorities, was attended by H E Qais bin Mohammed al Youssef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion; H E Dr Saleh bin Saeed Masan, Undersecretary for Commerce and Industry; H E Ibtisam bint Ahmed al Farooji, Undersecretary for Investment Promotion; and H E Pankaj Khimji, Advisor for Foreign Trade and International Cooperation. Senior officials from the Ministry, national media outlets, economists, and social media influencers were also present.

The Ministry reaffirmed its intention to develop a business ecosystem that supports knowledge-driven growth and private sector participation. “We continue to work with our partners to build an integrated, competitive and efficient business environment,” said H E Qais bin Mohammed al Youssef. The approach includes fostering investment, aligning with international best practices, and supporting the Sultanate’s sustainable development goals under Oman Vision 2040.

MoCIIP emphasised the importance of coordination with various stakeholders, including 15 government entities through the ‘Invest in Oman Hall’ and 17 others via the ‘Oman Business Platform’. It also facilitates data exchange with 35 bodies such as the ‘Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry’. Ten entities have activated the Compliance Register, while the Oman Export Gateway collaborates with seven public and private sector partners. Additionally, 25 institutions deliver services through Sanad Centres.

Efforts to tackle hidden trade practices are led by a national taskforce chaired by the Ministry and comprising the Royal Oman Police, Ministry of Labour, Ministry of Information, Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority, Consumer Protection Authority, Tax Authority, and Central Bank of Oman.



FOREIGN DIRECT INVESTMENT REACHED RO30.042BN BY END-2024, REFLECTING AN INCREASE OF RO4.583BN FROM Q4 OF 2023. THE OIL AND GAS SECTOR REMAINED DOMINANT, ATTRACTING 79.7% OF TOTAL FDI, FOLLOWED BY THE MANUFACTURING SECTOR AT 8.3%, FINANCIAL INTERMEDIATION AT 4.6%, AND REAL ESTATE, RENTAL AND BUSINESS ACTIVITIES AT 3.4%.

BUSINESS GROWTH AND INVESTMENT FIGURES

The Ministry reported that registered commercial records increased to 441,773 in 2024, up from 387,666 the previous year, indicating a growth of nearly 14%. Domestic trade contributed RO19.127bn to GDP in 2024, a rise from RO18.455bn in 2023, representing a 3.6% increase. Service-related activities accounted for approximately 46.5% of GDP.

Foreign direct investment reached RO30.042bn by end-2024, reflecting an increase of RO4.583bn from Q4 of 2023. The oil and gas sector remained dominant, attracting 79.7% of total FDI, followed by the manufacturing sector at 8.3%, financial intermediation at 4.6%, and real estate, rental

and business activities at 3.4%. The manufacturing sector alone received RO2.490bn in FDI.

Total trade exchange reached RO40.943bn in 2024, with merchandise exports accounting for RO24.230bn. Of this, oil and gas made up RO16.290bn, while non-oil exports and re-exports contributed RO6.232bn and RO1.708bn, respectively. The Ministry noted a broadening trade network that now includes the Gulf region, East Asia, Indian sub-continent, Africa, the United States, Europe, and China.

FIVE-YEAR ECONOMIC PROGRESS

MoCIIP presented a five-year comparison highlighting sustained expansion across trade, industrial and investment sectors.



IMATE AS FDI HITS R030BN IN 2024



Trade volumes rose from R023.111bn in 2020 to R040.943bn in 2024, a 15.4% increase. The trade sector's contribution to GDP rose from R02.627bn to R03.393bn, while the industrial sector's contribution increased from R06.034bn to R08.122bn. The investment sector showed the strongest growth, doubling from R014.261bn in 2020 to R030.042bn in 2024.

The number of registered commercial entities increased by 12% over the same period, from 280,793 in 2020 to 441,773 in 2024, reflecting expanding entrepreneurial activity and investor confidence.

TEJARAH CHANNEL FOR PUBLIC OUTREACH

To improve communication, the Ministry launched a new WhatsApp broadcast channel named "Tejarah". This one-way platform aims to provide timely updates on services, alerts, and policy changes. The channel will also be used for raising public awareness about initiatives and new announcements. Content shared will be exclusive to the Ministry, with no subscriber interaction.

