

OMAN DEFEATS QATAR 2-1



Issam al Sabhi (7) and Ahmed al Khamisi (6) celebrate after the former's 51st-minute goal in Kuwait's Jaber al Mubarak al Sabah Stadium on Tuesday. Oman claimed a 2-1 win over Qatar in the group stage of the 26th Gulf Cup

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Musannah Integrated Sports City project attracts major bidders

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Development of the Integrated Sports City project in Musannah, South Batinah is gaining momentum with the bidding process for project management consultancy in final stages.

The sports city project, spread over 1mn sqm, is being developed as part of Royal Directives of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq. Announced in October 2023, the project aims to create a world-class venue to host regional and international sporting events.

According to the Tender Board, three companies submitted bids and the financial proposals opened recently. Majan Engineering Consultants quoted



RO1.13mn, Hill International Engineering Consultancy offered RO431,970, while Mace International proposed RO1.58mn.

The scope of management consultancy covers pre-contract stages of the project, including detailed master planning and infrastructure design development leading up to the contractor award stage.

The sports city aims to host international tournaments and provide

world-class training facilities.

The centre piece of the project will be a 25,000-seat football stadium with a natural grass pitch, synthetic tracks and amenities that meet International Federation of Association Football (FIFA) and International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF) standards. VIP lounges, team changing rooms and spectator services are part of the comprehensive plan.

Push to add Oman in the Commonwealth

Our Correspondent
Muscat

A report published by a leading think tank in the UK has recommended the Commonwealth of Nations should extend membership to Oman and Morocco in the Middle East and North Africa region.

The report - One Family: Harnessing the Strategic Potential of the Commonwealth - by Policy Exchange has made 17 recommendations, including one to adopt a policy of 'strategic expansion' to facilitate the broadening of its membership into MENA, increasing its engagement with UK-friendly emerging economies such as Morocco and Oman.

The report, which was guided by a dedicated Commonwealth Advisory Board chaired by the 22nd Prime Minister of Canada Stephen Harper, presents the case for a more dynamic, relevant and cohesive Commonwealth of Nations which builds on its existing advantages in areas such as trade and investment.

Elaborating on the broadening of the Commonwealth base, the report added that the Commonwealth family of nations is one that spans a variety of world regions, but it should adopt a policy of strategic expansion - looking to the MENA region for potential new members which can add meaningful economic, cultural and security value to the association.

'While it is important that its membership does not become diluted, as it stands, the Commonwealth does not have a single member in this strategically important region of the world. The Commonwealth should increase its level of engagement with countries such as Morocco



The report by Policy Exchange has made 17 recommendations, including one to adopt a policy of 'strategic expansion' to facilitate the broadening of its membership into MENA

and Oman - emerging coastal economies with major trading ports in Casablanca and Salalah, which already serve Commonwealth markets in east Africa and the Indian subcontinent.'

The report also identified environmental protection, education and social mobility, and security and defence, as other areas where co-operation between its member countries can be deepened.

The report encouraged the new UK Government to recognise the Commonwealth's strategic value and the association's potential to be a shining beacon of international collaboration based on the central belief that stability and security are the inte-

gral foundations of sustainable economic development.

'The recent change in government presents a fine opportunity for an outward-looking, internationalist Labour Party to provide the Commonwealth - which has drifted to the margins of international relations in recent times - with much-needed momentum and a stronger sense of purpose. Current UK Foreign Secretary David Lammy MP - born in the global economic and cultural powerhouse of London and of Guyanese origin - is uniquely well-positioned to play a leading role in the fostering of a more dynamic and collaborative Commonwealth 'family of nations', the report stated.



King Hamad bin Issa al Khalifa

H M makes phone call to King of Bahrain

Muscat - His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq made a telephone call to King Hamad bin Issa al Khalifa of the Kingdom of Bahrain on Tuesday.

The two leaders discussed several topics and developments of mutual interest to the two countries.

Bilateral relations between Oman and Bahrain have been steadily advancing in recent times. The Oman-Bahrain Joint Committee has played a crucial role in strengthening cooperation across various sectors.



