

Etlaq to launch five rockets in 2025

Correspondent
Muscat

Etlaq Spaceport, the first commercial spaceport in the Middle East and North Africa, has announced plans for five rocket launches in 2025, marking an important milestone for the space industry in Oman and the region.

The launches will be held at its spaceport in Duqm, which is under development, with a viewing area soon opening to allow the public to witness the exciting landmark missions free of charge.

At a press conference on Thursday, Julanda al Riyami, Chief Commercial Officer of Etlaq, revealed the ambitious plans for 2025. He announced the spaceport's collaborations with international partners in the UK, New Zealand and Kuwait.

"We are thrilled to announce five launches in 2025, starting with the UNITY-1 mission in April, powered by Advanced

Propulsion Technologies from the UK," Riyami said. "These launches will showcase our growing partnerships and the technical expertise of Etlaq and our collaborators."

It will be followed by the launch of Duqm-2 in June, which will be facilitated by New Zealand-based Stellar Kinetics in partnership with Etlaq's parent company, NASCOM.

Riyami informed that the Duqm-2 rocket will use a different launch vehicle.

A more complex launch, utilising different parameters and operational procedures, is planned for Duqm-3 in October.

The fourth rocket scheduled for launch in November is Kuwait Space Rocket's Ambition-3, highlighting the significance of regional collaboration in the sector.

The fifth launch is expected to take place in December.

At the heart of Etlaq's mission is the Genesis Programme, a pioneering initiative launched in



2024 to establish Oman's 'national space launch heritage'. Inspired by Oman's history of seafaring excellence, the programme is the natural next step

in transitioning the nation into a spacefaring future.

H H Sayyid Azzan bin Qais al Said, founder and CEO of Etlaq, said, "The Genesis Programme

was launched as a proof of concept. At this stage, the programme is laying the foundation of what we call a national space launch heritage. We believe that

having such a heritage is a fundamental prerequisite for commercial spaceport operations, which we plan to begin in 2027."

He added, "The programme is designed to break down the essential elements of planning and conducting rocket launches.

Space. The agreement will facilitate the launch of its MIURA 5 vehicle from Oman, signalling a major leap in cooperation between Europe and Oman. Additionally, a memorandum of understanding was signed between Etlaq and SatMINA to col-

From now until 2027, our goal is to host as many launches as possible within safety and feasibility limits using multiple launch companies operating suborbital and experimental launch vehicles

H H SAYYID AZZAN BIN QAIS AL SAID

From now until 2027, our goal is to host as many launches as possible within safety and feasibility limits using multiple launch companies operating suborbital and experimental launch vehicles."

The press conference also marked the signing of several agreements by Etlaq, including a partnership with Spain's PLD

laborate on satellite ground station services and support operations for upcoming launches.

The conference also saw the unveiling of a new brand identity for Etlaq Spaceport. Additionally, Oman Society for Astronomy and Space too introduced a new logo reflecting the sultanate's growing commitment to the space sector.

ARAB LEADERS MEET IN RIYADH TO HASH OUT GAZA PLAN

Riyadh, Saudi Arabia - Arab leaders met in Riyadh on Friday to draft a plan for Gaza's post-war reconstruction to counter Donald Trump's proposal for the United States to take over the territory without its Palestinian residents.

A source close to the Saudi government confirmed to AFP that the meeting had concluded. He said he did not expect a final statement to be issued as the "discussion was confidential".

The official Saudi Press Agency said the 'fraternal consultative' meeting saw an 'exchange of views on various regional and international issues, especially joint efforts in support of the Palestinian cause and developments in the situation in the Gaza Strip'.

Ahead of the talks, the Saudi source said delegates would discuss "a version of the Egyptian plan".

The Saudi Press Agency said the decisions taken at the 'unofficial' meeting would be put on the agenda of an emergency Arab League summit to be held in Egypt on March 4.

MUSCAT MARATHON OFFERS THE EXPERIENCE OF OMAN



Over 13,000 runners from more than 60 countries participated in Experience Oman Muscat Marathon 2025 held on February 21-22 (See also Page 02)

Plans to adopt sustainable aviation fuel at airports

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman is set to establish a sustainable aviation fuel (SAF) station as part of its commitment to achieving net-zero carbon emissions by 2050. The announcement was made during launch of new electric vehicle (EV) charging stations at the cargo terminal of Muscat International Airport last week, signalling another significant step in the nation's sus-

tainability journey.

Hamoud bin Musabab al Alawi, Acting CEO of Oman Airports, said the new EV charging stations are part of a broader strategy to cut carbon emissions and improve air quality at the airport. "Introduction of sustainable practices such as electric vehicles and renewable energy solutions is a critical part of our strategy to make aviation more environmentally friendly," he said.

Alawi also confirmed plans for

a SAF production station to further reduce emissions from the aviation sector and help Oman meet its broader environmental goals.

The launch event was attended by Dr Abdullah bin Ali al Amri, Chairman of Environment Authority, who highlighted the importance of the initiative in achieving Oman's net-zero targets. He said Oman was taking a leading role in reducing carbon emissions and fulfilling its na-

tionally determined contributions under global climate agreements.

Amri also referenced the Environment Authority's 'Neutrality 3' initiative launched in December 2024, which focuses on cutting emissions across sectors such as energy, industry, transport and construction. This, he noted, aligns with Oman's broader goal of achieving net-zero emissions across multiple industries.

OIA partners with \$100mn MENA venture fund

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman Investment Authority (OIA) has announced a strategic partnership with Singapore-based venture capital firm Golden Gate Ventures through its technology arm Innovation Development Oman. The collaboration aims to strengthen the sultanate's startup ecosystem and attract foreign investment into Oman's technology sector.

Golden Gate Ventures recently expanded its presence in the Middle East and North Africa region with a new US\$100mn fund headquartered in Doha. OIA has joined as a limited partner in the fund, which is focused on supporting early-stage startups across the region. This marks Golden Gate Ventures' first international venture capital initiative targeting the MENA market. The partnership is expected to empower Omani startups, attract foreign direct investment, facilitate knowledge transfer and create job opportunities for local youth. The fund has already made its first investment in the region by backing Bayanat Technology, an Omani company specialising in data analysis solutions.

Ibrahim al Eisri, Head of Pri-

ivate Markets Investments at OIA, said the partnership is part of the authority's strategy to diversify its investments while focusing on sectors that can boost Oman's economic development. "This partnership reflects our commitment to redirecting investments towards local sectors, supporting economic growth and encouraging technological innovation," Eisri said.

Michael Lints, Partner for MENA at Golden Gate Ventures, described the partnership with

OIA as a "milestone" in the firm's expansion efforts. "Our collaboration with OIA will help shape the future of innovation and entrepreneurship in the region while building sustainable value for investors."

Lints also revealed plans to open an office in the sultanate, which will focus on investing in Omani startups, attracting local talent and supporting early-stage financing initiatives. "This will strengthen ties with the investment ecosystem in Southeast Asia and accelerate the flow of foreign investment into Oman's market," Lints added.

Founded in 2011, Golden Gate Ventures has invested in over 100 companies across Asia, the US and Europe, including nine with billion-dollar valuations.



Sayyid Bilarab project to revive architectural heritage



Japan's ties with Oman unique: H E Jota Yamamoto

Omani discovers near-Earth object, has privilege to name it

Our Correspondent
Muscat

In a landmark achievement for Oman's scientific community, Khalfan bin Hamad al Malki, a chemistry teacher, has become the first member of Oman Society of Astronomy and Space (OSAS) to make a preliminary detection of a near-Earth object.

The asteroid has been officially recorded by National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) and Malki now has the rare privilege of naming it within a week. He is considering either a

family name or a tribute to Oman.

Temporarily designated by NASA as P226gRJ, the asteroid marks the first such detection by an Omani citizen involved in the International Astronomical Search Collaboration (IASC) project.

Malki made the discovery on February 5 after analysing time-lapse images of the sky distributed by IASC, a global initiative that enables citizen scientists to assist in detection of near-Earth objects.

Asteroids like P226gRJ are remnants from the early formation of the solar system, typically



This discovery has brought me immense happiness. I did not expect to find an asteroid and pinpoint its coordinates

KHALFAN AL MALKI

found in the asteroid belt between Mars and Jupiter. While most remain in stable orbits far from Earth, those that venture closer, particularly between Earth

and the Moon, are monitored closely as potential threats.

Global space agencies, including NASA, increasingly rely on contributions from citizen scien-

tists to help detect these objects. Once identified, experts assess factors such as size, speed, trajectory and potential risk.

Malki's discovery highlights both Oman's growing role in global space research and the importance of collaborative efforts in expanding man's understanding of the cosmos.

"This discovery has brought me immense happiness," Malki said. "I did not expect to find an asteroid and pinpoint its coordinates. I am grateful for this opportunity and thank Abdul Wahab al Busaidi and Ghaida al

Jabri for their support in this project. God willing, discoveries will continue with the help of OSAS."

Busaidi, a board member of OSAS, called the discovery a significant milestone. "This achievement encourages greater citizen participation in space research. With more eyes on the sky, the world continues to deepen its understanding of the universe."

Malki's discovery not only marks a personal triumph but also reflects the increasing contributions of Middle Eastern researchers to global space exploration efforts.

Sayyid Bilarab project to revive design heritage

Our Correspondent
Manah

H H Sayyid Bilarab bin Haitham al Said has launched an initiative aimed at reviving Oman's architectural heritage. Held at Oman Across Ages Museum in Manah on Thursday, the event was attended by members of the Royal Family, ministers, senior officials and architects.

The initiative's objectives are to revive Oman's architectural identity and promote it as a key element of national heritage. It seeks to raise awareness on the cultural, social and economic significance of Omani architecture and encourage the community to explore its rich history.

It also aims to highlight innovative contributions made by Omani architects over the centuries and identify traditional methods of design and construction that can be adapted to enhance architectural heritage.



The initiative's objectives are to revive Oman's architectural identity and promote it as a key element of national heritage

(ONA)

Through this, the initiative hopes to create successful models that blend innovation with tradition.

Another goal is to foster greater public engagement with architecture by encouraging dialogue across society, including students and professionals. The

initiative will also cultivate an environment that supports creativity and leadership in the field of architecture, thereby increasing opportunities for Omani architects in the local labour market.

Following the launch, H H Sayyid Bilarab toured a pavilion showcasing the Bilarab bin Haitham Award for Architectural

Design. The exhibition featured 3D models of award-winning projects from the first two editions of the competition, as well as the winning design for Oman's pavilion at Expo 2025 in Japan.

He was then briefed on progress of the Bilarab bin Haitham Initiatives, which now include the Bilarab bin Haitham Community, the Bilarab bin Haitham Award for Architectural Design and Bilarab bin Haitham Programmes. The third edition of the award is scheduled for the end of 2025.

The architectural heritage revival initiative will also introduce an interactive experience centred on three key pillars of architecture - ongoing education, innovation and market readiness.

The ongoing education component will focus on inspiring future architects by reviewing notable architectural experiences. Innovation will highlight techniques developed by Omani architects, which will be used to restore old villages and turn these into sustainable tourist destinations. Market readiness will address the skills needed to succeed in the architecture job market, helping students connect with industry professionals and discover career opportunities.

The initiative builds on previous efforts, including Bilarab bin Haitham Award for Architectural Design and the competition to design Oman's pavilion for Expo 2025. It aims to enrich the field of architecture in the sultanate and engage a wide spectrum of society, from architecture enthusiasts to students and professionals.

Charter flights to link Salalah and Minsk

Our Correspondent
Salalah

Belarusian airline Belavia will operate its first charter flight to Salalah Airport from Minsk on Thursday following approval from Oman's Civil Aviation Authority (CAA). The move reflects ongoing efforts to strengthen Oman's tourism sector and deepen bilateral ties with Belarus.

In the initial phase, Belavia will operate four charter flights until the end of the winter season in late March, using a Boeing B737-800 aircraft of 189-passenger capacity. CAA stated that the airline is expected to continue operations through the summer, with a total of 16 flights planned across both phases.

Dr Abdullah bin Masoud al Harthy, Honorary Consul of Be-



Launch of direct flights connecting Salalah and Minsk is a result of sustained efforts to strengthen relations between the two nations

DR ABDULLAH BIN MASOUD AL HARTHY

larus in Oman, described the launch of direct flights a result of sustained efforts to strengthen relations between the two nations. He linked the development to the official visit of Belarusian President Aleksandr Lukashenko to Oman in December 2024,

which helped identify key sectors for cooperation, including clean energy, tourism, education, healthcare, technology and logistics.

"These direct flights will be a significant boost for Oman's tourism, particularly in Dhofar

governorate," Harthy said. "These will also help enhance trade and investment between the two countries, especially since Belarusian citizens now enjoy visa-free entry to Oman for up to 14 days, facilitating travel and economic exchange."

Plans are underway to launch additional direct flights connecting Muscat with Minsk. Harthy believes this will open new opportunities for investment and trade while contributing to the economic growth of both countries.

He also highlighted promising opportunities for collaboration in sectors such as agriculture, industry and food security. Harthy praised the role of Oman's Foreign Ministry in facilitating the partnership, which aims to foster stronger economic ties and mutual development.



(Supplied photo)

60 nationalities at Muscat Marathon

Muscat - The Experience Oman Muscat Marathon 2025 brought together a vibrant community of over 13,000 runners from more than 60 countries over February 21-22, providing a unique platform for local and international athletes to compete at the highest level.

Held under the patronage of Ministry of Heritage and Tourism and organised by Sabco Sports, with Al Mouj Muscat as founding partner and venue host, this year's event marked its most diverse and successful edition yet.

With record-breaking participation, the marathon reaffirmed its status as a world-class running event, showcasing Oman's rich culture, stunning landscapes

and growing prominence on the global sporting stage.

Runners of all ages and abilities competed in a variety of categories, including the highly anticipated 42km marathon, 21km half marathon, 10km and 5km races, a children's race and 2.5km Fun Run sponsored by Ooredoo, all designed to encourage inclusivity and community engagement, a press release said.

H E Azzan al Busaidi, Undersecretary for Tourism in Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, highlighted the event's role in positioning Oman as a premier international sports and tourism destination. "The Experience Oman Muscat Marathon is a prime example of how sports can

elevate Oman's global image.

This event has successfully demonstrated our nation's capacity to host large-scale international events while showcasing Oman's rich culture, warm hospitality and breathtaking landscapes. We look forward to continuing to support this event and similar initiatives as we work to consolidate Oman's position as a leading global hub for sports and tourism."

Reflecting on the event's success, Sayyid Khalid al Busaidi, Chairman of Sabco Sports, expressed his pride in the marathon's achievements. "We are incredibly proud of the success of the Experience Oman Muscat Marathon 2025."



ICAI Oman Chapter Wins 'Best Chapter' Award at ICAI Annual Function, Completing a Decade of Excellence

The Institute of Chartered Accountants of India (ICAI) - Oman Chapter (under the sponsorship of the College of Banking and Financial Studies (CBFS)) has once again been recognized for its outstanding contributions to the profession, securing the 3rd Prize in the 2024 Best Chapter Overseas Awards (Category II) at the prestigious ICAI Annual Event 2025.

This achievement marks a significant milestone as the 10th consecutive year that the Chapter has received this prestigious honor—an incredible testament to its commitment to professional excellence, continuous learning, and community building.

Under the leadership of CA Gaurav Kapoor, Chairperson of ICAI Oman

Chapter, and the dedicated Managing Committee, CA Unmesh Bhome (Vice-Chairperson), CA Sangeetha Suresh Kumar, CA Badri Narayan Subudhi, CA Ashish Subhedar, CA Abhishek Vaishya, CA Jay Duseja, CA Ajil James Kurian, the Chapter has consistently set benchmarks in thought leadership, technical sessions, industry networking, and CSR initiatives. The Chapter has also made history by successfully hosting the first-ever GCC Seminar, further solidifying its role as a hub for knowledge exchange and collaboration in the region.

In the words of CA Gaurav Kapoor, "Winning this award for the 10th consecutive year is a proud moment for our Chapter.

This recognition belongs to every member, volunteer, and past leader who has contributed to our success. We extend our heartfelt thanks to ICAI Leadership, including President CA Ranjeet Agarwal (2024-25) and Vice President CA Charanjot Singh Nanda (2024-25 and current President 2025-26), as well as the unwavering support from CBFS and the entire ICAI Oman Chapter family. This winning streak is a reflection of the passion, dedication, and teamwork that drive its initiatives. As it moves forward, the Chapter remains steadfast in its mission to provide finance professionals with cutting-edge insights, professional development opportunities, and a strong community network".

Advertorial

Tender Announcement



The Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn) announces the following Tender:

Tender Number	Tender Name	Last date of buying	Date of submission	Type of work	Register Degree	Fee (R.O)
2/2025/PEIE /H Q-2	Water supply services and related facilities for Raysut industrial city	2025-03-09	2025-03-27	Construction	First and above	1000

Interested Companies registered with Tender Board may obtain the Tender documents from the E-Tendering website: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om> against non-refundable payment as mentioned above for each set of documents. Tenders should be submitted on line on given website. The Tenderer must enclose electronic copy of Bank Guarantee issued by any bank in the Sultanate of Oman for the value of 1% of the Tender value validity for (90) days, and addressed to The Chairman of Tender Committee mentioned in above tenders.

- Tender Inquiry:** All correspondence pertaining to the TENDER Inquiry must be online at eTendering System.
- eTendering System Inquiry:** All correspondence pertaining to the eTendering System technical support must be directed to the following helpdesk email address and phone number: etenderhd@gstb.gov.om and +968 24402200 Note: Bid Submission will be online only.