SUPPORTING NATIONAL EMPLOYMENT

The Ministry reiterated its commitment to Omanisation through structured employment and training programmes. These are implemented in coordination with the National Employment Program, Ministry of Labour, academic institutions, and private firms.

In the second half of 2024, a total of 18,437 Omanis were employed in the wholesale and retail, construction, and manufacturing sectors. Of these, 8,710 were in construction, 3,407 in manufacturing, and 6,320 in wholesale and retail. By the first quarter of 2025, employment in these sectors rose to 10,891, indicating a 67.7% increase.

"The Ministry remains focused on creating sustainable job opportunities by enhancing national skills and partnering with industry leaders," said H E Dr Saleh bin

Saeed Masan.

MoCIIP confirmed it will continue supporting job creation across economic sectors through skill-building initiatives and strategic collaboration with private and educational sectors. These efforts are in line with the broader objectives of Oman Vision 2040 to empower the national workforce and ensure long-term economic resilience.

NAJD AGRICULTURAL ZONE GUIDE

The Ministry launched the Najd Agricultural Zone Guide, a comprehensive reference aimed at empowering investors by highlighting promising opportunities in the food security sector, particularly in Dhofar. The guide outlines the investment application process and seeks to create a conducive business environment for investors, farmers, and consumers. It is a joint initiative between MoCIIP, Invest in Oman, and the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources. The guide is aligned with Oman Vision 2040, supporting food security, sustainable agriculture, and private sector engagement.

ISHRAK PORTAL LAUNCHED

The Ministry also launched the Ishrak Portal to enhance investor engagement in shaping the regulatory landscape. Accessible via investoman.om/investor/ishrak, the platform allows investors to provide feedback on laws and regulations such as the Foreign Investment Law, thereby fostering transparency and improving the investment framework.

IMPLEMENTATION OF INITIATIVES IN 2024

In 2024, MoCIIP implemented 41 initiatives, completing 29 with a 100% success rate, and achieving an average performance rate of 70.7%. The Ministry has introduced 15 new initiatives for 2025 in key sectors such as trade, investment promotion, metrology, and standards. Key initiatives include the Investment Dashboard, Economic Events Calendar, Foreign Capital Law Evaluation, and the establishment of the Omani Accreditation Center.

1ST EDITION OF ADVANTAGE OMAN FORUM

Invest in Oman announced the inaugural Advantage Oman Forum scheduled for April 27-28, 2025, at the St. Regis Al Mouj Muscat. The forum will convene GCC officials and international investors to discuss global investment trends and highlight Oman's sectoral opportunities and incentives.

OMANI ACCREDITATION CENTER INITIATIVE

The Ministry confirmed the establishment of the Omani Accreditation Center to enhance trust in conformity assessment bodies, including labs and certification entities. It signed a framework agreement and implementation contract with the Gulf Accreditation Center to align with international accreditation standards and strengthen national technical capacities.

OMAN BUSINESS PLATFORM

The Oman Business Platform recorded 827,129 transactions in 2024, marking a 15.1% rise over 2023. Since April 2021, over 1.16mn automatic licences have been issued. The number of liquidation and cancellation requests in 2024 surged to 16,718, a 72.9% increase compared to 2023.

TRADEMARKS, PATENTS, AND INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY

In 2024, the Ministry received 12,675 IP-related applications, including 11,602 trademark applications and 855 patent filings, reflecting a 12.6% decrease from 2023.

DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

MoCIIP underscored the impact of digital platforms like the Oman Business Platform, Invest in Oman, Hazm, Maroof, Made in Oman, and Oman Exports in boosting service efficiency, easing customs procedures, and supporting e-commerce and export development.

COMBATING HIDDEN TRADE

The National Team for Combating Hidden

Trade, led by the Ministry, began implementation in Muscat, Dhofar, and North Al Batinah. The team audited 581 companies, issuing administrative commitments against 410 non-compliant entities. The initiative covers 106 activities, with provisions for exceptions in telecom, pharmacy, and dental sectors. Hidden trade violations can be reported via 80000070 or the Tajawob platform.