British adventurer's epic triathlon stops by Oman



Israel targets hospitals in northern Gaza

LAUNCHING OMAN'S UNIFIED PROMOTIONAL IDENTITY:

A vision for global Impact

Oman is a land where ancient traditions meet modern aspirations. From its rugged mountains and sweeping deserts to its vibrant souks and bustling ports, Oman tells a story of resilience, progress, and unity. But in today's interconnected world, a country's promotional brand is no longer confined within its borders. It is projected globally, shaping perceptions and opening doors to countless opportunities.

This is where a unified promotional brand becomes essential.

A nation promotional brand is much more than a logo or a tagline. It is the image of Oman as seen through the eyes of the world. It represents our values, our aspirations, and our unique positioning. For Oman, building a strong brand is not just about global recognition; it is about fostering local pride, driving economic growth, and ensuring our place on the global stage.



Why a Nation Promotional Brand Matters?

A strong brand benefits everyone. For citizens, it brings opportunities for growth, connection and pride. For businesses, it opens doors to new markets and partnerships. For the country, it drives tourism, attracts investments, and strengthens international influence.

Now, Oman is taking a monumental step toward defining its global brand positioning. From December 26th to 29th, the public is invited to vote for Oman's Unified Promotional Identity—a brand that will represent our nation's essence to the world. This is your chance to be part of history, to contribute to the story of Oman. Together, let us embrace this moment and

celebrate what makes Oman extraordinary. Let your voice be heard, and let us together tell our story to the world. Vote on the 26th and be part of this inspiring chapter.

-  Voting for the visual identity is and an essential element of the Nation Brand Project
-  Open to Omanis and Residents
-  Voting centers will be available throughout the Sultanate of Oman
-  From December 26th to 29th 2024
-  Voting is Easy through the website

-  Putting Oman on the Global Map
-  Boosting National Pride and Unity
-  Driving Foreign Investment
-  Supporting Economic Diversification
-  Enhancing Global Influence
-  Competing in Global Markets



British adventurer's epic triathlon stops by Oman

Our Correspondent
Muscat

British adventurer Mitchell aka Mitch made a brief stopover in Oman recently during what he describes as the "longest triathlon".

At 16, Mitch became the youngest Briton to conquer Mt Kilimanjaro. Now, nearly 15 years later, he's continuing to push the limits, embarking on a 15,000km adventure from Dover in England to the Himalayas.

His recent pit stop in Muscat marked a pivotal moment in his eight-month journey - called Limitless - spanning land, sea and air. Alongside his companion Ben Cook, Mitch spent some time in Oman, captivated by the sultanate's charm while awaiting transit to Pakistan or India.

"Oman's stunning landscapes and warm hospitality has a lasting impression. This adventure has been a lifelong ambition - not just for personal achievement but to inspire others to embrace

'Limitless' transcends personal ambition. It's a message to the world - with the right mindset, the impossible becomes achievable

MITCH

sport. Limitless aims to motivate millions, proving that perseverance can break barriers," Mitch said.

Cycling from the UAE into Oman gave him a "surge of energy" as he marvelled at the breathtaking scenery and the kindness of the people he met.

The adventure, backed by global supporters and friends, is likely the first triathlon to the Everest - a journey blending endurance, grit and community spirit. Mitch is accompanied by filmmakers Stan Gaskell and Molly McDonald who are documenting the journey.

The first phase of the adventure began with a grueling 34km



(Supplied photos)



Cycling from the UAE into Oman gave Mitch a 'surge of energy'

swim across the English Channel in collaboration with SAVSIM, a London-based nonprofit working for war veterans and PTSD patients. The ongoing second phase sees Mitch cycle 10,000km across 12 countries, accompanied for part of the journey by his golden retriever, Buddy. Phase 3 will involve conquering the Himalayas.

Mitch will soon commence a 900km run from India to Nepal, followed by a 350km trek to the Everest base camp.

"Limitless transcends personal ambition," he reiterated. "It's a message to the world - with the right mindset, the impossible becomes achievable."



(ONA)

GCC countries discuss Gulf specification, key projects

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) hosted the 40th meeting of the Gulf Technical Committee for Specifications and Standards in Muscat on Tuesday.