Madayn is not bound to accept the lowest or any other Offer and has the right to cancel these tenders and the tenderers have no right to claim for any compensations.

Travel Season is here!

Enjoy your holidays

With BankDhofar Ladies Credit Cards

* Terms & Conditions Apply

Scan to learn more





'Japan's ties with Oman unique'

Japan marks Emperor's birthday with tribute to enduring ties with Oman. Message from **H E Jota Yamamoto, Ambassador of Japan to Oman**

It is with great honour and warmth that I extend my greetings to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and the people of the Sultanate of Oman on the occasion of the 65th birthday of His Majesty the Emperor of Japan, which is observed on February 23.

Japan and Oman share a profound and enduring relationship, one that has been nurtured over decades by mutual respect, understanding and trust. This bond is embodied not only in the historical ties between our nations but also in the meaningful connections between our imperial and royal families. As the Japanese community here in Oman expresses its respect and admiration for His Majesty the Emperor of Japan, we also convey our heartfelt wishes for the continued happiness and prosperity of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, whose leadership and vision are central to Oman's progress.

The relationship between Japan and Oman holds immense significance. It is both a privilege and a responsibility for us to honour this legacy and continue to deepen our cooperation. While 50 years ago, Japan may have been the only East Asian nation familiar to the Omani people, today, Oman engages with a range of countries across Asia. Nonetheless, Japan's ties with Oman remain unique, not only due to our long-standing history of collaboration but also because of the ongoing friendship between our imperial and royal families. I, for one, eagerly anticipate the opportunity for mutual royal and imperial visits in the near future.



(Supplied photo)

The relationship between Japan and Oman holds immense significance. It is both a privilege and a responsibility for us to honour this legacy and continue to deepen our cooperation

Such exchanges, whether His Majesty Sultan Haitham visits Japan or the Emperor visits Oman, will offer fresh perspectives on our shared history and open new avenues for future cooperation.

Japan and Oman share deep cultural and historical connections, particularly as maritime nations. Both countries have long recognised the importance of maritime security, which has become even more relevant in today's increasingly complex regional context. Japan's Maritime Self-Defense Force operates actively in the region, and Oman continues to be a trusted partner in this vital area. The recent Indian Ocean Conference hosted in Muscat also offered a valuable opportunity to deepen our cooperation in maritime security and regional stability, particularly with the presence of the State Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan.

Culturally, the ties between our two nations are flourishing. Last year, a group of Japanese *manga* artists, invited by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, visited Oman to share the art of manga creation with Omani audiences. More recently, the Oman Japan Friendship Association (OJFA) hosted a Japanese orchestra, whose performance at Royal Opera House Muscat was a testament to the growing cultural exchange between our countries. I would also like to take this opportunity to express my sincere appreciation to the OJFA for its tremendous support in promoting Japanese culture here in Oman. It is truly encouraging to know that many Omani people are studying Japanese through the language courses offered by OJFA at Children's Public Library. This success is a direct result of the exemplary leadership of OJFA Chairman Sheikh Abdullah

Mohamed Bahwan, as well as the longstanding dedication of the previous Chairman, Sheikh Mohammed Saud Bahwan.

'Ship for World Youth (SWY) Committee - Oman' also plays a vital role in connecting Japan and Oman. Through its efforts in fostering people-to-people connections, particularly after their participation in the SWY programme organised by the Japanese government, it is expanding and strengthening the human network between the two nations. This is evident in its events, such as Oman-Japan Day and SWY Weekend.

Additionally, thanks to the sultanate's proactive and strategic efforts in hosting MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conventions/Conferences and Events/Exhibitions) activities, Japan and Oman have enjoyed a deepening relationship, including through sports. Events such as table

tennis, hockey, golf and others have facilitated numerous visits by Japanese athletes to Oman. These interactions not only promote sportsmanship but also offer Japanese players the opportunity to engage with Oman's rich culture, while expressing their sincere admiration for the hospitality and warmth of the Omani people.

Japan's partnership with Oman is in line with Oman Vision 2040. At the heart of this vision lies a commitment to education and capacity building, areas where Japan is eager to contribute. The recent inauguration of the Third General Assembly of the International Science Council (ISC) in Muscat underscored the importance of education in Oman's development. At this event, two prominent Japanese figures - President of Japan Science Council and ISC Vice-President for Science and Society - highlighted the shared focus on advancing scientific and educational cooperation. In addition, Prof Kanehara, a distinguished international law expert, visited Oman to deliver a lecture at Oman Foreign Ministry's Diplomatic Academy, further reinforcing the academic exchanges between our two countries. At the student level, both the Japanese government and Japanese businesses offer scholarships to Omani students to study in Japan. These scholarships not only foster educational growth but also provide a solid foundation for shaping the future of our bilateral friendship.

Equally important is the growing economic partnership between our countries. Japan has worked closely with Oman in the energy sector for more than five decades, particularly in areas of crude oil and liquefied natural gas. Today, our cooperation is entering a new phase, with both nations exploring new opportunities in green hydrogen, ammonia and other environmentally friendly technologies. Japan is also particularly eager to support Oman's transition to green energy, recognising the country's leadership in pioneering hydrogen projects. With eight major hydrogen initiatives already underway, Japan is proud to be involved in two of them.

Furthermore, Japan and Oman share a common determination to

pursue decarbonisation, a goal that is increasingly urgent as we face the realities of climate change.

Recent missions to Oman by Japan Cooperation Center for the Middle East and the Japan Business Federation were resounding successes, thanks in no small part to the warm hospitality of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, the Ministry of Energy and Minerals, and Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI). These visits allowed us to gain valuable insights into Oman's proactive approach to decarbonisation and economic diversification, and highlighted the country's comparative advantages, such as its peace, stability, strategic location and abundant renewable energy resources. Most importantly, these missions expanded our network of human connections, opening new possibilities for future collaboration. Discussions with H E Minister Qais Mohammed al Youssef of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion; H E Minister Salim bin Nasser al Aufi of Energy and Minerals; and Chairman Sheikh Faisal bin Abdullah al Rawas of OCCI, have revealed a shared focus on advancing initiatives such as the Japan-GCC Free Trade Agreement, the Japan-Oman Joint Crediting Mechanism and the upcoming Expo 2025 Osaka-Kansai.

Oman's proactive engagement with Expo 2025 under the leadership of H H Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth, is especially commendable. This event will undoubtedly play a pivotal role in expanding and diversifying business cooperation between our two nations, with sectors such as tourism, healthcare, pharmaceuticals and digital applications likely to benefit significantly.

On the auspicious occasion of His Majesty the Emperor's birthday, I would like to express my deepest appreciation to all those who, through their admiration for Japan, contribute to the strengthening of the bonds between our countries. Finally, I would like to convey my best wishes for the continued success and prosperity of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and the people of Oman.

Exhibition boosts SME collaboration across Oman, GCC

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The third edition of Gulf Tkatuf Exhibition concluded on Saturday having drawn participation of 200 small and medium enterprises (SMEs) from across Oman and GCC countries.

Held in partnership with Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises Development, the three-day event focused on empowering entrepreneurs, encouraging business partnerships and

expanding market opportunities.

Organised under the patronage of H E Dr Said bin Mohammed bin Ahmed al Saqri, Minister of Economy, the exhibition aimed to open new business horizons and strengthen strategic partnerships in alignment with Oman Vision 2040, which highlights SMEs as a vital pillar of the national economy.

Speaking to Muscat Daily, H H Sayyida Hujaija Jaifer Saif al Said, organiser of the event and founder of Links for Community



(Supplied photo)

Initiatives, said, "The exhibition was launched to support SMEs, promote their products and services, and create new business opportunities through collaboration with various stakeholders."

An Omani event management company, Links for Community Initiatives organised the exhibition as part of its efforts to encourage entrepreneurship and promote Gulf cooperation. This year's event featured a large number of SMEs from the sultanate with approved trade-

marks, alongside ventures from other Gulf countries, reflecting the growing interest of regional entrepreneurs in collaborating with Omani businesses.

A notable addition to this edition was a partnership with Oman Tourism College, offering students hands-on experience in event management and coordination. H H Sayyida Hujaija expressed hope that the students gained valuable insights from working alongside the exhibition staff.



be'ah secures R051mn financing for Sohar waste management expansion

Our Correspondent
Muscat

In a move towards establishing a comprehensive industrial waste management system, Oman Environmental Services Holding Company (be'ah) and ahli Islamic, the Islamic banking window of ahlibank, signed a R051mn financing agreement on Thursday.

The agreement will fund the second phase of an industrial waste treatment facility in the Sohar Free Zone, following the successful completion of its first phase.

Valued at R051mn, the financing agreement will support the development of a specialised hazardous waste treatment plant, upgrade physico-chemical treatment technologies, and establish modern facilities for handling

used oils and highly toxic waste. The funds will also cover the installation of smart storage tanks and advanced infrastructure to improve operational efficiency.

The first phase, which has been operational for several

economy. It also aligns with Oman Vision 2040 by creating infrastructure that supports heavy and light industrial projects, generating job opportunities, and maximising the value of waste resources within the country.

ment strategy to provide comprehensive and sustainable solutions to waste challenges."

Yousuf al Rawahi, Head of ahli islami, added, "We are proud to support be'ah in its mission to develop a sustainable industrial waste management system in Oman. This financing agreement reflects our commitment to projects aligned with Oman Vision 2040, promoting economic growth and environmental sustainability."

With the completion of the second phase, the integrated facility in the Sohar Free Zone is expected to transform Oman's industrial waste management sector, setting new benchmarks for hazardous waste treatment and meeting the growing demands of the nation's industrial sector while ensuring environmental sustainability.

Financing agreement will fund the second phase of an industrial waste treatment facility in the Sohar Free Zone, following the successful completion of its first phase

years, includes industrial landfills, solid waste storage units, a solidification plant, and a specialised laboratory accredited by the Gulf Accreditation Centre - Oman's only such facility.

Once fully completed, the project is expected to contribute to the national economy by supporting sustainability goals and advancing the principles of a circular

Eng Abdulkarim bin Qasim al Balushi, Chief Operating Officer for Hazardous Waste at be'ah, highlighted the importance of financial backing for such projects. He said, "This project represents a significant leap in waste management, particularly considering the increasing industrial activities in Oman. It aligns with the national industrial waste manage-

Oil prices fail to break 5-week downward trend

Muscat - Oil prices surged throughout last week, driven by the EU's expanded sanctions on Russia and reports of a Ukrainian strike on a Caspian Pipeline Consortium (CPC) oil pumping station. But just as momentum seemed set to hold, the market took a sharp turn on Friday, wiping out all gains and dragging prices below \$75.

Brent crude, which closed the previous week at \$74.40, rose on Monday following reports that Ukraine had attacked a CPC station carrying Kazakhstani oil in a 'reaction to the US.' The attack pushed Brent to \$75.12 before it finished the day at \$75.06, up 0.07%. West Texas Intermediate (WTI) rose 1% to \$71.28.

Economic recovery expecta-

tions in China, the world's largest oil importer, were fueled by comments from Chinese President Xi Jinping supporting the private sector. As a result, Brent oil gained 0.5% to \$75.45 on February 18, while WTI rose 0.6% to \$71.74.

Following the EU's approval of a new sanctions package targeting Russia's 'shadow fleet,' used to transport oil and circumvent sanctions, Brent crude reached \$76.46 on February 19. It closed the day at \$75.81, up 0.5%, while WTI gained 0.6%, closing at \$72.16.

Brent continued its upward movement on Thursday, rising 4% to \$76.12, with WTI also climbing nearly 4% to \$72.43.

Agencies



Salalah Port celebrates \$300mn expansion

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The APM Terminals-operated Port of Salalah has invested \$300mn in expanding and ensuring readiness for the new network under the Gemini-cooperation, according to a press statement.

The investment has included upgrades to all six existing berths and an expansion of the yard. The expansion has moved the terminal from a capacity of 4.5mn TEU's to 6.5mn and cements the Port of Salalah's position as a key hub in the region with ideal access to the Middle East, the Indian Subcontinent and East Africa.

As part of the expansion project, APM Terminals has also invested in a new access road, a new electrical power substation and electrical network upgrade, and reefer expansion of 2000 reefer plugs.

Capacity at the port will be



lifted by new equipment, including 10 new STS cranes with the capability to handle ultra large

vessels 26 containers wide. The new equipment list also includes 12 hybrid rubber tyred gantry

(RTG) cranes, two reach stackers, six empty container handlers and 30 terminal trucks and trailers have been added to the fleet of landside equipment.

Steven Yoogalingam, Port of Salalah's Chief Executive Officer, said, "Our investment underscores our deep commitment to Oman and the region. The new capabilities ensure a smooth and seamless operation from Port of Salalah and provide opportunities for local and regional growth and job creation."

Muhanna bin Moosa bin Baqer, Director General of Ports at Ministry of Transport, Communications, and Information Technology, said, "This expansion emphasises our commitment to advancing Oman's economic objectives and supporting Oman Vision 2040. In collaboration with Salalah Port Services Company, strategic planning efforts are continuously underway to optimise the port's strategic location and robust in-

frastructure.

"Recently, the company allocated \$300mn towards upgrading the container terminal, enhancing the port's capacity from 4.5mn to 6.5mn TEUs. This substantial investment aligns with the port's goal to stay ahead of rising maritime traffic, offering a competitive edge."

In the 2023 Container Ports Performance Index (CPPI), the Port of Salalah was ranked as the second most efficient container port in the world for the third year in a row. The upgrades, combined with the ongoing implementation of Lean practices is expected to raise levels of efficiency further and offer industry leading port stay times.

The Port of Salalah is a central component of the Gemini network, serving as one of the primary hubs supporting the infrastructure. On February 18, the first call by a Gemini vessel was made in Salalah.

SalamAir plans to add 10 additional aircraft to fleet

Our Correspondent
Muscat

SalamAir, Oman's low-cost airline, on Thursday announced its intention to add ten additional aircraft to its existing fleet over the next three years to meet growing passenger demand.

The airline has submitted a formal request for 10 Airbus A320 aircraft to multiple aircraft leasing companies in order to meet its growth targets for the next five-year period, according to a press statement.

"Our return to our low-fare approach has been highly successful, with full aircraft and more demand than we can meet," said Adrian Hamilton-Manns, SalamAir's Chief Executive Officer. "Our expansion over the next five years requires more aircraft to enable us to develop additional domestic and regional flights, as

well as introduce destinations that are currently unserved by airlines. These steps will stimulate tourism to Oman and ensure faster growth in the sector.

Our return to our low-fare approach has been highly successful, with full aircraft and more demand than we can meet

ADRIAN HAMILTON-MANNS

"Our low-fare model is highly popular, and our plan to add ten additional aircraft over the next three years is a response to the demand we see for budget travel. We see other airlines attempting to enter this market due to the evident demand; this is positive, as

competition will reduce fares and benefit consumers," he added.

In 2024, SalamAir carried over 3.2mn passengers, representing a 20% increase on 2023 passenger volumes. 2024 also marked the airline's refocus on low fares, including its year-round starting fares of RO9.99 to domestic destinations. These steps created a surge in travel, prompting SalamAir to seek additional aircraft to accommodate the increased demand.

SalamAir will receive two new A321 aircraft in 2025, bringing its fleet size to 15. The addition of ten more aircraft will see the airline expand to 25 A320s by 2028.

SalamAir currently operates a fleet of 13 Airbus A320/A321 aircraft with over 80 daily flights. The airline's 14th and 15th aircraft, both A321neos, are scheduled for delivery in early 2025.



GCC's strong growth, ambition balanced with fiscal prudence: Report

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The latest Middle East Economy Watch report from PwC highlights sustained growth across the region, primarily driven by a robust non-oil sector. The report noted that the oil market volatility has reinforced the emphasis on fiscal discipline in the GCC countries.

Meanwhile, GCC countries are introducing corporate tax reforms to align with OECD

GloBE rules, reflecting broader efforts to diversify revenue streams. Despite these challenges, business leaders remain confident about the region's economic outlook.

Richard Boxshall, Partner and Chief Economist at PwC Middle East, said, "OPEC+ has been remarkably effective at coordinating oil production over the past decade, shaping both global energy markets and the Middle East's economic trajectory. However, uncertainty remains over how



OPEC+ will respond to evolving factors, including a potential Trump presidency,

geopolitical developments in the region, and shifting dynamics in the oil sector. These fac-

tors heighten the need for continued non-oil sector expansion and fiscal adaptability across GCC economies."

According to the report, OPEC+ has slowed the tapering of voluntary production cuts, extending them into 2026. This move aims to stabilise oil prices amid weaker-than-expected demand, particularly from China. However, global uncertainties - including US energy policies - continue to add to market volatility. Brent crude is ex-

pected to average in the low \$70s per barrel in 2025, down from around \$80 in 2024.

The report states that momentum in non-oil industries continues to offset weakness in the oil sector, serving as the primary driver of regional economic growth. Abu Dhabi's non-oil sector recorded 6.6% year-on-year growth in Q3 2024, led by financial services and transportation. Other GCC economies are projected to see steady non-oil GDP growth in 2025, ranging from 2.1% in

Qatar to 4.5% in the UAE.