MANUFACTURING SECTOR OVERVIEW

The manufacturing sector contributed R04.149bn to GDP in 2024, with industrial activities comprising 19.8%. The Oman Business Platform processed 140,902 industrial licensing requests, 728 customs exemption requests, and 78,520 Certificates of Origin. There are currently 960 surveyed industrial units, with an Omanisation rate of 23.3% in the sector.

INVESTMENT ENVIRONMENT REFORMS

The Ministry has streamlined registration fees for foreign investors and mandated Omanisation compliance, requiring all foreign-owned companies to employ at least one Omani one year after establishment.

RAPID INTERVENTION WINDOW

The Rapid Intervention Window, launched in April 2024 via 80000222, provides swift support to investors facing procedural hurdles. A dedicated team ensures coordination with relevant agencies.

INVESTMENT OPPORTUNITIES

The Invest in Oman platform currently features 68 opportunities. Of the 90 investment projects under processing, 39 exceed R01bn in value. As of February 2025, 3,407 investors from over 60 countries have obtained residency cards through the Investor Residency Programme.

OMAN EXPORTS INITIATIVE

Oman Exports aims to boost non-oil exports and connect Omani companies with international markets through a digital platform offering advisory and support services for exporters, including SMEs.

NAZDAHIR PROGRAMME

The Nazdahir programme seeks to position the private sector as a key economic driver by improving the investment landscape and simplifying business procedures. It includes initiatives focused on enhancing private sector development, forging international partnerships, mapping strategic collaborations, and optimising benefits from global agreements. It also aims to strengthen value chains and improve Oman's performance in global competitiveness indices.

OMAN CENTER FOR STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS AND FOREIGN TRADE

The newly established Oman Center for Strategic Partnerships and Foreign Trade coordinates efforts to attract international partnerships and streamline foreign trade. The centre supports public and private sector initiatives, provides advisory services, and manages international economic cooperation in alignment with Vision 2040 objectives.

COMPETITION PROTECTION AND MONOPOLY PREVENTION

The Competition Protection and Monopoly Prevention Center reported a drop in harmful trade practices to just 14 cases over the last five years. In 2024 alone, it handled 169 cases, including 15 complaints and seven economic concentration requests. The Ministry is transitioning all related services to a digital platform and has launched public awareness campaigns. Oman has also signed cooperation agreements with several countries and organisations, including the WTO and EU, to adopt international best practices in competition regulation.

REGULATIONS AND LAWS

During the past year, the Ministry issued 7 decrees and regulations, including a ministerial decision to amend certain provisions of Ministerial Decision No. 209/2020, which defines the list of activities prohibited to foreign investment, restricting them to Omani investors only. The Ministry also issued regulations for the operation of activities related to the filling and sale of liquefied petroleum gas cylinders, the regulatory framework for inspection and calibration laboratories, a ministerial decision establishing principles for the governance of closed joint-stock companies, the Quality Mark regulation, and a ministerial decision determining the return on obtaining a commercial loan or debt.



Global economy likely to avoid recession despite tariffs: IMF

Doloresz Katanich

The Trump administration's sharp increases in duties have caused global uncertainty to spike, the IMF's Managing Director, Kristalina Georgieva, said. The import taxes will slow global growth, but not cause a world-wide recession, she added.

The world economy's resilience is being tested "by the reboot of the global trading system" that threatens to cause turbulence in financial markets, Georgieva said on Thursday.

That turbulence has been playing out in financial markets for weeks now, especially on Wall Street, which has experienced wild swings from day-to-day and often even hour-to-hour.

The IMF chief also echoed some Trump administration concerns. She called on countries to reduce their tariffs and lower other barriers to trade, a process that she said had stalled out in the past decade after making steady progress for many years after World War II.

"Trade distortions – tariff and nontariff barriers – have fed negative perceptions of a multilateral system seen to have failed to deliver a level playing field," she said. "This feeling of unfairness in some places feeds the narrative: we play by the rules while others game the system without



IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva

Surging US tariffs will weaken the global economy and push up inflation this year, according to the International Monetary Fund

penalty."

Georgieva added that tariffs cause uncertainty, which can be costly. Due to the complexity of supply chains, the cost of a single item can be affected by tariffs in

dozens of countries, she said.