During the meeting, 15 key projects for 2024 were discussed, spanning several sectors including agricultural irrigation, solar energy and oil measurement systems. These projects are set to be submitted for approval in preparation for implementation across GCC countries.

A key highlight of the meeting was emphasis on digital transformation and artificial intelligence projects. Specifications for industrial robots and electric vehicle charging equipment were reviewed with a focus on aligning these with metrological and technical industry standards.

The committee also discussed projects aimed at advancing calibration and remote sensing technologies, including development of space-borne microwave radiation measuring devices.

Faiza bint Hamad al Musharfi, Director of Industrial Information Department at MoCIIP, highlighted

Oman's pivotal role in harmonising Gulf specifications with international standards. She stressed that these initiatives are crucial in facilitating regional trade and fostering sustainable economic development through the exchange of expertise and best practices.

She further reiterated the commitment of the GCC countries to achieving greater economic and industrial integration, aligning with the region's vision by continuously monitoring the progress of projects related to Gulf specifications and standards.

RO8mn projects announced for Dakhliyah development

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Dakhliyah has approved implementation of several municipal development projects worth over RO8mn as part of its ongoing efforts to enhance infrastructure and public services.

The announcement was made on Tuesday following a meeting of the Internal Tenders Committee, chaired by Sheikh Hilal bin Saeed al Hajri, Governor of Dakhliyah.

According to a statement issued by the Governor's Office, these projects are aimed at improving municipal services across the governorate's wilayats, thereby contributing to enhanced living standards and benefiting the local community.

Among the key projects approved are construction of internal roads in the wilayats of Samail, Bahla, Izki and Adam. The committee also approved



Among the key projects approved are construction of internal roads in the wilayats of Samail, Bahla, Izki and Adam

paving of the Al Najid-Wadi Andam road in Samail, rehabilitation and development of Harat Misfat al Abriyeen in Al Hamra,

development of entrances to Jabrin and Basya in Bahla, as well as rehabilitation and enhancement of Bahla market.

These projects are expected to play a crucial role in boosting the economy of the governorate, contributing to a significant transformation in municipal services. These will support the development of wilayats and enhance the overall infrastructure of the governorate, paving the way for further growth and prosperity.



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GLOBAL MINING COMPANY L.L.C

TENDER COMMITTEE ANNOUNCEMENT

Global Mining Group - Dhofar Governorate
Invitation for Prequalification of Specialized Companies
Global Mining Group, Salalah, invites companies and consultancy offices to prequalify for the Restructuring and Institutional Development Project, aimed at enhancing institutional performance and aligning with best practices.

Prequalification Requirements:

1. Company Profile:

A brief overview, including relevant activities and services.

2. Commercial Registration and Licenses:

Valid and aligned with the required activity.

3. Previous Experience:

A list of similar projects and tests of success.

4. Team Profiles:

CVs and relevant certifications.

5. Supporting Documents:

Evidence of competence and ability to execute the project.

6. Impact Vision:

A proposal on the project's expected impact on group performance

Important Notes:

• Submissions will be evaluated, and only shortlisted companies will be notified.

• Shortlisted companies will receive the tender document (Terms of Reference).

• Submission deadline: (5 January 2025).

Contact Information:

• Email for submissions and inquiries: (mininggroup@gmc.om).

Mobile: 90603974 Phone: 23219355

Send your comments to muscatdaily@apexmedia.co.om

MHT promotes Buraimi as a premier tourist destination

Muscat - Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MHT) organised a familiarisation trip to Buraimi governorate on Tuesday for representatives of 35 tourism companies operating in the UAE.

A ministry statement said the trip included visits to historical landmarks and tourist attractions. The initiative aimed to highlight Buraimi as a comprehensive tourist destination, offering a blend of rich heritage and breathtaking natural beauty to visitors from the UAE.

Buraimi governorate, which comprises the wilayats of Buraimi, Mahdah and Sunaina, is home to numerous heritage sites and natural attractions offering a wide range of tourism experiences. The governorate has several historic forts and castles, including Al Khandaq Fort, Al Hilla Fort, Marjab Fort and Bait al Nad Fort, making it an interesting destination for history enthusiasts.