The report pointed out that the GCC nations are diversifying their revenue base by expanding taxation and adopting the OECD/G20's global minimum tax rules (Pillar Two) for large multinational enterprises. With the exception of Saudi Arabia, which has not yet made a formal announcement, all GCC countries plan to implement the Global Anti-Base Erosion (GloBE) rules from 2025, a move expected to generate additional tax revenue.

US Fed looks to pause interest rate cuts as risk of inflation rises



A file photo shows the Federal Reserve headquarters in Washington, DC

Lily Swift

The US Federal Reserve officials at a recent meeting pointed to rising risks that inflation could worsen, a key reason they kept their benchmark interest rate unchanged.

According to recently released minutes of the Fed's January 28-29 meeting, officials said that President Donald Trump's proposed tariffs and mass deportations of migrants, as well as strong consumer spending, were factors that could push inflation higher this year.

The Fed's 19 officials who participate in its interest-rate decisions indicated that "they would want to see further progress on inflation before making" any further cuts. They kept the Fed's key rate at 4.3%, after cutting it from a two-decade high of 5.3% late last year. The Fed's pause makes it less likely that borrowing costs for consumers, including for mortgages, auto loans, and credit cards, will decline anytime soon. Just last week, the government released data that suggested inflation was actually getting worse, leading many economists to forecast just one - if any - rate cut this year. Consumer prices rose 3% in January from a year ago, the Labor Department said, up from a 3 1/2 year low of 2.4% last September. The Fed, however, more closely

follows a separate inflation measure that is shows inflation is closer to 2.5%.

The minutes also cited a "high degree of uncertainty" surrounding the economy, which made it appropriate for the Fed to "take a careful approach" in considering any further changes to its key interest rate.

Federal Reserve's 19 officials who participate in interest-rate decisions indicated that they would want to see further progress on inflation before making any further cuts

All of the Fed's policymakers supported keeping its key rate unchanged last month, the minutes said. The unanimity comes after signs of a growing disagreement in recent months between those officials who supported further rate reductions and those more worried about stubborn inflation.

How long before more cuts
A key issue, particularly on Wall Street, is how long the Fed's

pause on rate cuts will last. Wall Street investors expect the central bank won't cut again until July, according to futures prices. They don't forecast a second cut until 2026.

Many Fed officials have also said they want to see how Trump's proposed tariffs and immigration crackdown affect the economy. Most economists forecast that the tariffs will push up inflation, though some also argue that Trump's promises to reduce regulation could lower consumer prices over time.

On Monday, Fed governor Christopher Waller said in a speech in Australia that he still expects rates to come down this year, but for now he supports a pause.

Waller said that, if the inflation uptick last month turns out to be a blip, as it did in January 2024, "rate cuts would be appropriate at some point this year".

Waller also said that he didn't think new tariffs would significantly raise inflation, and added that any increase in prices would likely be temporary. As a result, he said the Fed shouldn't necessarily change its policies because of tariffs.

"I haven't altered my outlook based on what has been implemented to date", he said, referring to Trump's tariff announcements. (Source: Investing.com)

DP World records highest cargo volumes since 2015

Dubai, UAE - The UAE's DP World has delivered another standout year for trade, recording its highest container and breakbulk cargo volumes at Jebel Ali Port since 2015.

The port handled 15.5mn twenty-foot equivalent units (TEUs) in 2024, up 1mn TEUs on the previous year. This marks the highest throughput since 2015, reinforcing Jebel Ali's position as the leading trade and logistics hub in the region, even amid ongoing supply chain disruptions.

The figure represents nearly 18% of DP World's total global container throughput of 88.3mn TEUs for the year. Breakbulk cargo also saw significant growth, surging by 23% year-on-year to reach 5.4mn metric tonnes (MTs) - the second-highest performance in nearly a decade.

Abdulla bin Damithan, CEO and Managing Director, DP World GCC, said, "This performance reflects the strength of our world-class ports and logistics infrastructure. The 15.5mn TEUs handled at Jebel Ali in



2024, along with the strong growth in breakbulk cargo, shows our capacity to meet increasing demand in both sectors. With a thriving ecosystem in Jebel Ali Free Zone and strong ties with major global economies, we are well-positioned to support the region's growing trade volumes. Despite global uncertainties, we remain committed to investing in advanced infrastructure to facilitate trade."

Major infrastructure projects in the region have fuelled the growth for breakbulk demand, which is set to continue, with the value of planned construction

projects in the UAE alone reaching approximately \$112bn in 2024.

Jebel Ali Port played a critical role in supporting major international projects in 2024. Jebel Ali Port has an annual container capacity of 19.4mn TEUs across four terminals, over 100 berths, and a 25-kilometre quay length. It also features dedicated terminals for breakbulk, Ro-Ro, and heavy-lift cargo. Dubai's Mina Al Hamriya Port further complements these capabilities by handling bulk and breakbulk cargo and accommodating a wide range of vessel types.

WAM



South Lobby Roof Top, Grand Mall, P.O. Box: 163, PC: 136, Al Khwair, Muscat, Sultanate of Oman
Tel: +968 22063752 | Fax: +968 22063753

Invitation to Annual General Meeting of Barka Water and Power Company SAOG

The Board of Directors of Barka Water and Power Company SAOG (the "Company") has the pleasure to invite the shareholders of the company to the Annual General Meeting ("AGM") to be held at 3:00 p.m. on Tuesday, 11th March 2025 on the e-portal for convening general meetings which may be accessed through the Muscat Clearing and Depository SAOC ("MCD") website (www.mcd.om).

Failing quorum of the AGM, a second AGM shall be convened at 3p.m. on Tuesday, 18th March 2025 on the e-portal for convening general meetings which may be accessed through the Muscat Clearing and Depository SAOC ("MCD") website (www.mcd.om) to discuss the following agenda:

- To consider and approve the Board of Directors' Report for the financial year ended 31 December 2024.
- To consider and approve the Report on Corporate Governance for the financial year ended 31 December 2024.
- To consider and approve the Auditor's report and the audited financial statements of the Company for the financial year ended 31 December 2024.
- To ratify the payment of sitting fees to the Board of Directors and Sub-Committees for the financial year ended 31 December 2024 and to determine the sitting fees of the Board of Directors and Sub-Committees for the next financial year 31 December 2025 (Annexure 1).
- To consider and approve the Directors' remuneration for an amount of OMR 50,000 (Rials Omani Fifty Thousand only) for the financial year ended 31 December 2024.
- To notify the General Assembly with transactions carried out with related parties during the financial year ended 31 December 2024 (Annexure 2).
- To notify the General Assembly of donations disbursed to support community services during the financial year ended on 31 December 2024(Annexure 3).
- To approve the allocation of a budget of OMR 25,000 (Rials Omani Twenty-Five Thousand only) to support community services during the financial year ending 31 December 2025.
- To approve the proposal authorizing the Board of

Directors' to determine and distribute cash dividends to the Company's Shareholders (who are registered with the MCD as of the dates to be decided by the Board of Directors) in July 2025 and January 2026 out of the retained earnings as per the audited financial statements for the financial year ended 31 December 2024, provided that the aggregate amount shall not exceed 8.83 Baisas per share.

- To appoint the statutory auditors for the financial year ending 31 December 2025 and approve their fees.
- To Approve the standards for Assisting the performance of the Board of Directors for the financial year ending December 31, 2025 (Annexure 4).
- To appoint an independent consultant to carry out appraisal for the performance of the Board of Directors during the financial year ending on 31 December 2025 and to fix the fees.
- To elect 2 members to the Board of Directors of the Company to fill the vacant seats on the Board.

Any person who wishes to nominate himself/herself to the Board of Directors should complete a nomination form available with the Company. The nomination form can be obtained from the Company's head office. The completed forms should be delivered to the Company minimum five (5) days prior to the AGM date. Nomination forms received after 5pm on Thursday, 6th of March 2025 shall not be accepted.

In accordance with the Rules for Convening General Meetings via Electronic Means, issued by the Financial Services Authority "FSA" we would like to call your attention to the following:

- only a corporate person may authorize a natural person to attend and vote on its behalf on decisions/resolutions of the AGM through electronic means, provided such natural person has an investor number with the MCD.
- voting on any item of the agenda shall commence prior to the convention of the AGM at a maximum of three (3) days and ends on the day of the AGM. If a shareholder's balance is changed either by increase or decrease, the voting process shall stand canceled and must re-vote at the AGM.

Please join online at least 30 minutes prior to the AGM.

For more information, please contact Mr. Adnan Husain of Barka Water and Power Company SAOG on telephone No. +968 92084869.



شركة ظفار لتوليد الكهرباء
Dhofar Generating Company SAOG

PO Box: 1571, PC: 211, Salalah, Sultanate of Oman.
www.dgcoman.com

Invitation to Annual General Meeting of Dhofar Generating Company SAOG

The Board of Directors of Dhofar Generating Company SAOG (the "Company") has the pleasure to invite the shareholders of the company to the Annual General Meeting ("AGM") to be held at 3:00 p.m. on Monday, 10 March 2025 on the e-portal for convening general meetings which may be accessed through the Muscat Clearing and Depository SAOC ("MCD") website (www.mcd.om).

Failing quorum of the AGM, a second AGM shall be convened at 3p.m. on Monday, 17th March 2025 on the e-portal for convening general meetings which may be accessed through the Muscat Clearing and Depository SAOC ("MCD") website (www.mcd.om) to discuss the following agenda:

- To consider and approve the Board of Directors' Report for the financial year ended 31 December 2024.
- To consider and approve the Report on Corporate Governance for the financial year ended 31 December 2024.
- To consider and approve the Auditor's report and the Balance Sheet and Profit and Loss Account of the Company for the financial year ended 31 December 2024.
- To ratify the payment of sitting fees to the Board of Directors and Sub-Committees for the financial year ended 31 December 2024 and to determine the sitting fees of the Board of Directors and Sub-Committees for the next financial year 31 December 2025 (Annexure 1).
- To ratify the payment of Directors' remuneration for an amount of OMR 15,000

(Rials Omani Fifteen thousand only) for the financial year ended 31 December 2024.

- To notify the General Assembly with transactions carried out with related parties during the financial year ended 31 December 2024 (Annexure 2).
- To notify the General Assembly of donations disbursed to support community services during the financial year ended on 31 December 2024(Annexure 3).
- To consider and approve the allocation of a budget of OMR 15,000 (Rials Omani Fifteen thousand) to support community services during the financial year ending 31 December 2025 (Annexure 4).
- To appoint statutory auditors for the financial year ending 31 December 2025 and approve their fees (Annexure 5).

In accordance with the Rules for Convening General Meetings via Electronic Means, issued by the FSA we would like to call your attention to the following:

- only a corporate person may authorize a natural person to attend and vote on its behalf on decisions/resolutions of the AGM through electronic means, provided such natural person has an investor number with the MCD.
- voting on any item of the agenda shall commence prior to the convention of the AGM at a maximum of three (3) days and ends on the day of the AGM. If a shareholder's balance is changed either by increase or decrease, the voting process shall stand canceled and must re-vote at the AGM.

Please join online at least 30 minutes prior to the AGM.

For more information, please contact Mr. Salim Al Amri of Dhofar Generating Company SAOG on telephone No. 9884 9480.

MG drives success at Tour of Oman

The 14th edition of the Tour of Oman 2025 concluded on February 12, leaving behind a trail of unforgettable moments, fierce competition, and a stunning showcase of Oman's breathtaking landscapes.

MHD ACERE, the official distributor of MG in Oman, proudly served as the Strategic Sponsor of this prestigious event, reinforcing its commitment to excellence, endurance, and sporting innovation.

This year's Tour of Oman featured six challenging stages over six days, welcoming 18 international professional teams and some of the biggest names in cycling. The race commenced with the Muscat Classic and culminated with the grueling climb of Jabal al Akhdhar (Green Mountain) - a true test of strength and perseverance.

Riders from over 30 countries competed, making this edition one of the most diverse and thrilling in the race's history. The event once again highlighted Oman's incredible natural beauty, from its pristine coastline along the Gulf of Oman to the dramatic peaks of the Al Hajar Mountains.

Reflecting on the success of



the event, Mohsin Hani al Bahrani, CEO of MHD ACERE, expressed his delight to be the 'Strategic Sponsor' of the Tour of Oman 2025 - an event that not only brings the world's best cyclists to our nation but also highlights Oman's incredible landscapes and commitment to international sporting excellence.

"The spirit of endurance, passion, and innovation that drives this race aligns perfectly with MG's values. It was inspiring to witness the determination of the riders and the enthusiasm of the fans, and we look forward to supporting such remarkable initiatives in the future."

Since its inaugural edition in 2010, the Tour of Oman has established itself as a key fixture in the UCI ProSeries calendar, attracting elite cyclists and previous champions such as Chris Froome and Vincenzo Nibali. The 2025 edition once again proved why it is considered an essential early-season race, offering a mix of stunning coastal routes, grueling mountain ascents, and exhilarating sprint finishes.

MG's involvement as Strategic Sponsor brought an added layer of excitement, engaging fans with interactive experiences and reinforcing its connection to performance, adventure, and cutting-edge technology.

As the Tour of Oman 2025 ends, MG and MHD ACERE celebrate not only the achievements of the cyclists but also the growing stature of Oman as a premier destination for world-class sporting events. Looking ahead, MG remains committed to fostering an active and dynamic lifestyle for its customers and the wider community.

MG Motor is a British-born automotive brand established in 1924, known for its historic models, awards and achievements throughout the past 100 years. MG was founded by William Morris and Cecil Kimbers and has one of the oldest car clubs in the automotive industry.

Best known for its two-seat open sports cars, MG Motor also produced saloons and coupes. Since its acquisition of MG, SAIC MOTOR, as a Global Top 500 company, has opened a new chapter for this British icon. MG Motor is at the forefront of the introduction of innovative technologies and new energy vehicles for car buyers.

MHD ACERE is the flagship distributor of MG in Oman.

ahlibank improves career opportunities for youth

As part of its strategic objectives to develop national expertise and empower the youth to begin a successful journey in the banking sector, ahlibank participated in the Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) Career Fair.

The event took place over the span of three days, from February 17 to 19, and it succeeded in connecting groups of students; giving them a brief look into the intricacies of ahlibank.

The popular Career Fair that aims to provide job and training opportunities for students and graduates. Students interested in working for the companies and institutions at the career fair were given insight on how they operate and what is expected of them upon joining the workforce.

Representatives of ahlibank offered consultations to those present at the event, driving forward the bank's mission to nurture bright, young individuals.

Talent acquisition is a key focus at events like the SQU Career Fair, where ahlibank actively works to unlock youth potential, enhance their skills, and accelerate their professional growth.



By offering a platform that empowers national talent, the Bank reinforces its commitment to Oman's socio-economic development, aligning with the objectives of Oman Vision 2040.

ahlibank adopts a strategic approach, providing training and development programs that address its employees' needs. Programs to note, such as HIMAM, IGeneration, and the Business Graduates Programme, all play into a well-crafted system that

enables the youth to pursue career opportunities in the banking sector.

Supporting and nurturing young talent is a fundamental pillar of ahlibank's commitment to driving national economic growth. The bank provides a distinguished platform for young Omanis, equipping them with the tools and opportunities needed to define their career paths and excel in their chosen fields.

Vodafone Oman's auction breaks record with highest sold number

Vodafone Oman has once again set the benchmark for exclusivity and innovation with the success of its 777 live number auction.

Held in collaboration with the Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA), this exclusive event provided customers the opportunity to claim some of the most sought-after mobile numbers in the sultanate, with final bids closing at over RO580,000 to support charitable associations and organisations across the country.

Building on the success of the company's previous special gold and diamond numbers auction, which generated over RO100,000 - the 777 series auction, attracted overwhelming participation, reaffirming the growing demand for unique mobile numbers that embody both status and rarity.

This momentum continued as Vodafone reached a new milestone with the auction of the first-ever single-digit number (77777777) in the country's telecom history, which sold for RO429,500, setting a new record as the most valuable



number ever sold in Oman.

Commenting on the impact of the auction, Bader al Zidi, Vodafone Oman CEO, asserted that at Vodafone Oman, "we believe that every interaction with our customers should be meaningful; whether it's through our services, experiences, or initiatives like the 777 auction". This event, he said, was not just about offering rare numbers; it was about creating something truly memorable

while making a tangible impact in the community.

"The overwhelming participation reaffirms that exclusivity can have a purpose, and we are committed to continuing to find ways to bring value to our customers beyond traditional telecom offerings."

He went on to add, "I would like to thank the TRA and our loyal customers for being part of this success."

The event provided a seamless and interactive experience, allowing bidders to compete for some of the rarest numbers in Oman.

While adhering to regulatory and data privacy processes, this auction reinforced Vodafone's commitment to setting new standards in customer engagement while ensuring fair competition through a structured and transparent bidding process.

All-new Nissan Kicks gets thrilling regional launch in Dubai

An immersive unveil event captures the spirit of individuality of the all-new Kicks featuring streetstyle installations and high-energy dance performances

Nissan has last week introduced Kicks, 2025, to the region with a high impact launch at The Sevens Stadium, Dubai.

Hosted under the theme 'GO EPIC', the venue was transformed into an urban-inspired stage, bringing together over 200 guests including Nissan's regional partners, media, automotive experts and select customers.

Designed for individuals who dare to stand out, the Kicks introduces a progressive design, advanced technology, and dynamic driving performance that sets a new benchmark in its segment.

Nissan transformed the stadium's grounds into a custom-built automotive arena, featuring a life-sized track encircling the central stage. The reveal unfolded with the 'Kicks Drop', a seamless fusion of digital illusion and reality, where the all-new Nissan Kicks appeared to plummet onto the stage before transitioning into a real-world spectacle, reinforcing the model's urban, street-style identity.