Increased trade barriers also tend to immediately impact growth, and while it can lead to more domestic production, that takes time to implement, she

added.

In its most recent projections issued in January, the IMF forecast the world economy to grow nominally faster and for inflation to come down, though it warned that the outlook was clouded by President Donald Trump's policies, including tax cuts and increased tariffs on foreign imports.

The Washington-based lending

agency said at the time that it expected the world economy to grow 3.3% this year and next, up from 3.2% in 2024.

Global inflation, which had surged after the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted global supply chains and caused shortages and higher prices, was forecast to fall from 5.7% in 2024 to 4.2% this year and 3.5% in 2026.

However, in a blog post that accompanied those projections, the fund's chief economist, Pierre-Olivier Gourinchas, wrote that the policies Trump has promised to introduce "are likely to push inflation higher in the near term."

Those forecasts from January are expected to change – possibly significantly – as Trump's trade war has escalated in recent months, particularly with the US's biggest trade partner, China.

Trump has paused or pulled back on many of his tariff threats – leading to more volatility in the stock market – but has been in a tit-for-tat tariff battle with China and has shown no sign of backing down. Each time Trump has raised tariffs on China, Beijing has retaliated with tariffs on US imports.

The IMF will release the details of their global economic outlook on Tuesday.

(Source: Euronews.com)



China slams new US port fees, warns of harm to consumers

Beijing, China – China on Friday criticised the United States over newly imposed port fees, warning that the measures will ultimately hurt American consumers and disrupt global trade, according to state-run Global Times.

Port fees "raise global shipping costs, disrupt supply chain stability, and increase inflationary pressures in the US, ultimately harming American consumers and businesses, without revitalising the US shipbuilding industry," said Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Lin Jian.

Lin added that the tariffs on cargo-handling equipment "harm the interests of both others and itself," and called on Washington to "immediately cease its wrongdoings." He warned that Beijing will take "necessary measures to firmly safeguard its legitimate rights and interests."

The US announced new trade

measures Thursday targeting China's maritime, logistics, and shipbuilding industries, accusing Beijing of using unfair practices to dominate the global market.

"Ships and shipping are vital to American economic security and the free flow of commerce," said US Trade Representative Jamieson Greer.

"The Trump administration's actions will begin to reverse Chinese dominance, address threats to the US supply chain, and send a demand signal for US-built ships."

The actions, taken under Section 301 of the Trade Act of 1974, follow a year-long investigation by the Office of the US Trade Representative.

The second phase, set to begin in three years, will impose incremental restrictions over 22 years on transporting liquefied natural gas (LNG) using foreign-built vessels, in a bid to support US-built LNG carriers.

Anadolu Agency



ECB cuts interest rates as tariffs threaten economy

Frankfurt, Germany – The European Central Bank (ECB) has lowered its main interest rate by 0.25 percentage points, citing rising global trade tensions following US President Donald Trump's tariff policies, which have triggered a worldwide trade dispute.

In a statement on Thursday, the ECB said that while the 20 countries using the euro have built up "resilience against global shocks", the "outlook for economic growth has worsened due to increasing trade tensions".

The ECB is among several major financial institutions warning that tariffs could harm global economies, affecting both large corporations and ordinary consumers. Similar concerns have been raised by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Trade Organization (WTO), and US Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell.

Addressing journalists, ECB President Christine Lagarde said, "Disruptions to international trade, financial market tensions, and geopolitical uncertainty are weighing on business investment. As consumers grow more cautious about the future, they may reduce their spending."

The rate cut, which was widely anticipated, brings the ECB's benchmark rate down to

2.25%. This marks the seventh rate cut in the past year.

Yael Selfin, Chief Economist at consultancy firm KPMG, warned that the ongoing trade war – characterised by waves of new tariffs, temporary pauses, and delays – could lead to a backlog of goods as trade routes are disrupted.

"The fallout from these trade disruptions could create a global oversupply of manufactured products, pushing prices into deflationary territory this year," Selfin said.

In contrast, the US Federal Reserve kept its interest rates unchanged at its latest policy meeting in March. Chair Jerome Powell and other officials have indicated that ongoing trade uncertainty may delay any future rate changes.