For adventure and exploration, Buraimi has attractions like Falaj al Saarani, Madaba Village, Wadi Sharm, Wadi al Qahfi, Wadi Khamis and Jabal Kattar.

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Muscat Nights Festival offers entertainment for all age groups

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Muscat Nights Festival has entered a new era spreading over seven locations for the first time. Al Qurum Natural Park, a floral paradise with over a million blooms, has become a key highlight of this year's celebrations.

In an interview with Oman TV, Ahmed bin Mohammed al Humaidi, Chairman of Muscat Municipality, stated, "For the first time, the festival is being held in as many as seven locations, offering a variety of activities, including sports, entertainment and cultural events."

Muscat Nights Festival 2024 features numerous entertainment and tourism events spread across Amerat Park, Al Naseem Public Park, Oman Automobile Association, Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre, Al Hail Beach and Wadi al Khoud, besides Al Qurum Natural Park, several cultural centres and shopping malls. These locations were selected to ensure accessibility for residents and visitors throughout the capital.

Humaidi informed that a global element has been incorporated in the festival to enhance its appeal. Amerat Park is hosting 'Hybrid Show', organised by an international company, features cutting-edge technology and creating a unique experience for visitors. The flower festival at Al Qurum Natural Park is being held of the first time at Muscat Nights Festival. Additionally, Sur al Hadeed Beach is hosting a range of



Over 900 SMEs and enterprising families are participating in the festival to present their products and services

AHMED BIN MOHAMMED AL HUMAIDI



(V K Shafeer)



sports activities, adding to the festival's diverse offerings.

Elaborating on the activities at Sur al Hadeed Beach, Humaidi said it includes a wide range of activities - beach soccer and volleyball competitions, fire performances, giant chess board matches, graffiti art, live music shows and service kiosks offering



various amenities throughout the festival ground.

"Spread over 4,000sqm, the Hybrid Show blends live performances with modern digital technologies, such as augmented and virtual reality, to create an unprecedented interactive experience for the audience."

Humaidi further added, "We

have designated areas at the seven locations for visitors to take photos and enjoy the events."

Highlighting the involvement of small and medium enterprises and productive families, Humaidi said, "Over 900 SMEs and enterprising families are participating in the festival to present their

products and services. The festival provides a significant platform for these businesses to showcase their offerings to nearly one million anticipated visitors."

On the organisational front, Muscat Municipality has deployed more than 700 personnel at the festival venues to manage

the event. Humaidi emphasised the importance of engaging youth in the festival's activities, stating, "We are keen to involve young people in an organised manner to ensure a unique and integrated experience for visitors. We also aim to engage students who need work experience, helping them transi-

tion into the labour market immediately after graduation."

According to Humaidi, to support this initiative Muscat Municipality will collaborate with educational institutions to provide certificates of experience to participating students, with plans to expand this programme in future festivals.

Port Sultan Qaboos welcomed over 431,000 tourists in 2023

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Port Sultan Qaboos received over 431,00 tourists in 2023, according to Muscat Municipal Council. An announcement to this effect was made during a meeting of the council, chaired by Sayyid Saud bin Hilal al Busaidi, Governor of Muscat, on Monday.

The meeting reviewed a statement from Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology regarding operations of the port, which now accommodates a growing number of cruise ships.

Specialists from the ministry highlighted development plans for the port which aim to enhance the tourism sector by accommo-



dating giant cruise ships in alignment with the government's strategy to promote Oman as a premier tourist destination. Transformation of the port into a dedicated tourist hub reflects the government's vision to optimise its capacity to handle ships of various sizes.

The council also reviewed fa-

cilities and services provided by the port to shipping companies, logistics operators and cargo owners. These include nine berths with a combined length of 1,750m, a passenger terminal, port and gate management, cargo handling and maintenance services, as well as marine services such as mooring, tug oper-

ations, berth planning, fresh water supplies and baggage handling.