Additionally, two all-new



Kicks vehicles drove onto the platform in synchronised motion, amplifying the sense of arrival, and then crossed the platform, giving attendees their first look at the region's newest crossover.

The experience continued with immersive touchpoints, including vibrant parkour performances that infused the night

with the raw energy of street culture, tying into the Kicks' bold, individualistic identity.

Taking the stage on the opening night, Thierry Sabbagh, Divisional Vice President & President - Middle East, KSA, CIS - Nissan & Infiniti, set the tone for the evening, sharing Nissan's vision for the next-generation Kicks.

"The all-new Kicks embodies our bold vision to 'Defy Ordinary,' offering a blend of style, innovation, and versatility that is truly unmatched. Since its debut in the Middle East, the Kicks has empowered drivers to express their individuality, and this new generation takes it even further," he said.

"With a daring new design, cutting-edge technology, and exceptional performance and fuel efficiency, the all-new KICKS is built for those who live vibrantly and go epic every day."

Following the reveal, Charl Grobler, General Manager, Product Marketing at Nissan Middle East, took the stage to present an in-depth breakdown of the Kicks' latest advancements, highlighting the vehicle's refined design and innovative technologies, showcasing how the new powertrain enhances performance while maintaining fuel efficiency.

NBO top spenders to get rewards on Mother's Day

The National Bank of Oman (NBO) has announced launching a special Mother's Day campaign, rewarding top-spending cardholders with special packages in celebration of this special occasion on March 21.

From February 15 to March 10, all NBO cardholders - including Debit, Credit, and Badeel Prepaid Card customers - can participate by purchasing through POS and eCommerce transactions.

Speaking on this exclusive offer, Maha Saud al Raisi, Assistant General Manager and Head of Product at NBO, said: "As we celebrate this special occasion, we aim to offer our customers a meaningful way to celebrate with their loved ones. Not only does this cam-

paign reward our valued cardholders, but it also helps to strengthen their familial bonds by providing a truly memorable experience.

"With NBO cards, customers can enjoy easy transactions, enhanced security, and exclusive rewards, making their shopping journey even more rewarding. Through this initiative, we recognise and appreciate our customers."

As part of the campaign, the highest spenders across various card categories will be rewarded with one winner to be selected from each of the Infinite, Signature, Platinum, and Gold Credit Card categories. For Debit Cards, two winners will be chosen from the Sadara, Mazaya, and Mass/Classic categories.

GAC, Mitsubishi Motors, Fuso celebrate 50 years of success

General Automotive Company (GAC), a part of The Zubair Corporation, celebrated a landmark occasion - 50 years of partnership with Mitsubishi Motors and Mitsubishi Fuso Truck & Bus Corporation in Oman.

The grand anniversary event took place on February 16 at the prestigious Al Bandar Ballroom, Shangri-La Barr Al Jissah in Muscat. The evening brought together dignitaries, business leaders, and industry pioneers to honour a legacy built on trust, innovation, and an unwavering commitment to progress.

The event was graced by the presence of several distinguished guests, including the German Ambassador to Oman, H E Dirk Lölke, Chairman of Mobility & Equipment Sector within The Zubair Corporation; Hani al Zubair, senior dignitaries from Mitsubishi Motors; Minoru Kinoshita - Corporate Office; Moteki Takahiro - GM, Middle Division and Junya Takami - President MMMEA as well as Daimler Truck - Fuso; Michael Dietz, CEO & President MEA and Stavros Stavropoulos - Head of Network Development & Training, further underscoring the significance of this important milestone celebration.

Reflecting on the 50-year journey, Hani al Zubair said, "Fifty years is not merely a measure of time; it is a testament to the enduring spirit of partnership, resilience, and shared vision. Together, we have built a foundation of trust and excellence that



has shaped Oman's mobility landscape. As we celebrate this milestone, we also look ahead with renewed commitment to innovation and progress, ensuring that Mitsubishi Motors and Fuso brands remain the trusted mobility solutions for generations to come in Oman."

Since 1974, when Mohamad al Zubair introduced Mitsubishi cars and Fuso trucks to Oman, this partnership has played a pivotal role in shaping the nation's automotive landscape. From the first Mitsubishi Galant to the legendary Pajero and Canter, Mitsubishi and Fuso vehicles have become an integral part of Oman's roads, industries,

and everyday life. Over the decades, this collaboration expanded its presence with state-of-the-art showrooms, service centers, and industry-leading customer service initiatives, setting new standards in reliability, performance, and excellence.

Addressing the attendees, Manoj Ranade, General Manager of GAC, highlighted the role of customer trust in this success: "Over the years, our network has expanded to 9 sales outlets, 14 service centers, and 18 parts outlets across Oman, ensuring that we are always within reach of our customers. But more than just numbers, what truly defines us is the trust our customers

have in us, knowing that we stand by them at every step of their journey. Our commitment to after-sales excellence has been recognised regionally, reinforcing our mission to continuously set new benchmarks in customer satisfaction."

Speaking on behalf of Mitsubishi Motors, Minoru Kinoshita, Corporate Officer of Mitsubishi Motors Corporation, reaffirmed the strength of this long-standing partnership, stating, "Fifty years is a testament to a relationship built on trust, mutual respect, and a shared vision. Together, we have not only delivered vehicles that conquer Oman's diverse terrains but have

also met the evolving needs of its people. Mitsubishi Motors is proud to have played a role in the nation's development, and through our collaboration with General Automotive Company, we have created a legacy of reliability, innovation, and customer excellence."

Michael Dietz, President & CEO of Daimler Truck MEA - Fuso, said, "Our enduring partnership with General Automotive Company isn't built on products alone; it's built on trust - the trust of drivers who rely on Fuso's dependability every day, and the trust of businesses that count on our vehicles to power their success."

Bank Muscat highlights career paths

During the Career Fair at Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) organised recently under the auspicious of H E Khalid Salem al Ghamari, Undersecretary in the Ministry of Labour, Bank Muscat's stall experienced a positive turnout of students eager to explore diverse career and training opportunities. The bank's participation in the fair underscores its commitment to investing in human resources and creating valuable job and training prospects for Omani youth.

Bank Muscat, honoured with the 'Best Places to Work Award 2024', takes pride in being one of the leading institutions in Oman that prioritises this vital sector.

A number of students and visitors expressed their views regarding the training and employment opportunities provided by Bank Muscat, highlighting the significance and value of such exhibitions and events.

Aisha Mohammed al Jabri, cyber and information security graduate from University of Technology and Applied Sciences, said, "These exhibitions provide significant benefits for graduates, as numerous institutions have established dedicated programmes for fresh graduates, presenting a wealth of opportunities for job seekers. Bank Muscat offers a variety of opportunities tailored to both students and graduates."

Ibrahim Suleiman al Shaqsi, a visitor, said, "The significance of such exhibitions lies in their ability to enrich graduates and stu-



Aisha al Jabri



Ibrahim al Shaqsi

dents by providing them with opportunities to discover available positions and understand the application process, particularly at the outset of their careers. I strongly encourage students and job seekers to attend these exhibitions to familiarise themselves with the participating institutions." The bank acknowledges that a skilled and highly engaged workforce is key to driving productivity.

Dhofar Islamic enables women to achieve financial aspirations

Designed exclusively for ladies, Dhofar Islamic's ladies Account - the sharia'a-compliant savings account under BankDhofar's Islamic banking window - is built on the Mudharaba principle. It aims to empower women financially, enabling them to make informed decisions and achieve their aspirations.

With a strong commitment to supporting ladies' financial independence, Dhofar Islamic offers exclusive benefits, including special rates on financing and deposits, ensuring that ladies receive competitive returns for their personal or business financial needs. Through its Ladies Banking services, Dhofar Islamic provides ladies with a range of tailored benefits, such as the ease of opening an account via mobile banking, a monthly return based on the Mudharaba account balance, and competitive financing rates.



Amer bin Said al Amri, DGM and Head of Retail Banking at Dhofar Islamic, highlighted the bank's commitment to inclusivity, stating: "Dhofar Islamic is characterised by diversity, inclusiveness, and meeting the needs of all segments of society. Therefore, the Ladies Account is committed to providing ladies in the Sultanate of Oman with the financial tools that enable them to achieve their future aspirations and ambitions."

The Ladies Account offers more than just banking services. Customers also gain access to exclusive benefits on credit cards, including loyalty points under the Dhofar Islamic Rewards Program, discounts at select stores, and privileges that enhance their lifestyle.

In addition to financial products, the account provides financial guidance and advisory support, enabling ladies to plan effectively for their future.



Genetco, Arçelik Hitachi host convention

Genetco LLC and Arçelik Hitachi Home Appliances hosted a prestigious dealer convention at the Intercontinental Hotel, Muscat, bringing together key regional distributors and retail partners.

The event served as a platform to showcase the latest innovations in home appliances while reinforcing our strong partnerships with our partners in the Omani market. The convention was attended by our authorised retailers, along with senior executives from both organisations.

Representing Genetco LLC were Chairman Murtadha Hassan Ali; Dr Muthanna al Durrah CEO & Board Advisor; Dr Ambuj Khare, COO; and Product Manager Sathesh Chandran.

From Arçelik Hitachi Middle East, the event was graced by Atsushi Yamanaka, Managing Director; Mohamed Farjad, Director - Sales; Ahmed Rashwan, Director - Product & Marketing; and Mohammed Masood, Sales Manager.

As a trusted industry leader in

Oman, Genetco remains committed to delivering excellence through high-quality products, exceptional customer service, and strong distributor relationships. The company continues to drive market growth, ensuring that all our consumers receive best-in-class home appliances tailored to their evolving needs.

Dr Muthanna also stated in his presentation that Genetco after 54 years of its operations in Oman positioned itself as the market leader in home appli-

ances and electronics. The event featured insightful presentations on Hitachi's latest product lineup, emphasising advancements in energy efficiency, smart home integration, and cutting-edge technology. Attendees engaged in live product demonstrations and discussions focused on market strategies to enhance customer experience and business growth. This gathering reinforced Hitachi's dedication to providing innovative home appliances.

Newly launched Haval H9 and H7 set to conquer sultanate's SUV market

Oman Trading Establishment (OTE Group), a reputable conglomerate with over 30 years of legacy in the region, in partnership with Chinese vehicle manufacturer Great Wall Motor Company (GWM), is aiming to make a significant impact in the competitive SUV/4x4 market across the country with the launch of two new Haval products: the second-generation H9 and the all-new H7.

The Crowne Plaza, Muscat hosted a glittering event to showcase the cars to the media, influencers and enthusiasts.

A Senior Spokesperson, OTE Group, expressed his pride in the enduring partnership with Great Wall Motor: "Tonight marks a

significant milestone for both OTE Group and Great Wall Motor. The Haval H9 and H7 exemplify the very best of automotive engineering and design, perfectly suited for the Oman market. We are committed to delivering exceptional vehicles and unmatched customer experiences, and these new models are a testament to that promise."

Haval H9

The H9 comes with a 2.0L turbocharged petrol engine with an 8-speed automatic transmission that delivers an impressive 214 HP and 380 Nm of torque. The H9 is a 4WD with a 7-drive mode all terrain control system. It has a high ground clearance of



224mm and an impressive 800mm wading depth. With the H9, GWM is targeting families

with its 7-seater capacity and strong emphasis on safety.

The H9 boasts an impressive

14.6" infotainment screen which delivers crisp visuals and intuitive controls for a seamless and con-

nected driving experience. It can wirelessly connect to devices, has a 10-speaker DTS, 50W fast wireless charger and multiple USB ports. The driver and passenger seats come with ventilation and massage functions, while the second row of three seats offers ample legroom and the third row is more functional than before.

Haval H7

The second unveiling of the evening was the all-new H7 with a hardcore design style that differentiates from traditional flat waistline designs with a sectional splicing design approach.

It's classic yet appealing retro round led head lights comes with

a thick wall technology for brighter light dispersion.

The round rear taillights match the front headlights completing its distinctive look. It comes with a conventional 2.0L turbocharged 4WD petrol engine paired with a 9-speed dual-clutch automatic transmission.

The petrol engine delivers a high 228 HP and 380 Nm of torque. As a mid-to-large-sized 5-seater SUV, the H7 provides a spacious interior with a luxurious feel, featuring large instrument displays, a 14.6" touchscreen, a panoramic sunroof and a heads-up display.

The H7 is classy and luxurious with a bit of beast mode all rolled into one.

AP sues three Trump administration officials for media access ban

Washington, D.C., US - The Associated Press (AP) on Friday sued three Trump administration officials after journalists from the news organisation were barred from White House events, the Oval Office and Air Force One for not using 'Gulf of America' in its reporting.

The lawsuit, filed in the US District Court in Washington, argued that the ban violates the First Amendment and the Fifth Amendment's due process clause in the US Constitution.

The AP is seeking an emergency hearing and a court order declaring the ban unconstitutional.

"The press and all people in the United States have the right to choose their own words and not be retaliated against by the government. The Constitution does not allow the government to control speech. Allowing such government control and retaliation to stand is a threat to every American's freedom," AP lawyers stated in the lawsuit.

The suit named White House



Chief of Staff Susan Wiles, spokeswoman Karoline Leavitt and Deputy Chief of Staff Taylor Budowich as defendants.

The Associated Press (AP) journalists were barred from White House events, the Oval Office and Air Force One for not using 'Gulf of America' in its reporting. Later, Trump said he would not allow AP back until 'they agree that it's the Gulf of America'

The White House move followed AP's continued use of 'Gulf of Mexico' in its reporting, despite President Donald

Trump's executive order renaming it 'Gulf of America'.

Trump defended the decision on Tuesday, saying that he

would not allow The Associated Press back in the Oval Office until 'they agree that it's the Gulf of America'.

"The Associated Press, as you know, has been very, very wrong on the election, on Trump, and the treatment of Trump, and other things having to do with Trump and Republicans and conservatives," Trump said.

"They're doing us no favours, and I guess I'm not doing them any favours. That's the way life works." While the White House

argues that AP remains credentialed like other media outlets, AP argues that barring its reporters from the 'press pool' coverage, such as presidential questions and answers at the Oval Office, denies access to billions relying on its reporting.

The agency earlier explained in its stylebook that it did not adopt Trump's name change.

"Trump's order only carries authority within the United States.

Anadolu Agency

'Get together' to end Ukraine war, Donald Trump tells Putin, Zelensky

According to Marco Rubio, Trump wants to know if Russia is serious about ending the war in Ukraine

Washington, D.C., US - US President Donald Trump called on Friday for his Ukrainian and Russian counterparts Volodymyr Zelensky and Vladimir Putin to 'get together' to end the Ukraine conflict.

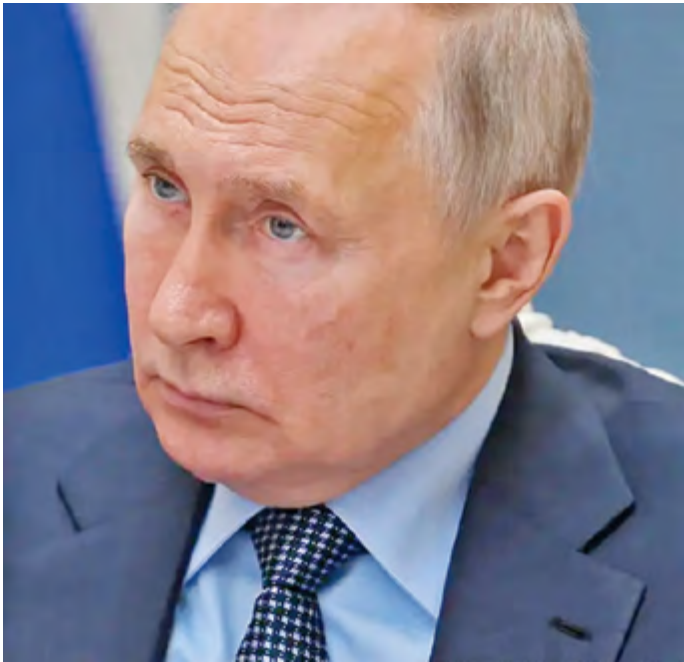
"I think that President Putin and President Zelensky are going to have to get together. Because you know what? We want to stop killing millions of people," Trump told reporters at the White House.

Trump has been pushing for a deal to end the war soon and has held separate calls with both leaders. His top officials recently met their Russian counterparts in Saudi Arabia in talks that did not include Ukraine.

Trump's new call follows comments by US Secretary of State Marco Rubio earlier on Fri-



Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky says Russian President Vladimir Putin is not interested in peace



Trump's new call follows comments by US Secretary of State Marco Rubio, who said a potential meeting between Trump and Putin would 'largely depend on whether we can make progress on ending the war'

day, who said a potential meeting between Trump and Putin would 'largely depend on whether we can make progress on ending the war in Ukraine'.

In an interview published on social media, Rubio said he told

Russian officials in Saudi Arabia earlier that there would be no meeting until 'we know what the meeting is going to be about'.

According to the official, Trump wants to know if Russia is serious about ending the war in

Ukraine, which was sparked by Moscow's full-scale invasion three years ago.

"The only way is to test them, to basically engage them and say, 'Okay, are you serious about ending the war? And if so, what are your demands? Are your public demands and your private demands different?'" Rubio said.