Speaking in Chicago on Wednesday, Powell described President Trump's tariff measures as "very fundamental policy changes" and gave his most serious warning yet about their potential impact on the US economy – the largest in the world.

However, Lagarde publicly backed Powell during her press conference, stating: "I have a lot of respect for my esteemed colleague and friend Jay Powell."

Agencies

Trump calls for Fed chief's 'termination' over reluctance to cut interest rates

Diccon Hyatt

US President Donald Trump renewed his calls to dismiss Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell on Thursday, after the central banker signalled he was in no hurry to reduce borrowing costs – something Trump has long demanded.

Trump launched an attack on Powell via social media, following the Fed Chair's remarks on Wednesday suggesting that the former president's larger-than-expected tariffs could create a "challenging" situation for the Federal Reserve by slowing the economy while simultaneously driving up prices. Powell said officials at the central bank anticipate the import taxes imposed by Trump this month will push prices higher, and that they remain determined to prevent this bout of inflation from becoming prolonged.

"Powell's termination cannot come fast enough!" Trump wrote on Truth Social.

Trump's call for Powell's "termination" marked an escalation of his longstanding criticisms of the Fed Chair and his efforts to exert greater influence over the Federal Reserve, an institution that operates independently



A file photo shows US President Donald Trump with Fed Chair Jerome Powell

from the White House.

Trump has repeatedly pressured Powell and the Fed to cut the central bank's benchmark interest rate, which affects borrowing costs across various types of loans. The Fed has maintained interest rates at elevated levels since 2022, when it began hiking rates in an effort to slow the economy and rein in surging inflation.

The Fed is a unique government institution designed to be independent, enabling it to make monetary policy decisions based on economic reasoning rather than political motives.

Trump has tested that independence by threatening to remove Powell before his term ends in May 2026. Trump originally appointed Powell in 2018, and President Joe Biden reappointed him for another four-year term in 2022. During both of his terms in office, Trump has frequently criticised Powell and urged him to reduce interest rates. Lower rates could stimulate the economy – potentially benefiting Trump politically – although they risk fuelling inflation in the longer term.

Any move to remove Powell would mark a reversal for

Trump's call for Jerome Powell's 'termination' marked an escalation of his longstanding criticisms of the Fed Chair and his efforts to exert greater influence over the Federal Reserve

Trump, who said in December that he had no plans to oust the Fed Chair. It could also trigger a legal showdown: Powell has made clear he would not resign if asked by the president, and legal experts argue that the president lacks the authority to fire the head of the Federal Reserve.

The issue may ultimately be decided by the US Supreme Court, which, according to a Wall Street Journal report on Wednesday, is taking up a case that considers whether the president has the authority to dismiss leaders of agencies traditionally seen as independent from White House control.

(Source: Investopedia.com)

Tariff uncertainty to cause 0.2% drop in global trade: WTO

Geneva, Switzerland – The World Trade Organization (WTO) said that the global volume of goods trade is projected to decline by 0.2% this year, as the outlook for global trade has deteriorated sharply due to rising trade policy uncertainty.

Although the WTO expects global trade volumes to increase in 2025 and 2026, the large-scale tariffs announced since January this year have prompted economists at the Geneva-based international trade regulator and



facilitator to reassess the current state of trade, according to the WTO's Global Trade Outlook report.

The temporary suspension of

reciprocal tariffs by the United States for 90 days is helping to ease the contraction in trade, but downside risks persist.

The decline in trade is ex-

pected to be particularly steep in North America, where exports are forecast to fall by 12.6%.

Risks to the global trade outlook remain due to the reintroduction of reciprocal tariffs announced by the US – which were later suspended for 90 days – and the potential for increased trade policy uncertainty to affect non-US trade relations.

If implemented, the US reciprocal tariffs are estimated to reduce global trade growth by a further 0.6% this year, with the

contraction potentially reaching 0.8% should trade policy uncertainty intensify.

The combined effects of reciprocal tariffs and growing uncertainty could lead to a total 1.5% decline in global goods trade this year. The WTO forecasts that North America's exports will fall by 12.6%, and imports by 9.6% this year. Meanwhile, Asia's and Europe's exports and imports are projected to grow by 1% and 1.9%, respectively.

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