The council presented statistics on the number of incoming tourists, which in 2023 exceeded 431,000, with 110 cruise ships arriving the same year.

During the meeting, the council approved minutes of the previous session, including its recommendations. Discussions covered several key topics, including a statement of the Child Protection Committee of Muscat governorate, a work plan of the Social Development Committee and volunteer teams, the environmental impact of sewage water in Amerat, and proposals and plans outlined by the Governorate Development Committee.

Majlis a'Shura discusses streamlining e-payment systems for enhanced business operations

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Members of Majlis a'Shura's Economic Committee held a meeting on Tuesday with specialists from Central Bank of Oman to discuss the fees imposed on shop owners for electronic payment services.

The meeting focused on the evolving role of the central bank in payment systems and services. Key discussions included services and systems launched in 2024, the development journey of the digital payment system, and the ongoing expansion of electronic pay-



ment services. The committee also reviewed the new electronic authorisation system and its role in simplifying installment payment operations.

At the meeting, committee members emphasised the need for transparency in the fees imposed on electronic payment transactions. Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) conducted an inspection campaign in 2023 across 4,911 commercial establishments to enforce adoption of electronic payment systems. The campaign found 1,183 businesses non-compliant with the

mandatory electronic payment regulations.

The enforcement drive aligned with MoCIIP's regulations, effective from January 1, 2022, which mandate electronic payment options in commercial activities. An official from MoCIIP reiterated the ministry's rigorous approach to ensuring the widespread availability of electronic payment devices across various sectors.

To support this transition, Central Bank of Oman, in coordination with banks and service providers, has facilitated the provision of point-of-sale devices to merchants at no installation or annual fees, with only transaction fees set by the central bank applicable.

MARKET WATCH

MSX30

4,485.542

SENSEX

78,472.87

FOREX RATES

(RO1 equals)

India

221.21

Pakistan

725.12

Bangladesh

310.13

Philippines

151.80

Sri Lanka

764.92

*Rates as on December 24

Source: xe.com

BRIEFS

Oil prices up on US growth data

Oil prices climbed on Tuesday, buoyed by stronger US economic growth data and expectations that global economic activity will bolster oil demand, although trading volumes remain subdued ahead of the Christmas holiday.

The international benchmark Brent crude rose by 1.5% to \$72.84 per barrel, up from \$71.74 at the close of the previous session.

The US benchmark West Texas Intermediate (WTI) also edged up by 0.8% to \$69.63 per barrel, compared to its prior session close of \$69.08.

Last week, data from the US, the world's largest oil consumer, had raised concerns about inflation and the risk of a potential recession.

Uncertainty surrounding the US Federal Reserve's interest rate policy for 2025 also influenced oil price trends.

Fitch revises outlook on OQ, EDO, Omantel and Nama to positive

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Fitch Ratings has revised its outlook on OQ Group, Energy Development Oman (EDO), Omantel, and Nama Electricity Distribution Company (NEDC) to positive from stable, while affirming their long-term issuer default ratings (IDRs). The rating actions follow the agency's upgrade of Oman's sovereign rating outlook last week.

On December 18, Fitch revised the outlook on Oman's long-term foreign-currency issuer default rating to positive from stable, while affirming the IDR at BB+.

OQ Group

Fitch affirmed OQ's long-term IDR at BB+, noting that the rating is constrained by Oman's sovereign rating (BB+/Positive) due to OQ's strong ties with the Omani government. OQ, which is fully owned by the government through the Oman Investment Authority (OIA), was established to consolidate and strengthen Oman's oil and gas sector, the agency noted.

'OQ's rating is closely linked to that of the sovereign, in line with Fitch's government-related entities (GRE) rating criteria and



► OQ's rating is supported by low leverage, declining debt, a conservative financial policy, and a successful operational track record

► EDO is expected to maintain a strong financial profile until at least 2028, despite rising capital expenditures and tax obligations

parent-subsidiary linkage rating criteria,' Fitch said.

OQ's standalone credit profile (SCP), as per Fitch, is rated bbb- and is supported by low leverage, declining debt, a conservative financial policy, and a successful operational track record.