Rubio: Trump 'very upset' with Zelensky

In the interview, the US Secretary of State also spoke about a growing rift between Trump and Ze-

lensky. "President Trump is very upset with President Zelensky," Rubio said. "We care about Ukraine because it has implications for our allies and ultimately for the world. There should be some level of gratitude here."

Rubio also said he discussed a deal to open Ukraine's natural wealth to US investment in a meeting with Zelensky and US Vice President JD Vance in Munich last Friday.

"We explained to them, 'Look, we want to be in a joint venture with you, not because we're try-

ing to steal from your country, but because we think that's actually a security guarantee because we're your partner in an important economic endeavour,'" Rubio said.

Speaking at the Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC) near Washington, Trump's National Security Adviser Michael Waltz said Zelensky would be giving the US access to Ukrainian mineral resources soon.

"Look, here's the bottom line, President Zelensky is going to sign that deal, and you will see that in the very short term, and that is good for Ukraine," Waltz said.

The US has also drafted a short US resolution on Ukraine which mourns the 'tragic loss of life' throughout the conflict, according to AFP and Reuters news agencies.

The 65-word draft also 'implores a swift end to the conflict and further urges a lasting peace between Ukraine and Russia'. The resolution does not blame Russia for the war and does not mention Russia's occupation of Ukrainian territory.

Russian Ambassador to the UN Vassily Nebenzia labelled the US-produced text a 'good move' but added it does not touch on the 'roots' of the conflict.

A parallel Ukrainian-European UN text singles out Russia for the ongoing invasion and said it backs Kyiv's 'territorial integrity'.

The 193-member UN General Assembly will gather on Monday to vote on the European-backed UN resolution.

Macron's warning

Meanwhile, French President Emmanuel Macron plans to use his upcoming trip to the White House to try to persuade Trump to align himself with European allies.

During an online question-and-answer session on Thursday night, Macron said he planned to tell Trump on Monday that showing any weakness to Putin would make it harder to deal with China and Iran.

"I will tell him: deep down you cannot be weak in the face of President Putin. It's not you, it's not what you're made of, and it's not in your interests," the French president said.

Following the online session, Macron wrote on X that he had a phone conversation with Zelensky, and they had reviewed 'all the contacts I have had with European partners and allies willing to work towards a lasting and solid peace for Ukraine and to strengthen Europe's security'.

DW

DR Congo: UN Security Council calls on Rwandan troops to leave

New York, US - The United Nations Security Council on Friday urged the Rwandan military to withdraw its support for the M23 rebel group in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo and pull out its soldiers from Congolese territory 'without preconditions'.

Large patches of the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo are now under the control of the M23 rebel group with the support of some 4,000 Rwandan soldiers, according to UN experts.

Security Council resolution

On Friday, the UN Security Council unanimously adopted a resolution saying it 'strongly condemns the ongoing offensive and advances of the M23 in North Kivu and South Kivu with the support of the Rwanda Defence Forces'.

It also called on the Rwanda Defence Forces 'to cease support to the M23 and immediately withdraw from DRC territory without preconditions'.

Earlier, the Security Council had called for an 'immediate and unconditional ceasefire' by all parties, but on Friday all countries including the three African members held Kigali responsible for



A UN Security Council resolution has called on Rwanda for the first time to stop backing M23 rebels

the first time.

In a phone conversation with Kenya's President William Ruto on Friday, US Secretary of State Marco Rubio also called for an immediate ceasefire.

Rwanda, however, denies the allegations that it supports the M23 rebels with armed troops.

Expanding control of M23 rebels

Tensions of an escalating war loom as the M23 have captured

the two largest cities in eastern Congo. The M23 rebels have also gained control over Lake Kivu after its lightning offensive in the east.

The latest round of fights has forced more than 50,000 Congolese to move to Burundi, Uganda and other countries, according to the UN.

Since losing Bukavu to the rebels, the Congolese armed forces have barely put up a fight, instead retreating.

"Almost no Congolese soldiers are fighting," an observer said on Friday, adding that the 'only ones still fighting are the Wazalendo' pro-Kinshasa militia.

Congo accuses Rwanda of using M23 as a proxy to loot its natural resources. Meanwhile, Rwanda accuses Congo of supporting ethnic Hutu militias such as the FDLR, the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda.

DW

German voters concerned over economy, far-right ahead of poll

Berlin, Germany - German voters are increasingly worried about their economic outlook and the growing influence of the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) party as they prepare to head to the polls on Sunday in a closely-watched parliamentary election.

"My biggest concern is the right-wing tendencies that are currently on the rise in Germany," said Nicole, a 29-year-old musician in Berlin. "It's influenced by a lot of factors - the economy is one of them obviously, migration is one of them," she told Anadolu, adding that polarisation in society is causing great worries.

The anti-immigrant AfD has seen its vote share surge to 21% before the election, cementing its position as the second-largest party behind the Christian Democrats (CDU/CSU). It marks a dramatic increase from the party's 10% share in the 2021 election.

The AfD's rise has spurred previously disengaged voters to plan to head to the polls on Sunday. The socialist Die Linke party has seen its support grow from 3% in December to 8%, largely due to its strong opposition to the AfD. "I'm concerned about the AfD and the economy. I don't see the brightest future right now for



AfD's rise has spurred previously disengaged voters to the polls on Sunday

the economy if we don't do a few things," said Damian, a 28-year-old sales professional. He also expressed concern over the Trump administration's interference in German elections but added that 'the people will vote nevertheless for what they want'.

The election campaign has been marked by escalating tensions between the US and Europe, particularly following controversial moves by American leadership. US Vice President JD Vance's speech at the Munich Security Conference where he voiced support for right-wing populist movements, and his subsequent meeting with AfD co-chair Alice Weidel also raised concerns.

Gutrund, a 74-year-old pen-

sioner, expressed concern about external influences on German politics. "Trump is the most dangerous person for me at the moment. He is not predictable and these decisions that Trump and his aides are making worldwide - that's dangerous," she said, adding that Germans must step up to defend their democracy.

She noted that frustrated Germans, particularly in the former East German states, were increasingly turning to the AfD, which she said was not offering real solutions to current problems and challenges. The 'AfD catches exactly the fears of the people. The world is changing, nobody can stop it, the AfD can't change it either', she said.

Anadolu Agency

Hamas hands over five captives to Red Cross in Rafah, Nuseirat



Hamas handed over Israeli hostages Eliya Cohen, Omer Shem Tov, Omer Wenker, Tal Shoham and Avera Mengistu to the Red Cross

Ankara, Turkey - Al-Qassam Brigades, the military wing of Hamas, handed over on Saturday five Israeli captives to the Red Cross in two locations in Gaza as part of the seventh exchange under the January 19 ceasefire deal.

Two captives were released in Rafah, southern Gaza: Tal Shoham, an operative in the Israeli intelligence agency Mossad, and Avera Mengistu, who was captured in 2014 under mysterious circumstances when he entered Gaza.

Later, Hamas released three more Israeli captives - Eliya Cohen, Omer Shem-Tov, Omer Wenkert - in Nuseirat, central Gaza Strip.

The sixth hostage, Hisham Al-Sayed, is due to be released later Saturday without a formal ceremony.

Two captives were released in Rafah - Tal Shoham, a Mossad operative, and Avera Mengistu, who was captured in 2014 under mysterious circumstances

Representatives of the Red Cross signed an official transfer protocol with the Al-Qassam Brigades, ensuring the safe delivery of the captives.

The Israeli army in a statement confirmed receiving the captives, saying they were on their way to Tel Aviv where they will undergo an initial medical

evaluation.

In return, 602 Palestinians held in Israeli jails will be freed.

Hamas ready for 2nd phase

Meanwhile, Hamas declared on Saturday its readiness to move to the second phase of the ceasefire agreement in Gaza, reiterating that the completion of prisoner-hostage exchanges depends on Israel's full adherence to the terms of the deal, particularly regarding the humanitarian situation in the enclave.

In a statement, Hamas stressed that the exchange of the six Israeli captives demonstrated its commitment to the terms of the agreement that took effect on January 19, while Israel's continued 'delaying tactics' were hindering the process.

Hamas warned Israel that they face a stark choice: "Either they receive their prisoners in coffins, as occurred on Thursday due to Netanyahu's arrogance, or they embrace them alive, adhering to the conditions set by the resistance."

The Palestinian group said 'Netanyahu's attempts to distract from his military's defeat in Gaza by committing massacres in the occupied West Bank will not break the will of our people or their resistance'.

Earlier, Hamas' spokesperson Abdul Latif al-Qanou said in a statement that 'the completion of the upcoming prisoner exchanges relies on the occupation's commitment to the remaining clauses of the agreement and its implementation of the humanitarian protocol'.

The spokesman criticised Israel for 'failing to fully execute the terms of the ceasefire agreement, even after 33 days into the first phase'.

He called on international mediators to 'exert pressure on Israel to fulfil its obligations', ensuring that 'vital supplies for shelter and aid reach the Palestinian people'.

Hamas reiterated its 'readiness to proceed with a large and comprehensive prisoner exchange, encompassing a definitive end to the war, the withdrawal of the occupying forces, and the rebuilding of Gaza'.

The three-phase truce took effect last month, halting Israel's genocidal war, which has killed more than 48,000 people.

Anadolu Agency



Syria: EU set to approve gradual lifting of sanctions

Istanbul, Turkey - The EU is set to approve the gradual suspension of certain sectoral sanctions against Syria next week to facilitate the country's reconstruction following the fall of the Bashar al-Assad regime, diplomatic sources said on Friday.

The decision is expected to be formalised on Monday by the EU Foreign Affairs Council, which will convene in Brussels, diplomatic sources confirmed, Spanish news agency EFE reported.

The bloc previously reached a political agreement on the matter, but Monday's meeting will mark its implementation.

EU foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas said the sanctions will be eased step by step, with the possibility of reinstatement if Syria's new authorities fail to meet EU expectations.

The bloc is particularly seeking assurances of inclusiveness and respect for human rights from the new government.

The initial phase of sanctions relief is expected to focus on sectors critical to reconstruction, including transport, energy and financial transactions, a diplomatic source said.

In particular, air transport is anticipated to benefit from the lifting of restrictions.

The EU, however, will maintain its arms embargo on Syria, as it was not included in the political agreement among member states.

The EU initially imposed sanctions on Syria in response to the Assad regime's crackdown on the 2011 uprisings, which escalated into a prolonged civil conflict.

The bloc currently enforces restrictive measures against 318 individuals and 86 entities, including asset freezes and travel bans. Additionally, sectoral sanctions remain in place across various industries.

Anadolu Agency

Key Pakistani-Afghan border crossing closed after dispute

Islamabad, Pakistan - A key border crossing between Pakistan and Afghanistan closed on Saturday following a dispute on the construction of a new check post, an official told Anadolu.

The Torkham border crossing was closed for travellers and traffic following a verbal clash between border security forces from the two countries on Friday night.

"Afghan Taliban are constructing a new check post near the border crossing. Pakistani officials told them to stop, but they refused," a Pakistani official at the border told Anadolu on the condition of anonymity.

He added that the border remained shut since morning.

Relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan have been sour since November 2023 after Islamabad launched a crackdown against illegal foreigners, mostly



The border was closed after a dispute on construction of a new check post

Afghan refugees, and announced to send them back to their countries.

Islamabad also accuses 'Afghanistan-based' militants loyal to outlawed Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan of carrying out attacks, with the Taliban turning a blind eye. Kabul denies the charge.

In December, the Pakistani

military carried out airstrikes, the second such cross-border action by Islamabad since March 2024, in the Barmal district of eastern Paktika province.

Afghan Taliban claimed a Pakistani jet killed 46 people, including women and children. Islamabad rejected that civilians were targeted.

Anadolu Agency

Israeli army raids occupied West Bank

Ramallah, Palestine - As Israel prepared to release a group of Palestinian prisoners as part of the Gaza ceasefire deal with Hamas on Saturday, its forces carried out a series of raids across the occupied West Bank targeting Palestinian homes and threatening the families of those expected to be freed, sources and witnesses said.

In Nablus, northern West Bank, Israeli bulldozers and military vehicles stormed the town of Yasid. A house was bombarded with an explosive device, though no injuries were reported. Israeli forces then raided the structure, arrested a Palestinian and his wife, and seized their vehicle, according to the Palestinian news agency Wafa.

In Bethlehem, forces raided the Aida and Azza refugee camps, targeting the homes of two prisoners, Jawad Jawarish and Ahmed Al-Azza, who are expected to be released as part of the deal.



Israeli forces carried out a series of raids across the occupied West Bank ahead of prisoners release

In Hebron, Israeli forces entered the town of Ash-Shuyukh, in the northeastern part of the governorate. They also raided the home of prisoner Musa Muhammad Abdullah Halaika, who is also due for release.

The Israeli military's incur-

sions and detentions also extended to Ramallah, where the homes of several others prisoners due for release were raided.

The Israeli attacks come as Al-Qassam Brigades released two Israeli captives, Tal Shoham and Avera Mengistu, from Rafah

in southern Gaza.

Meanwhile, 47 prisoners who were re-arrested after being freed in the 2011 Shalit deal will be released along with 445 detainees from Gaza who were detained after October 7, 2023.

Anadolu Agency

China gives unsatisfactory answer for apparent warships firing off: Australia

Canberra, Australia - Australia Defence Minister Richard Marles said on Saturday that China has not given a 'satisfactory' answer for its warships reportedly firing into airspace off the Australian Coast, according to media reports.

Marles said Foreign Minister Penny Wong raised this issue with her Chinese counterpart, Wang Yi, during their meeting on the sideline of a G20 foreign ministers summit in South Africa, 9 News reported.

"I don't think we have a satis-

factory answer from China as to the question of the notice, we would have preferred that there was much more notice provided so that we didn't have the disconcerting set of circumstances yesterday," said Marles.

Commercial flights between Australia and New Zealand were put on notice on Friday because of 'fears' of possible live-fire exercises by two Chinese warships southeast of Sydney in international waters.

The directive prompted several international flights to divert



routes.

"What we had yesterday was the notification of a live firing event. It's not clear whether that actually occurred in terms of the

I don't think we have a satisfactory answer from China as to the question of the notice, we would have preferred that there was much more notice provided so that we didn't have the disconcerting set of circumstances yesterday

RICHARD MARLES

live firing itself," said Marles.

He added that despite the short notice, it was 'important' to remember that China has not broken international law.

Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese spoke to Christopher Luxon, his New Zealand counterpart, on Friday and said there has been no risk of

danger to any Australian or New Zealand assets.

Albanese said the vessels issued an alert that they would be holding exercises, including potential live fire. He repeated that it was not clear whether live firing had occurred.

Australia's Defence Ministry claimed last week that a Chinese fighter jet released flares in front of an Australian military plane in an 'unsafe and unprofessional' interaction above the disputed South China Sea.

Canberra said a People's Lib-

eration Army J-16 fighter aircraft 'released flares in close proximity' to an Australian Air Force P-8A Poseidon maritime patrol aircraft which was 'conducting a routine maritime surveillance patrol' above the vast water body.

China's Defence Ministry, however, slammed Australia for its alleged 'false narratives' and said it 'deliberately infringed upon China's rights and interests in the South China Sea, and even complained first and spread false narratives'.

Anadolu Agency

Pentagon to start firing around 5,400 probationary workers

Washington, D.C, US - The Pentagon announced on Friday it will start firing 5,400 probationary workers next week.

“We expect approximately 5,400 probationary workers will be released beginning next week as part of this initial effort, after which we will implement a hiring freeze while we conduct a further analysis of our personnel needs, complying as always with all applicable laws,” said Darin Selnick, who is performing the duties of undersecretary of defence for personnel and readiness. The statement came a day after Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth announced that the department is re-evaluating the probationary workforce.

“We anticipate reducing the Department’s civilian workforce by 5-8% to produce efficiencies and refocus the Department on the President’s priorities and restoring readiness in the force,” said Selnick.

Hegseth, recently, directed military officials to find US\$50bn in budget cuts for fiscal year 2026 to be redirected to align with President Donald Trump’s priorities for the department.

Govt watchdog to remain on job

Meanwhile, the US Supreme Court prevented President Donald Trump from firing the head of the US Office of Special Counsel on Friday.

The top court, in an unsigned decision, put off a decision on Trump’s request to lift a lower court ruling that reinstated Hampton Dellinger until February 26, when that order is set to



Announcement came a day after the defence secretary said the department is re-evaluating probationary workforce

Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth recently, directed military officials to find US\$50bn in budget cuts for fiscal year 2026 to be redirected to align with President Trump’s priorities for the department

expire, according to CBS News.

A district court hearing is scheduled to consider extending the pause on Dellinger’s dismissal. The Office of Special Counsel handles issues related to federal employees, overseeing protections for whistleblowers and enforcing restrictions on political activity. The office can bring enforcement actions and issue regulations. It has no relationship with special counsels that can be appointed by the Justice Department to bring federal prosecutions.

Dellinger took office last March after being picked by former President Joe Biden and confirmed by the Senate.

Trump sought to remove Dellinger from office on February 7, prompting Dellinger to file a lawsuit.

The president wants to instead install Doug Collins, the head of the Veterans Affairs, as acting head of the agency.

Besides, a federal judge temporarily blocked Trump’s crack-down on diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) programmes.

US District Judge Adam Abel-

son said the government could not freeze or cancel ‘equity-related’ contracts, nor require grant recipients to certify that their programmes do not promote DEI. Nor is the government allowed to bring any False Claims Act enforcement action, under the judge’s preliminary injunction order, according to CNN.