However, Fitch cautioned that OQ's concentration of opera-

tions in Oman and potential risks from future partial divestitures of some key operating companies could pose challenges.

EDO

Fitch affirmed EDO's long-term IDR at BB+. Similar to OQ, EDO's rating is constrained by its ownership ties to the Omani govern-

ment. Fitch highlighted EDO's strong cash flow generation, supported by long-term gas sale contracts and a flexible royalty structure, as key strengths.

However, Fitch noted that EDO's standalone credit profile of bbb+ is constrained by a business model focused exclusively on upstream oil and gas, limited

diversification, and a mature reserve base with a lower proved reserve life compared to peers.

Fitch expects EDO to maintain a strong financial profile until at least 2028, despite rising capital expenditures and tax obligations.

Omantel

Fitch affirmed Omantel's long-

term IDR at BB+, noting the company's rating is also constrained by Oman's sovereign rating. Omantel is 51% owned by the Omani state, and its rating is closely linked to the government, according to the agency.

According to Fitch, Omantel's standalone credit profile remains at bbb, supported by its market leadership in Oman and diversification from its minority stake in Zain Group. However, Fitch pointed out the increasing competitive pressure from Vodafone Oman and the growing mix of wholesale fibre services as potential headwinds for Omantel.

NEDC

Fitch affirmed NEDC's long-term foreign- and local-currency IDRs at BB+. The rating action follows the revision of Oman's sovereign outlook to positive from stable. Fitch said NEDC's support score assumes "strong" expectations of government backing, consistent with the sovereign's positive outlook.

Should Oman's rating be upgraded, Fitch indicated that it would likely upgrade NEDC's standalone credit profile by one notch, potentially aligning its IDRs with the sovereign rating.

Oman-Kuwait Economic Forum focuses on enhancing investment opportunities

Kuwait City, Kuwait - The discussion panels at the Oman-Kuwait Economic Forum, held in Kuwait, explored the realities of the manufacturing sector, the integration of supply chains, real estate, hotel development, and food security in both Oman and Kuwait.

The forum aims to strengthen trade and investment relations, promote the products of both countries, and increase the volume of trade exchange.

The multi-day forum, which began on Monday, and the accompanying exhibition are organised by the Supervisory Team for the Promotion of Omani Products (OPEX), represented by the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI), the Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises



Development (ASMED), and the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn). These events are being held in cooperation with Kuwait's Ministry of Commerce and Industry and the Kuwait Chamber of

Commerce and Industry. H E Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, stressed that the forum and the accompanying joint exhibition highlight the depth of the fra-

ternal ties between the two countries.

In his speech, the minister said, "Kuwait is a strategic partner of Oman, and we are determined to consolidate our economic relationship in accordance with the leaders' directives and boost areas of trade and investment cooperation in priority sectors, which will contribute to generating job opportunities and enhancing sustainable development in both countries."

H E Yousef expressed his hope that the forum would focus on opportunities for joint trade and investment cooperation, increasing the volume of trade exchange, sharing expertise and knowledge, and building strategic partnerships between companies and businessmen in both countries.

ONA

UAE economy to grow 4% in 2024, central bank says

Abu Dhabi, UAE - The Central Bank of the United Arab Emirates (CBUAE) maintained its real GDP growth projections for 2024 at 4.0%, accelerating to 4.5% and 5.5% in 2025 and 2026, respectively.

According to CBUAE's Quarterly Economic Review, growth expectations for the current year are driven by growth in the tourism, transportation, financial and insurance services, construction and real estate, as well as communication sectors.

Non-oil GDP growth accelerated to 4.8% year-on-year in Q2 2024, up from 4.0% in the previous quarter, mainly due to the faster growth in manufacturing, trade, transportation and storage, and real estate activities.

Non-oil GDP growth is expected to remain strong at 4.9%



in 2024 and 5.0% in 2025, resulting mainly from the strategic plans and policies implemented by the government to attract foreign investments and promote economic diversification.

The 16 non-oil sectors continued their steady growth pattern in Q3 2024. Wholesale and retail trade, manufacturing and construction continued to be some of the backbones of the growth in the non-oil sector.

The manufacturing sector, continued to attract more FDI, expanding in line with the different Emirates' and Federal strategies. The first nine months of 2024 also saw strong growth in the construction sector.

In the first 10 months of 2024, oil production averaged 2.9mn barrels per day, and is expected to grow by 1.3% in 2024, accelerating to 2.9% in 2025.

WAM

COMMENTARY

Realising full potential of US-Oman Free Trade Agreement

Fifteen years ago, the governments of Oman and the United States made a forward-thinking investment in their economic partnership with the US-Oman Free Trade Agreement (FTA). This remarkable achievement positioned Oman as one of just 14 FTAs globally, granting Omani exporters and US businesses unparalleled, duty-free access to each other's markets. Over the years, the FTA has significantly boosted bilateral trade, created jobs, and strengthened economic ties between the two nations.

Both governments deserve recognition for laying a strong foundation. The US has been a steadfast partner, providing tools, expertise, and an open market. Oman's leadership has embraced the agreement, creating an environment conducive to trade and investment. Both governments' efforts can be compared to building a smooth, well-paved road: the foundation is in place, and the path to success is clear.

But here's the key: a road, no matter how well-built, will not generate success on its own. It is the private sector's responsibility to provide the cars - investment, effort, and strategy - and drive on that road to reach the opportunities ahead. Businesses must be willing to invest in market entry, build relationships, and adapt their products or services to meet the demands of a competitive global market.

The potential benefits, particularly for Omani exporters, are not just significant - they're transformative. With duty-free access to the largest market in the world, Oman's industries - plastics, aluminum, fisheries, agriculture, and so many more - have unparalleled opportunities to grow and succeed. However, long-term success requires investment from both the public and private sectors.

When it comes to investment, OABC took a big step this year as a nonprofit business council seeking to

support companies in Oman. After years of hearing comments about how people aren't utilising the US-Oman FTA enough, we decided to do something practical about it. OABC hired a full-time Trade and Development Director to guide companies through the export process and provide research,

matchmaking, and compliance support. This investment helps address barriers, but businesses must be ready to take the next steps themselves, committing time and resources to access the US or Omani markets. Just look to other FTA countries to see how

this pays off in the end.

Governments also play an essential role in ensuring that the "road" remains clear and well-maintained. For the US, an investment in additional resources - such as hiring a Commercial Officer who reports to the US Department of Commerce at the US Embassy - can enhance support for businesses seeking to utilise the agreement. For Oman, investment in export-readiness programs, SME development, and coordinated initiatives will help pave the way for even more companies to benefit from the FTA. Importantly, a US pres-

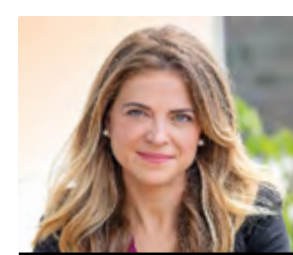
ence is needed for Oman stateside, to help the country market itself and support its businesses to compete in such a vast market.

It's not just financial investment into resources that is needed, but also the investment of time as it's directed towards stronger collaboration. A shining example of what is possible can be seen in Jordan's Tijarah Coalition, a 34-entity coalition of private and public sector stakeholders focused on collaborating to utilise the US-Jordan FTA. By coordinating efforts between public and private sectors, Jordan has maximised its FTA with the US, growing exports exponentially. Their model, with a focused FTA Unit residing within the local American Chamber of Commerce Affiliate (AmCham Jordan), demonstrates the power of cooperation. Oman can adopt a similar approach, tailored to its strengths, to achieve even greater success.

This month, in honor of the 15th anniversary of the FTA, we are excited to

launch a 24-page US-Oman FTA Guide, created to empower businesses with trade data, opportunities, and practical tips for using the FTA. This guide is a tool to help businesses take the wheel and drive on the road that has been built for them.

The US-Oman FTA has no expiration date, and the foundation built by both governments remains strong. Now is the time for greater synergy, strategic investments, and commitment from all sides. It's too big an opportunity for all parties to not collaborate. Together, engaging as both the public and private sector, we can turn this agreement into a catalyst for transformational growth, benefiting Oman and the United States for decades to come.