Abelson said Trump’s policy could violate the Free Speech Clause of the First Amendment due to the executive orders curbing DEI programmes being written so vaguely that groups had reason to fear ‘arbitrary and discriminatory enforcement’.

He wrote in his 63-page ruling that ‘the possibilities are almost endless, and many are pernicious. If an elementary school receives Department of Education funding for technology access, and a teacher uses a

computer to teach the history of Jim Crow laws, does that risk the grant being deemed ‘equity-related’ and the school being stripped of funding? If a road-construction grant is used to fill potholes in a low-income neighbourhood instead of a wealthy neighbourhood, does that render it ‘equity-related’?”

Joint chiefs of staff head fired

Trump abruptly announced late on Friday that the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Charles Brown, was being fired.

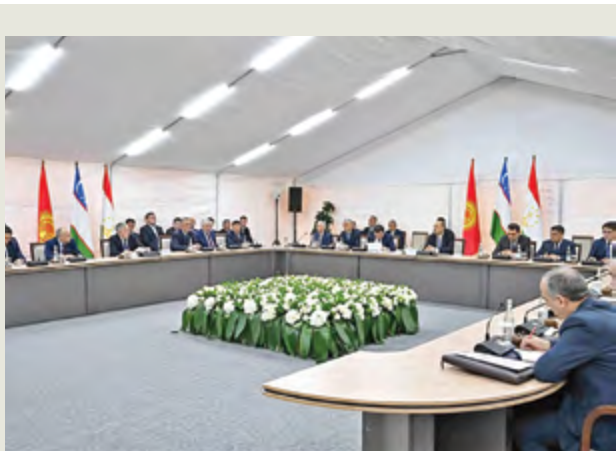
“I want to thank General Charles ‘CQ’ Brown for his over 40 years of service to our country, including as our current Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. He is a fine gentleman and an outstanding leader, and I wish a great future for him and his family,” Trump wrote on Truth Social.

He announced he would nominate Air Force Lieut. General Dan ‘Razin’ Caine to be the next chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

Trump spoke highly of Caine, stating that, ‘General Caine is an accomplished pilot, national security expert, successful entrepreneur, and a ‘warfighter’ with significant interagency and special operations experience’.

He said Caine was ‘passed over for promotion by Sleepy Joe Biden’ during the previous administration and he also directed Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth to ‘solicit nominations for five additional high level positions, which will be announced soon’.

Anadolu Agency



The border agreement potentially ends a century-long dispute

Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan reach landmark deal

Istanbul, Turkey - Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan have reached a historic agreement on the delimitation and demarcation of their shared border, potentially ending a century-long territorial dispute, a top Tajik official said on Friday.

Saimumin Yatimov, head of Tajikistan’s State Committee for National Security, hailed the development as a major breakthrough, crediting the leadership of Tajik President Emomali Rahmon and Kyrgyz President Sadyr Japarov for facilitating the agreement.

“After long, difficult, but ultimately effective work, documents on water-energy and road-transport infrastructure have been prepared and initialled. The most important historical document that was initialled on February 21 is the agreement on delimitation and demarcation of the Kyrgyz-Tajik border,” Yatimov said.

He emphasised that the finalised documents will be

submitted to the highest authorities of both nations for official approval and signing.

“If they are legalised, it will bring an end to the 100-year dispute between the two fraternal countries concerning the border issue. These historical documents, once signed by the heads of state, will serve the historical aspirations of our peoples. They will serve the political, social, cultural, economic, and other interests,” Yatimov added.

The agreement marks a significant step towards easing long-standing tensions between the two Central Asian neighbours, which have experienced sporadic border clashes over the years.

The Kyrgyz-Tajik border, stretching over 970km (600 miles), has been a point of contention since the collapse of the Soviet Union, with numerous disputes over land and access to resources fuelling conflicts in border communities.

Anadolu Agency



Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta meets PM Narendra Modi, at his residence in New Delhi, India on Saturday (ANI)

India: Delhi CM meets PM Narendra Modi at residence

New Delhi, India - Just two days later of being sworn-in as Delhi Chief Minister, Rekha Gupta met Prime Minister Narendra Modi at his residence in the national capital on Saturday.

Both of them had met during the oath-taking ceremony at Ramlila Maidan on February 20 too while the PM attended the event along with Union Home Minister Amit Shah and various other NDA leaders.

Earlier on Saturday, Gupta also held a meeting with the officials of the Public Works Department (PWD) to discuss improving the infrastructure of the national capital, and repair any damaged roads.

“Chief Minister @gupta_rekha held a meeting with the officials of the PWD department in the direction of improving the infrastructure of Delhi and also discussed in detail all the issues related to the dug up roads, damaged roads and traffic in Delhi and gave directions to the concerned officials,”

read Delhi BJP’s X post.

Meanwhile, Delhi’s PWD minister Parvesh Verma carried out an inspection of the department’s projects from Bhairon Marg till Sarai Kale Khan, Ring Road.

Both of them had met during the oath-taking ceremony at Ramlila Maidan on February 20 too while the PM attended the event along with other NDA leaders

During his inspection, he spoke with various constituents and officials to listen to their grievances and find a solution to the problems.

“Make such a road which is good for 10-15 years, even

though 5 years is the official time, you (the official) make sure it is good for 10-15 years,” Verma told the official in front of reporters.

The minister was seen asking an official about the 4km long stretch of road which is being repaired, and how traffic congestion gets dealt with during road closures. The official informed Verma that the work gets done per lane and mainly done at night.

Former CM of Delhi and AAP leader Atishi also wrote to CM Rekha Gupta, expressing her concern of the NCT’s government not yet passing scheme of giving Rs 2,500 to women.

“The first cabinet meeting of your government was held in February 20, but the Rs 2,500 scheme for women was not passed. The mothers and sisters of Delhi had believed Modi ji’s guarantee and now they feel cheated,” Atishi wrote in her letter.

ANI

ICE FISHING IN RUSSIA

People pose for photos showing off the flounder they caught during an ice fishing event in the Brazhnikov Bay of Vladivostok, Russia, on Saturday (Xinhua)



Visiting EU chief to hold talks with Indian PM

New Delhi, India - President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, will visit India on February 27-28, at the invitation of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said in a statement on Saturday.

She will be accompanied by the European Union (EU) College of Commissioners.

“This will be President Ursula von der Leyen’s third visit to India. She has earlier visited India for a bilateral official visit in April 2022, and to attend the G20 Leaders’ Summit in September 2023. Prime Minister and President Ursula von der Leyen have also met regularly on the sidelines of multilateral meetings,” the MEA statement said.

The MEA noted that this will be the first time that the entire EU College of Commissioners will visit India together. It is also ‘among the first such visits since



European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen

the start of the mandate of the current European Commission in December 2024 after the European parliamentary elections held in June 2024’.

During the visit, Prime Minister Modi will hold delegation-

level talks with President Ursula von der Leyen. “The second ministerial meeting of the India-EU Trade and Technology Council and bilateral ministerial meetings between the European Commissioners and their Indian counter-

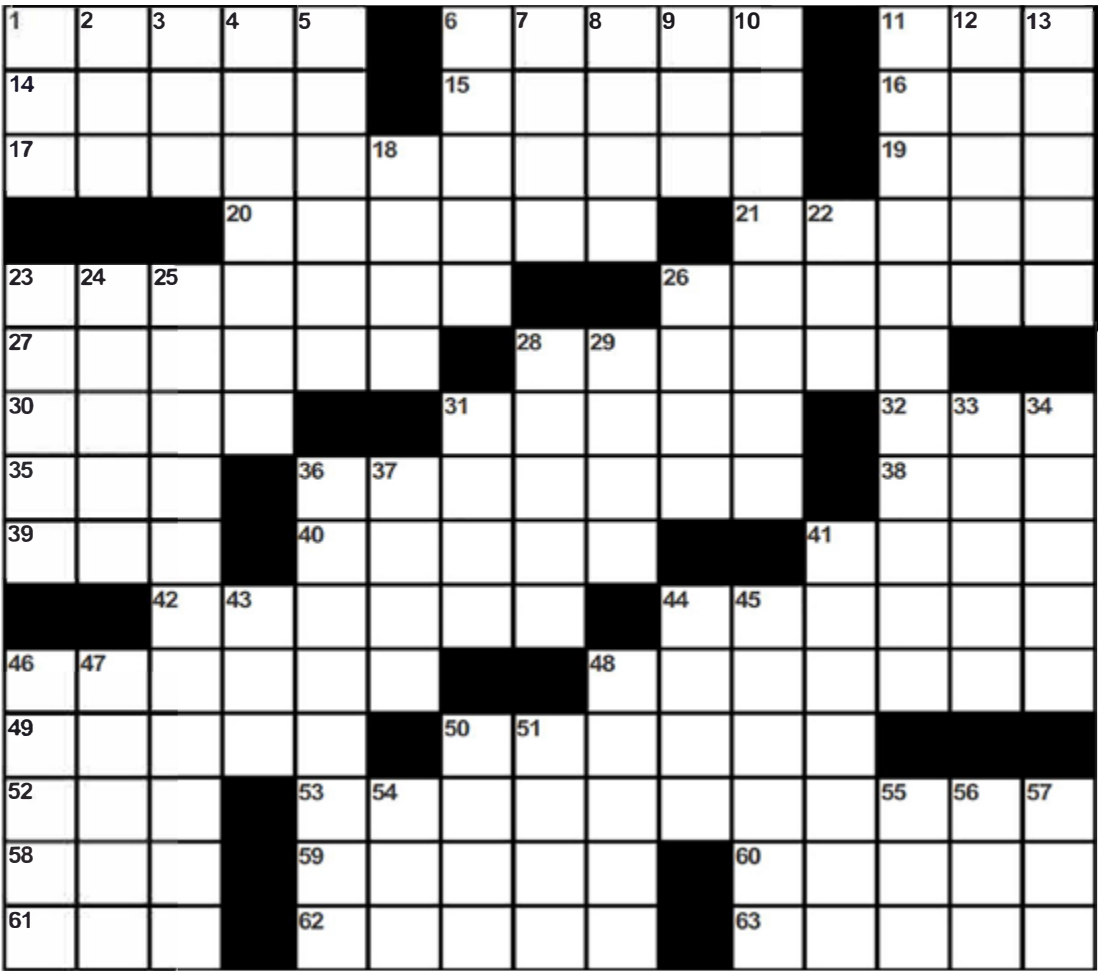
parts will also be held during the visit,” the MEA, in its official statement, mentioned.

India and the EU have been strategic partners since 2004. Their relationship has grown stronger in many areas, the MEA noted. “As the two sides enter the third decade of the strategic partnership, the visit of President von der Leyen and the EU College of Commissioners will pave the way for further strengthening of bilateral relations based on growing convergence,” the statement said.

The relationship between India and the European Union is based on shared values of democracy and rule based international multilateralism. The ties are multifaceted and cover a broad spectrum including trade, investment climate change, science and technology, digital connectivity and agriculture.

ANI

DAILY CROSSWORD



ACROSS
1) Evening hour
6) Golden Horde member
11) Undergrad degs.
14) Candidate's concern
15) Make retribution
16) Farthest or highest (Abbr.)
17) Jumper's protectors
19) Prefix meaning "new"
20) Software holders
21) Become part of history
23) Leg bones
26) Putting on airs
27) Jewelers' aids
28) Yellow fruit
30) Has the deed to
31) Hulk in the ring
32) Scandinavian rug
35) Got ruined in the wash
36) Utterly unyielding
38) Commandment count
39) "... luck?"
40) Emphatic denial
41) Engine knock
42) Hindu princesses (Var.)
44) Burden bearers
46) Virtual-reality pinch

hitter
48) Home
49) Rome's river
50) Add spice to
52) Tennis court play
53) Newborn, to parents
58) Name among boxing legends
59) Adult
60) Fast-growing vine
61) Didn't strap-hang
62) Flyboy's agreement
63) Assassinated
DOWN
1) Bro, for one
2) Australian runner
3) Delivery vehicle
4) Breakfast dishes?
5) It may be in a groove
6) Mexican meal items
7) Elementary particle
8) Craggy hills
9) "Go on ... "
10) Full, as a voice
11) Con man
12) Alaska native
13) Novel idea?
18) Important blocks of time

22) Coquettish
23) Fauna's partner
24) Dubuque resident, e.g.
25) Common hopper
26) Gap to bridge
28) Apples, e.g.
29) Biology lab supply
31) Possess
33) Gossipmonger
34) Apprehensive feeling
36) Michigan town
37) Big game
41) Like some realizations
43) Absorbed, as a cost
44) Statue part
45) Downloadable reading material
46) Book of maps
47) Kind of concerto
48) Relatively robust
50) Negotiation problem
51) Narrowly defeat (with "out")
54) Alien craft
55) Kind of approval
56) Action film weapon
57) Mother Teresa, for one

NOTE PAD



YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE



ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19
Put your money where your mouth is when the stars offer up someone out of your usual comfort zone. After all, you're a firm believer that two heads are better than one. Your collaboration won't be altogether serene, but it will be unusually artistic and constructive. Will you question the nature of this relationship? Of course. It's only natural. But don't think about it too much. You'll both achieve remarkable things.



LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22
Someone has been trying to work you, to get you to do their bidding. You might have eventually seen things their way, and you might have even done things their way before, but now that you know you're being manipulated and it's just not going to happen. You're far too rebellious and independent to let someone do this to you. Tell them all about it. Contrary to popular opinion, confrontation can be good for the soul.



SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21
Stop worrying. It's time to give something new a chance, and you're ripe and ready to do it. The only thing that's holding you back now is fear of failure. Well, guess what? Everyone fails once in a while, so get over it. And you can't win if you don't play, so why wait? Pull out all the stops, and give it a shot. You'll have more than enough help and support from your loved ones.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

1. A hunter claimed to have seen what bird in 1688, thought to be the last recorded sighting?
A. Gryphon
B. Roc
C. Phoenix
D. Dodo
2. When was the first award ceremony for the US's Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences held?
A. 1951
B. 1919
C. 1941
D. 1929
3. Which of these was a former name of Northern Rhodesia?
A. Zanzibar
B. Zimbabwe
C. Zaire
D. Zambia

Answers: 1. D 2. D 3. D



TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20
Those new people you've been associating with lately? You're really beginning to enjoy them, aren't you? Well, that's a good thing, but you won't want to alienate your current crew. Why not get them all together over the next few days? You might be surprised by how easily their energies blend. You might end up with one great big peer group instead of two.



VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22
You show-off, you! You're not only be good at your own job now, you're also good at taking care of everyone else's. So heaven help anyone who doesn't get out of the way fast enough when you come barreling through. They may not get bruised, but they definitely won't forget the experience in a hurry.



CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19
You can't hurry love. Sometimes you just have to wait. Be patient when it comes to your relationships, especially if you and a loved one have dealt with a lot of turbulence in the recent past. What's important is that you don't view this as a make-or-break time. While the energies you're encountering now might be quite dramatic, it doesn't mean that you have to settle things now once and for all. Remain open-minded.



GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21
After days of wandering around, thinking that someone has it in for you, you're about to discover all they were really doing was testing you to see what you're made of. No, it wasn't much fun, and no, you shouldn't have to go through it again. Now that their reasons are out in the open, why not let go of it and move on? Besides, you've definitely proven yourself. Bury the hatchet.



LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22
You may think that you're judged by the company you keep, but that isn't necessarily true. Today, don't worry about people making assumptions about who you are based on who you're with. Your personality is too potent to camouflage and will shine brightly through any circumstances. Be confident knowing that by staying true to the person you want to be, you're encouraging other people to do the same.



AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18
You never know what the Universe will toss your way today, but it's definitely not going to be a routine, run-of-the-mill afternoon. Instead of worrying about coulda, woulda, and shoulda, help those changes along. When surprising news arrives, jump right in, get on board, and go with the flow. It's time to expand those horizons and see what's out there waiting beyond the expected.



CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22
Today's astrological buffet is really more of the same: unpredictable. You might have had to change, cancel, or reschedule plans you made, but it turned out all right. In fact, these past few days have been kind of crazy, if not fun, haven't they? Keep this in mind when you start getting that feeling you've been here before. You should only expect the good times to continue. Be prepared for anything.



SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21
Ready or not, the new improved you is going to hit the streets. Your friends will be quite interested in all these new traits you're exhibiting, so don't be afraid to let them see it all. That goes double for that irresistible urge you've had lately to let go and be rebellious, outrageous, and anything but conservative. Oh, this is going to be great fun, isn't it?



PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20
Just in time to create an exciting day, someone near and dear to you could make a surprising announcement. You could be thrown off balance, but not for entirely unpleasant reasons. Whatever it is may take some getting used to, but then, doesn't all change take getting used to? Besides, this could free you up to do a bit more of what you've been thinking about. Look for the positives. You'll definitely be able to find more than a few.

KIDS COLOURING



BOGGLER

T	S	T	A
O	I	B	U
Y	A	U	B
B	P	Y	T

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

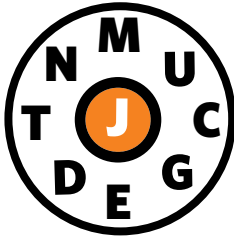
SOLUTION
20-25 words: Excellent,
15-20 words: Very good,
10-15 words: Good,
5-10 words: Average

DO YOU SUDOKU?

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

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

WORD BUILDER



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

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

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER

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

BOWEN HAMMER BLOW TO ARSENAL'S TITLE DREAMS

English forward's goal helps West Ham edge Arsenal

London, England - Arsenal's Premier League title hopes suffered a hammer blow as Jarrod Bowen's goal just before halftime gave London rivals West Ham United a surprise 1-0 away victory on Saturday.

Bowen headed in from close range in the 44th minute and Arsenal's feeble attack, missing a host of injured forwards, never looked like salvaging anything as they suffered their first home league defeat of the season.

Arsenal barely troubled visiting keeper Alphonse Areola, managing two shots on target, and played the last 20 minutes with 10 men after substitute Myles Lewis-Skelly was red-carded for hauling down Mohammed Kudus.

Mikel Arteta's second-placed side have 53 points from 26 games, eight behind leaders Liverpool who face champions Manchester City away on Sunday.

Man United rally to hold Everton

Late goals from Bruno Fernandes and Manuel Ugarte helped Manchester United come from



West Ham United's Jarrod Bowen scores against Arsenal in their Premier League match on Saturday

behind to earn a dramatic 2-2 draw at Everton on Saturday after the hosts were denied a stoppage-time penalty following a VAR review.

United's woeful campaign looked set to get worse as more poor defending allowed rejuvenated striker Beto to fire Everton in front early on, and Abdoulaye Doucoure made it 2-0 before halftime at Goodison Park.

The visitors did improve after the break and captain Fernandes pulled a goal back from a free kick before Ugarte slammed home a superb equaliser 10 minutes from time to complete the comeback.

Everton thought they were set to snatch a dramatic win after they were awarded a stoppage-time penalty, but the decision was overturned by VAR, and one point apiece kept United 15th in the standings, three places below their opponents. "I think it was a soft touch from what I saw," United manager Ruben Amorim said. "I think it was a soft penalty, it was clear."

Mbuemo stars in Brentford's big win against Leicester

Leicester, England - Brentford's Bryan Mbuemo scored one goal and made another in a 4-0 win over Leicester City on Friday as a dismal display of defending saw the relegation-threatened Foxes slump to their sixth home defeat in a row in the Premier League.

With 59 goals conceded and 10 defeats in their last 11 league games, Leicester now boast the worst defensive record in the league, and Friday's performance offered little to suggest that Ruud van Nistelrooy's side are capable of turning things around.

An early chance for Jamie Vardy got the game off to a positive start, but that was one of few bright spots for the home fans to cheer as things quickly fell apart.

The rout started when Bees playmaker Mikkell Damsgaard teed up Youane Wissa to open the scoring in the 17th minute, and 10 minutes later the Dane picked out Mbeumo on the right, and he curled home an unstoppable shot to make it 2-0.

Five minutes later Leicester's defence was caught napping again at a free kick as Mbuemo picked out Christian Norgaard,



Bryan Mbuemo scored one goal and provided an assist in Brentford's win against Leicester City

who flashed a header into the net, prompting several fans to head for the exits.

Norgaard then struck the left-hand post with another header in first-half stoppage time and the Bees also had a goal ruled out for handball before the break as Leicester's rearguard offered scant resistance.

The introduction of Argentine forward Facundo Buonanotte in the 55th minute gave Leicester's attack a much-needed boost, but the spark he provided was quickly quenched by a torrential downpour that went on for most of the second half.

Instead, Brentford substitute Fabio Carvalho rattled in a late fourth as the Bees moved up to 10th in the standings on 37 points, while their hosts remain in 19th on 17 points, with Van Nistelrooy cutting a glum figure as he discussed his side's performance.

"You have to acknowledge it's a huge step back. There was hope after recent performances, the beginning of the game was hopeful ... after the bright start from us, we were never in the game again and at halftime the game was done," he told Sky Sports.

Man City suffer injury blow as Stones faces long layoff

Manchester, England - Manchester City centre back John Stones could be facing surgery and a long layoff, said coach Pep Guardiola, who reiterated his belief on Friday that the crowded game schedule is to blame for mounting injuries.

Guardiola added that the status of leading scorer Erling Haaland is to be determined in potentially another big injury blow ahead of their top-flight clash with Premier League leaders Liverpool on Sunday.

Stones limped off the pitch with a quadriceps injury in the first half of Wednesday's loss to Real Madrid, which eliminated them from the Champions League. Haaland was sidelined with a knee injury suffered in the 4-0 win over Newcastle United on February 15.

"(Stones) is injured," Guardiola said. "It's a difficult one. In the next days, we will know if he needs surgery or not. Yeah (a long period out), like Manuel



John Stones

Akanji."

Swiss defender Akanji underwent surgery to repair a groin injury on Saturday and is expected to be out for up to 10 weeks.

Asked about Haaland's status, Guardiola said: "Don't know yet. Tomorrow we will know it, but I

don't know. It's better to have Erling on the pitch but obviously, we don't have it. But of course, with Erling we are stronger."

Even with a healthy Haaland, City face a tough test against Arne Slot's Liverpool, who top the league standings on 61 points.

Will Manchester City-Liverpool clash produce another twist in title race?

Manchester, England - Manchester City and Liverpool: the only two teams to win the Premier League over the past seven years, and the biggest rivals of that era.

Late-season showdowns between the pair have often had a decisive feel about them, determining who might prevail in their chase for the title.

Of course, this season is rather different. When the two sides meet at the Etihad on Sunday, only one will have their mind on lifting the Premier League trophy.

Languishing - by their lofty standards - down in fourth place, a huge 17 points off the pace, City are attempting to salvage something from the wreckage of a season that has unexpectedly seen a meek title defence, an early UEFA Champions League exit, and only the FA Cup as a remaining silverware option.

Their visitors are eight points clear, the dominant force in Europe and are already into the EFL



Liverpool's Mohamed Salah and Manchester City's Erling Haaland

Cup final.

Yet, Sunday's match is far from a foregone conclusion. After dropping points in two of their past three league games - and clinging on to win the other - Liverpool would dearly love a confidence-boosting triumph to calm



nerves that are starting to fray.

There is a sense that defeat might throw the title race open.

Faced with a gruelling fixture list, February always appeared decisive for Arne Slot's side. Sunday's short trip to Manchester will be Liverpool's fourth of five

F1 eyes return to V10 engines

London, England - Formula One could be racing towards a far noisier future after the sport's governing body triggered talk of a return to roaring V10 engines, this time powered by fully sustainable fuel.

Grand prix cars have been powered by 1.6 litre V6 turbo hybrid engines since 2014, with new rules from next year to 2030.

The current engines, while marvels of engineering, are hugely expensive and far quieter than the ear-splitting naturally aspirated and high-revving V10s which wowed the fans until their final appearance on the starting grid in 2006.

Mohammed Ben Sulayem, president of the governing FIA, raised the possibility in a post on Instagram reflecting on Formula One's spectacular -- and very loud -- 10-team launch in London last Tuesday. The crowd, more than 15,000-strong, had booed mention of the FIA during the proceedings.

"This week's F1 launch in London has triggered a lot of positive discussion on the future of the sport," said the Emirati in the post on Thursday night.

"While we look forward to the



Mohammed Ben Sulayem

introduction of the 2026 regulations on chassis and power unit, we must also lead the way on future technological motorsport trends.

"We should consider a range of directions including the roaring sound of the V10 running on sustainable fuel. Whichever direction is chosen, we must support the teams and manufacturers in ensuring cost control on R&D expenditure."

An FIA spokesman confirmed discussions were ongoing with stakeholders over the sport's technical direction from 2030, and a working group was likely to be set up. "A V10 power train running on sustainable fuel would be part of those considerations which would be tied to environmental and cost-containment measures," he added.

'I didn't want to offend anyone'

Atalanta manager Gasperini clarifies his comments about Lookman penalty

Bergamo, Italy - Atalanta coach Gian Piero Gasperini on Saturday said he never intended to offend Ademola Lookman by saying the striker is "one of the worst penalty takers he has ever seen" after their home Champions League defeat by Club Brugge.

Belgian side Club Brugge stunned Atalanta 3-1 in the second leg of their playoff tie to dump the Italian side out with a 5-2 aggregate win and reach the last 16.

Lookman, Atalanta's hero last season when they won the Europa League, pulled back one goal for the Italian side when they were 3-0 down.

But the Nigerian, who has scored 15 times this season, had a penalty saved, which Gasperini said Lookman was not supposed to take with offensive midfielder Charles De Ketelaere and striker Mateo Retegui on the pitch.

In a post on Instagram, Lookman said Gasperini's comments singling him out were "deeply disrespectful" and hurtful.

Gasperini brushed off the quarrel while addressing a press conference on Saturday, pointing out similarities to an incident in Udinese's 1-0 Serie A win over Lecce on Friday where Lorenzo Lucca scored a penalty despite



Ademola Lookman with Atalanta coach Gian Piero Gasperini

not being the designated taker.

"It had an extraordinary impact, everything that came afterwards... mine was not meant to be an offensive sentence," Gasperini said.

"Yesterday in Udinese-Lecce we had what could have been a drama, luckily there were guys who let it go. I would have liked a strong player like Lookman to have made a gesture towards De

Ketelaere saying 'come on keep the ball, put it in'.

"He can become a penalty taker, that would be an additional goal-scoring ability... I always speak in front of the whole team, it has never touched the club. He felt offended, I didn't want to offend anyone."

Atalanta, third in Serie A with 51 points from 25 matches, travel to relegation-threatened Empoli

I would have liked a strong player like Lookman to have made a gesture towards De Ketelaere saying 'come on keep the ball, put it in'. He can become a penalty taker

GIAN PIERO GASPERINI

on Sunday.

"Empoli come from a streak of difficult results, all the games I've seen they've performed very well," Gasperini said.

"They are a good team, with a good quality of play, with an excellent coach, who are playing for

salvation. I remember the first game, I expect a balanced, difficult match. We only have one goal, we have to do our best."

Juventus eye win

After being knocked out of the Champions League by PSV Eind-

hoven in the knockout phase playoffs, Juventus manager Thiago Motta is hoping their Serie A match against Cagliari on Sunday can help his players move on from that disappointment.

Juventus, beaten 3-1 by PSV on Wednesday to lose the tie 4-3 on aggregate, are fourth in the standings with 46 points from 25 matches.

"After such a disappointment,

the best thing is to get on the pitch and play. We know the difficulties and we have to try to win...," Motta told reporters.

"The disappointment is a lot, because we thought we could go to the round of 16. Now we have to start again and think about tomorrow's game. We still have a very busy week and we have to be smart as we always have been."



Carlo Ancelotti

We can't afford to make more mistakes in LaLiga: Ancelotti

Madrid, Spain - Real Madrid cannot afford to keep dropping points in LaLiga if they want to stay in contention in their title defence after failing to win their last three games, manager Carlo Ancelotti said on Saturday.

Barcelona took advantage of Real's slip-ups to move top on goal difference and take the driver's seat in the title race, with Atletico Madrid one point behind in third. Ancelotti urged his players to bring to Sunday's match against Girona the same intensity they showed to knock Manchester City out the Champions League playoffs.

"It's an crucial moment in the season and we have to repeat our good performance against City (on Sunday). We can't afford to make more mistakes, the league

is very competitive and every game is vital to get strong to the end of the competition," Ancelotti told a press conference.

"It's true we've been a bit unlucky and I think we have played quite against City so we have to continue in this vein, because if you play well and have a good attitude, the result will reward you.

"That is key in a competitive league like here in Spain that is very difficult to win. There are three teams within one point and they are teams of a very high level. I believe this year the title will be decided in the last game."

Jude Bellingham will miss the Girona game after receiving a two-match suspension for directing foul language at the referee during last weekend's 1-1 draw at Osasuna.



Luis Rubiales

CAS dismisses Rubiales appeal against FIFA's three-year ban

Madrid Spain - The highest court in global sport dismissed an appeal by former Spanish soccer head Luis Rubiales on Friday after he was banned from any football-related activity for kissing player Jenni Hermoso without her consent at the 2023 women's World Cup final.

World soccer governing body FIFA had banned Rubiales in October 2023 for three years and an appeals committee had also dismissed his appeal in January last year. The 47-year-old had the option to appeal the decision before the Court of Arbitration for Sport.

However, a CAS panel determined that his behaviour at the presentation ceremony "constituted multiple and serious violations of the FIFA Disciplinary Code", adding that it saw no reason to consider the sanction to be disproportionate.

"The appeal sought to set the contested decision aside, or in the alternative to set it partially aside and amend the sanction, or in the further alternative, apply any other disciplinary measures," CAS said.

Lucca's penalty helps Udinese beat Lecce

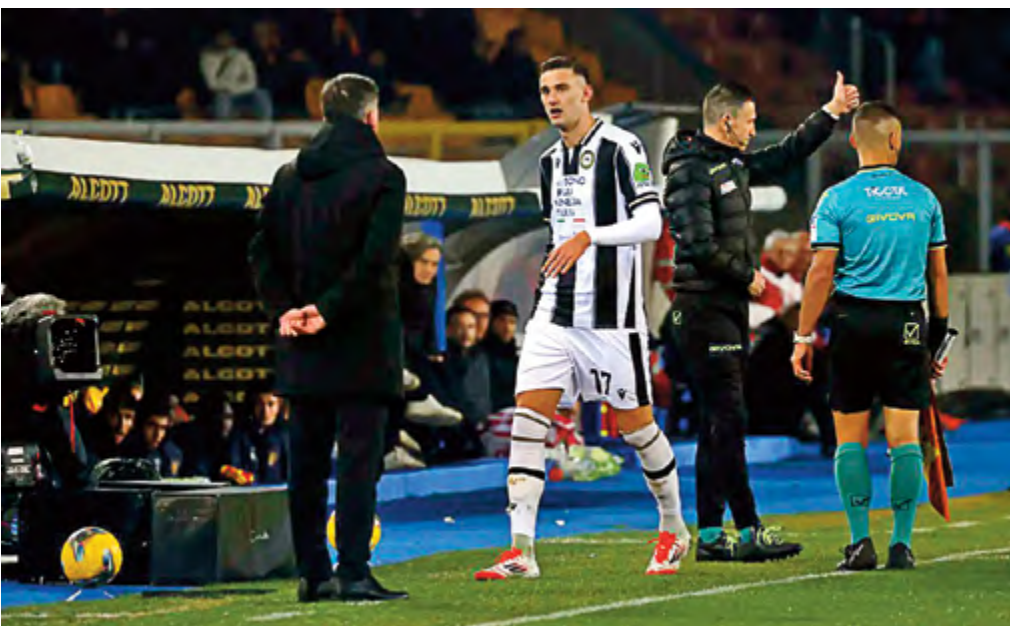
Lecce, Italy - Udinese earned a tense 1-0 away win over Lecce on Friday, not so much for the battle with the hosts but for the controversy surrounding Lorenzo Lucca's winning penalty, which infuriated his teammates.

The game took a dramatic turn just after the half-hour mark when Udinese were awarded a penalty and although captain Florian Thauvin, who is normally the penalty taker, was due to convert, Lucca unexpectedly stepped up.

Ignoring the protests of his teammates, including objections from Alexis Sanchez, Oumar Solet and Jaka Bijol, Lucca decided to take it even after Bijol attempted to stop him.

Lucca fired the ball past Lecce goalkeeper Wladimiro Falcone. His celebrations were short-lived, however, as Udinese coach Kosta Runjaic decided to replace him with Iker Bravo on 36 minutes.

The second half was no less



Lorenzo Lucca was substituted minutes after taking a penalty despite objections from his teammates

controversial, with Lecce's frustration mounting at refereeing decisions. Martin Payero, who had already received a yellow card, narrowly avoided a second

booking after a heated clash with Gaby Jean, in which there was minimal contact with the ball.

Payero almost doubled Udinese's lead with a powerful shot

that went just wide.

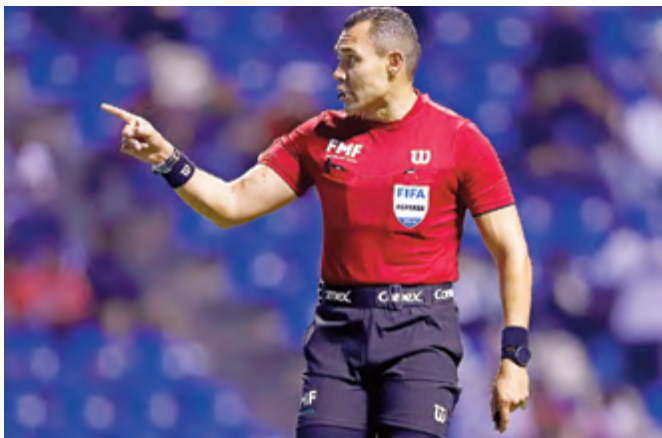
Udinese are tenth in the standings with 36 points, while Lecce are fifteenth with 25 points.

Seeking Messi's autograph puts referee in trouble

Miami, US - Mexican referee Marco Antonio Ortiz Nava found out the hard way that there are consequences for seeking an autograph from eight-time Ballon d'Or winner and World Cup winner Lionel Messi - he was hit with a CONCACAF disciplinary sanction.

As the final whistle blew on Inter Miami's 1-0 Champions Cup win over Sporting Kansas City, secured by a brilliant second-half goal from Messi, the referee known as 'El Gato' approached the Argentina international.

He appeared to be asking for the striker's shirt to join the Messi-mania, but it turned out



Antonio Ortiz Nava

he was actually requesting an autograph for a relative with special needs.

Despite the heartfelt request,

Ortiz's actions did not comply with CONCACAF's code of conduct for officials.

"Upon investigation, CONCA-

CAF has learned that the referee approached the player to request an autograph for a family member with special needs," the North American football governing body said in a statement to ESPN.

"The referee's actions were not in accordance with the confederation's code of conduct for match officials and the procedures in place for these types of requests."

Although the exact nature of the disciplinary action was not disclosed, CONCACAF added that Ortiz accepted full responsibility for his actions and apologised for his breach of protocol.

BATTLE FOR SURVIVAL

Pakistan must beat India in Dubai to stay alive in the Champions Trophy

Dubai, UAE - After the defeat to New Zealand in Karachi, Pakistan must travel to Dubai to play India, a team they have struggled to beat for several years

If ever Pakistan needed a miracle, it is now. Not for the cricketers' fault, they find themselves isolated in international cricket to the extent that this is the first ICC event they are hosting in 29 years. And barely three days into the Champions Trophy, following a thrashing against New Zealand, they are staring at the exit sign of a party they waited three decades to host.

To stay alive in the tournament, Pakistan must beat their arch-rivals on a slow, tired track, where India have already played and won one match, and have five spinners to choose from. For no fault of India's cricketers, Pakistan must leave their own party and travel to Dubai because India refused to travel to Pakistan for reasons neither their board nor their government will specify.

Would you blame Pakistan for feeling under siege when they must fight to even reinstate their nation's name in the official broadcast branding? At such times, the reasons behind any such omission can seem sinister even if they might not be.

It creates a weird dynamic between the two sets of cricketers. Despite all the machinations, the



Indian captain Rohit Sharma and his Pakistani counterpart Mohammad Rizwan (below) during their respective training sessions in Dubai



cricketers respect each other and are civil to each other to the extent that it annoys those who want their own hatred to reflect on the field. The edge is also perhaps because of the gulf between the two sides.

As is likely to happen with a team left isolated, Pakistan, once

at the forefront of innovation in Asia, are woefully behind the times, especially in limited-overs cricket. India, once the land of accumulators but not always winners, are now continuously striving to push into the future. In an era that the ICC engineers its tournament schedules to ensure

at least one big India-Pakistan match, it says a lot that Pakistan have won only in 2017 and 2021 since 2011.

More than the four-year pattern of wins, Pakistan will look at the conditions with some hope. The slow pitches in Dubai, recently used for the ILT20, call for an old-fashioned game that could neutralise to an extent India's big-hitting advantage in the middle overs. With no dew - 1pm starts anyway leave little room for dew to play a role - the toss on these pitches is a big advantage.

Kohli and Agha in the spotlight

Virat Kohli has been out to legspin in each of the five last matches that he has faced such bowling. That's five dismissals

for 21 runs in the last 46 balls of legspin he has faced in ODIs. Now Pakistan don't have a classic legspinner in their ranks, but Abrar Ahmed does turn the ball both ways like a legspinner. Most batters these days can hit big on flat tracks, but it is here you need the skill to pick singles without taking risks. It is not hard to imagine India needing just that in one of these games. Will the Kohli of the old turn up?

Salman Agha has been the silver lining for Pakistan in recent ODI cricket. Since 2024, he has scored the second-most middle-over runs for Pakistan: 325, at an average of 65.00 and a strike rate of 88.07. Pakistan will need all of his industriousness in the middle overs when India try to choke them with their slower bowlers.



Temba Bavuma

Close to our best performance, says South Africa's Bavuma

Karachi, Pakistan - Captain Temba Bavuma hailed what he termed South Africa's brave decision to bat first in their comprehensive 107-run Champions Trophy win over Afghanistan on Friday as they mastered a Karachi wicket that had left both teams unsure over how it would play.

South Africa posted 315 for six in their 50 overs thanks to a maiden one-day international century for

was a brave decision to bat first not knowing how it (the wicket) would play," Bavuma said at the post-match presentation.

"We took care of that, got a competitive score and then were clinical with the ball. All in all, close to our best performance.

"(The pitch was) closer to a wicket from back home, lots of cracks and a bit of variable bounce, but assessing a good score was tricky."

South Africa never let Afghanistan get away in their batting innings and controlled the run-rate, not just by picking up regular wickets, but also with their exemplary line and length that made scoring difficult.

"Our thinking was to hit the pitch hard and see what happens. We'll enjoy the win, but then start gearing up for what we need to do against Australia (in Rawalpindi on Tuesday)."

Afghanistan captain Hashmatullah Shahidi admitted his side battled on a wicket that did not suit their vaunted spin attack and proved difficult for their batters.

"The toss was important, it was not a typical Karachi pitch," he said. "We have the ability to fight but we didn't play the way we wanted. Their bowlers bowled well."

It was a clinical performance, but we got the rub of the green with the toss and it was a brave decision to bat first

TEMBA BAVUMA

opener Ryan Rickelton, before restricting Afghanistan to 208 all out in reply.

Karachi has been full of runs in recent times, but this wicket had more pace and bounce than is usually found at the National Stadium and it was South Africa, and their seam attack, that adapted quicker to conditions.

"It was a clinical performance, but we got the rub of the green with the toss and it

Argentina's Comesana stuns world No 2 Zverev in Rio Open

Rio de Janeiro, Brazil - Argentinian Francisco Comesana stunned Australian Open finalist and world number two Alexander Zverev on Friday with a 4-6 6-3 6-4 win in the quarter-finals of the Rio Open, the biggest win of his career so far.

Comesana, ranked 86th in the world, turned heads in his Grand Slam debut match last year when he handed sixth seed Andrey



Francisco Comesana

Rublev a first-round exit from Wimbledon.

Friday's win in Rio de Janeiro is the 24-year-old's first victory over a top-five ranked opponent.

"I was repeating to myself throughout the match, 'How good it is to be alive,'" Comesana said in his post-match interview. "So, I was enjoying the entire match."

Germany's Zverev landed

three aces as he won the first set, but Comesana fought back, converting two break points to win the second. Zverev struggled with his serve in the decisive set, making three double faults as Comesana took the win.

"I think it is because (of) all the hard work I have been doing to be here. I have to be grateful for this moment and I am enjoying (it)," Comesana said.

CLASSIFIEDS

SITUATION WANTED

Indian male graduate with 14 years of Sales & Marketing experience looking for suitable position with valid D/L , Ready to join immediately. Contact : 95136784

Looking for Immediate Job opportunity in Accounts. I am Shoaib Shaikh, with 2.5 years of experience in Accounts, specializing in bank reconciliation, accounts payable, and receivable. Additionally, I have 6 months of experience in the travel industry in Muscat. I am available to join immediately

and seeking a position with a salary expectation of RO450-550. For more details, contact: 93267786

Indian male 'Application and Business Intelligence Developer' with 22+ years' experience and expert in PowerBI, PowerApp, PowerAutomate, ASP.NET, MVC, dot-NET, C#, SQLServer, SSIS, SSRS, NintexWorkflow, looking for suitable position. Currently available in Muscat. Contact 92056372, gspirmotvla@gmail.com

VACANCY AD

"Looking for Structural Designer having experience in design of Structural Steel Building mainly in PEB industry. Minimum 3 years of experience with M-Tech Structural Design. Please Send CV to: hrjob191@yahoo.com"

SEND YOUR REQUEST FOR Birthday/ Anniversary wishes to wish@apexmedia.co.om with your resident card copy (It's free of cost)

FOR LEASE

STAFF ACCOMMODATION CAMP

prime 6000 sq. Mts. Semi Furnished Staff Accommodation Camp available for Lease in Ghala Industrial Zone, with direct road access. The Camp features porta-cabins with Junior&Senior rooms, kitchen, dining area, recreation rooms, storage, and ample open space. Ideal for short or long-term leasing.

for inquiries or to arrange a site visit, please contact: 95501871, 96704540/support@nadafaoman.com

FOR SALE

Aluminium & Upvc Fabrication Company

Fully operational factory in Misfa specializing in windows and doors. Equipped with modern machinery, skilled staff, and an established client base.

Contact: 99343645 / 79062015

ASPHALT LAYING & CABC CREW WITH MACHINERY AVAILABLE

ON DAILY / LONG TERM RENTAL BASIS

Laying Crew consist of the below.

Asphalt Paving machine 6/12 meters - 1 No's each

PTR Roller - 3 No's

Tandem Roller - 2 No's

Bitumen Sprayer - 2 No's

Crew & Operator

in case of long term rental period can be upgraded to OPAL standard.

To contact: 99660581

عيادة فصول السنة للطب الهندي التقليدي

ALL SEASON AYURVEDA CLINIC

The most efficient and authentic Ayurvedic Treatment & Medicine, Yoga, Kalari, Panchakarma, Massage, Dhara etc... Rehabilitation, Beauty therpay & post Delivery Care

Zaher Building ,1st Floor, Flat 8A, Al Khuwair Service Road ,near Al Zawawi Mosque & Burger-king Tel:24475280, GSM: 95371664 , 92504980 , Website:www.siddhayur.com

WJ Towell Group Company

Quality car rentals at competitive prices.

Muscat 9014 6672, 9679 0684

Sohar 9731 6218 | Salalah 9429 9325

www.orbit-oman.com

- Fleet of 2,000 vehicles
- Choose from a wide range of brands & models
- PDO, OXY and BP spec vehicles available
- Attractive rates for short-term & long-term lease



ECOLOGY

Moon to Earth

China’s moonfaring grass seeds to sprout on Earth

Herders in Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region may have the chance to feed their cows and sheep with out-of-this-world grass, as a group of new varieties will be developed from seeds that survived a trip to the Moon.

Four packages of grass seed samples, weighing 200 grams and originating from northwest China, were carried aboard the Chang’e-6 lunar probe, which was launched to the previously unexplored far side of the moon in May last year and returned to Earth in late June.

The trial planting of these seeds on Earth will commence in early March this year, Xinjiang’s Academy of Animal Science told Xinhua on Thursday.

Scientists say that the seeds, exposed to the conditions of deep space, will induce genetic mutations that may create superior varieties on Earth.

The Moon-bred seeds, which are commonly found in Xinjiang, include species such as camel thorn and alfalfa. These seeds exhibit remarkable tolerance to saline-alkaline conditions, cold temperatures, and drought, said Zheng Wenxin, vice president of Xinjiang Agricultural University and the lead researcher of the programme.

Some species have high nutritional value and strong survival ability in harsh environments, playing a key role in preventing grassland degradation and combating salinisation and desertification in arid agricultural areas.

Space breeding refers to exposing seeds and strains to cosmic radiation and microgravity during a spaceflight mission to mutate their genes.

When the space-bred samples are brought back to Earth, scientists will examine and evaluate their mutations. Compared with naturally bred types, some are positive, conferring properties such as greater yields, shorter growth periods, and better resistance to diseases.

In June 2022, four species of grass seeds from Xinjiang were sent aboard the Shenzhou-14 manned spaceship for a trip to China’s orbiting Tiangong space station.

The returned seeds showed significant changes, with yields apparently one-third



Space breeding refers to exposing seeds and strains to cosmic radiation and microgravity during a spaceflight mission to mutate their genes



This was the first time we sent Xinjiang grass seeds to the Moon. It is like opening a blind box; we may discover unexpected rewards and achieve exciting technological breakthroughs

ZHENG



The trial planting of these seeds on Earth will commence in early March this year



higher than those of ordinary seeds, and they also exhibited greater resilience, Zheng noted.

Such results exceeded scientists’ expectations. Zheng and his team saw the potential in space-bred grass seeds and looked forward to exploring this line of research further.

“This was the first time we sent Xinjiang grass seeds to the Moon,” Zheng said.

The greater distance and the unknown situation on the far side of the Moon may produce more mysterious consequences on the breeding trial, Zheng told Xinhua, explaining the reasoning behind taking seeds on a lunar mission.

“It is like opening a blind box; we may discover unexpected rewards and achieve exciting technological breakthroughs,” Zheng said.

In the next few years, scientists will continue to analyse the returned grass seeds and select outstanding strains by integrating space breeding, biological breeding and even artificial intelligence (AI). After at least three generations of cultivation, the variation traits will become stably inherited and lead to a new variety with superior quality.

However, Zheng admitted that no concrete progress has been made in using AI in the research so far.

In recent years, space breeding news has enjoyed significant exposure across Chinese media. A variety of agricultural crops including rice, wheat, mushrooms and tea plants have been transported into space via recoverable satellites and subsequently returned to the Earth for further cultivation.

Data showed that China has carried out more than 3,000 space breeding experiments, growing more than 240 varieties of staple grains and hundreds of new varieties of vegetables, fruits, grasses and flowers. They have helped increase grain production by more than 2bn kilograms per year, generating direct economic benefits of more than 100bn yuan (US\$13.9bn approx).

Xinjiang is the largest and most widely distributed area of desertified land in China, and its saline-alkali land area accounts for about one-third of the country’s total.

The cultivation and utilisation of excellent grass seeds will undoubtedly play an important role in the development of both animal husbandry and ecological conservation, Zheng noted.

Xinhua

UNEA-7

FOR A RESILIENT Planet

The Chair of the Environment Authority of the Sultanate of Oman, Abdullah bin Ali al Amri was elected President of UNEA-7. UNEP recently spoke with Amri to discuss the ambitions of UNEA-7 and his role as its President

After a busy year for the global environmental agenda, starting with the sixth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA-6) and ending with the decision-making meetings of the Rio Conventions on climate change, biodiversity and desertification, attention in 2025 will shift to the seventh session of the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA-7).

UNEA-7 will take place from December 8 to 12, 2025 at the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) headquarters in Nairobi, Kenya, on the theme 'Advancing sustainable solutions for a resilient planet'.

UNEA is the world's highest decision-making body on the environment and includes all 193 UN Member States. It was created in 2012 and meets every two years at UNEP's Headquarters in Nairobi, Kenya.

UNEA sets the global environmental agenda, provides overarching policy guidance, and defines policy responses to address emerging environmental challenges. It undertakes policy review, dialogue and the exchange of experiences, sets the strategic guidance on the future direction of the UNEP, and fosters partnerships for achieving environmental goals and resource mobilization.

The Chair of the Environment Authority of the Sultanate of Oman, Abdullah bin Ali al Amri was elected President of UNEA-7. UNEP recently spoke with Amri to discuss the ambitions of UNEA-7 and his role as its President.

The President leads the UNEA-7 Bureau, guards the rules of procedure, and functions as the moral authority and voice of the Assembly. The President also convenes all formal plenary meetings and facilitates negotiations.

The theme for the upcoming UNEA-7 this year is 'Advancing sustainable solutions for a resilient planet'. What does a resilient planet mean to you?

A resilient planet is one where healthy ecosystems are prioritised; unsustainable resource extraction is reduced and efficiency enhanced, and where new technologies and practices can anticipate and prevent environmental risks. All this work must be underpinned by effective and inclusive environmental governance, and respect for the human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment.

Countries must work together towards sustainable solutions for a safer and more resilient planet to support the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Rio+20 outcome document The Future We Want. UNEA-7 will leverage science and effective governance to guide Member States and partners to work



Abdullah bin Ali al Amri

towards this end. The theme will inspire Member States to explore and advance solutions such as coherent policies to implement environmental mandates and commitments, improve access and use of scientific data and knowledge sharing, and strengthen collaboration.

Science is clear, and the effects of inaction to tackle the crisis of climate change, the crisis of nature, land and biodiversity loss, and the crisis of pollution and waste are already palpable in every corner of the world. We now need effective and ambitious systems in place for inclusive, systemic and action-oriented responses at all levels to slow the curve of the current paths, taking into consideration national context, capacities and priorities.

How can UNEA improve its ability to create consensus and political momentum on environmental challenges and solutions?

We aim to strengthen UNEA as the global leader in environmental affairs and will lead consultations to secure a Ministerial Declaration that enhances the Assembly's political mandate at its seventh session.

I call on all Member States to listen to future generations, Indige-

nous communities, and island states to agree on effective mechanisms to access environmental support and financing faster and more easily for the most vulnerable to confront challenges.

Finally, we must engage the private sector to play a key role in achieving common goals by raising the level of global environmental performance and supporting the transition to sustainable consumption and production systems.

Science and environmental data will be the key drivers in finding solutions for a resilient planet.

What are Oman's ambitions during the presidency of UNEA-7?

First, Oman will work diligently to build on the outcomes of the first Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEA) Day held at UNEA-6 and enhance cooperation between UNEP, UNEA and the MEAs.

My Presidency will pay special attention to the regional Forums of the Ministers of the Environment and civil society consultations organized by UNEP, which will help Member States and stakeholders prepare their perspectives and asks from UNEA-7 in December 2025. The Presidency will also look at digital transformation and AI, and their role in advancing solutions to protect the planet.

The Presidency also encourages Member States to submit draft resolutions which can have an impact on the ground and make available funds for their implementation.

Furthermore, UNEA will also adopt UNEP's new Medium-Term Strategy for 2026-2029 and the Programme of Work and Budget for 2026-2027, and will guide UNEP, Member States and partners in the monitoring and implementation of the UNEA mandates.

Oman is regarded as an environmental leader in the Middle East? Why do you think that is?

In 1974, two years after the Stockholm Environment Summit, the first government agency for environment preservation was established in the country, the first environmental law was issued, and the first natural reserve for mangrove trees was declared, and it remains the lung of the capital, Muscat, to this day. Since then, Oman has and continues to prioritise the environment in its development plans.

More recently, Oman announced its national plan for zero neutrality and 2050 as the date for achieving it. We have also issued a resolution to ban the use of single-use plastic bags, and we are working hard to promote the production of renewable energy, solar and wind.

UNEP