REBECCA OLSON

CEO, Oman American Business Council (AmCham Oman)

The views and opinions expressed in this column are solely those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of Muscat Daily or Apex Media Publication

Trade wars, conflicts pose risks for global economy in 2025

London, UK - The global economy will face trade wars, sluggish growth, and geopolitical risks in 2025, following a year characterised by monetary easing and falling inflation.

Many nations that had previously implemented monetary easing measures were quick to raise policy rates in the second half of the year to combat inflation. The US Federal Reserve lowered its policy rate by 25 basis points at its December meeting, marking a total of 100 basis points in cuts for the year, bringing its policy rate to a range of 4.25% to 4.5%.

The European Central Bank (ECB) wrapped up the year with four rate cuts, the latest being a 25-basis-point reduction in December, bringing its deposit rate to 3%, and its refinancing and marginal lending facility rates to 3.15% and 3.40%, respectively.

Weak growth in many countries, the potential for escalating trade wars, and persistent geopolitical risks continue to exert pressure on the global economy.

Tax hikes, tariffs may pressure growth

Economists suggest that additional tariffs promised by US President-elect Donald Trump before taking office in January could significantly affect global growth in 2025.

Brian Coulton, Chief Economist at Fitch Ratings, told



Weak growth in many countries, potential for escalating trade wars, and persistent geopolitical risks continue to exert pressure on the global economy

Anadolu that US economic growth is expected to slow next year, and exports to China may also decelerate, although a moderate recovery is possible in the eurozone.

"We expect a mild slowdown in global GDP growth to 2.6% next year, down from 2.8% in 2024," he said.

Coulton added that tariff hikes would generally reduce economic activity, but US consumer spending could gain momentum beyond expectations. He pointed out that Fitch Ratings raised its US growth forecast from 1.6% to 2.1% for 2025.

He noted that the effective

tariff rate could exceed 5%, warning that retaliation from China, Europe, and other trading partners could hurt US growth while exacerbating inflationary pressures globally.

"A clampdown on immigration could also add to US inflationary pressures by reducing labour supply growth, which might result in a shallower path of Fed rate cuts than we expect," he said.

Coulton stated that the eurozone is likely to experience a slight recovery in consumer spending in 2025 due to rising real wages, though this recovery may be weaker than anticipated.

"Our assumption that the US will apply tariff increases across the board has also weighed on our eurozone growth forecasts, particularly for Germany, although this is partly offset by our expectation that the ECB will cut rates further and faster," he said.

"We are also assuming a significant increase in US tariffs on China, resulting in downward revisions to both our 2025 and 2026 China growth forecasts. These revisions are tempered by an expectation that China's fiscal policy will be eased more aggressively to cushion the impact of US tariff hikes on the economy," he added.

Rising debt

Ahmet Ihsan Kaya, Principal Economist at the UK-based National Institute of Economic and Social Research (NIESR), told Anadolu that inflation in developed countries is expected to remain under control in 2025 as interest rates decline steadily.

Kaya forecasted that the Fed will cut its policy rate to between 3.25% and 3.50%, the ECB will reduce its main policy rate to 2.25%, and the BoE will lower its policy rate to 3.75% by the end of 2025, noting that Trump's protectionist policies beyond tariffs and immigration could support growth through regulations and tax cuts.

"The most significant risk to international trade and global economic growth seems to be Trump's protectionist trade policies," he said.

"Trump announced several tariffs, and we will see how these will manifest and affect the economy over time. Meanwhile, our studies show that global growth could be about 1 percentage point lower if Trump's tariffs are implemented broadly, and our global growth forecast for next year is 3.2%," he added.

Kaya noted that developed countries have been experiencing rapidly rising public deficits since the coronavirus pandemic, and reducing the debt burden requires major fiscal consolidation, particularly in the EU.

Anadolu Agencies



Mubadala acquires majority stakes in GMSC, Al Ittihad Drug

Abu Dhabi, UAE - Abu Dhabi's Mubadala Investment Company has acquired an 80% stake in Global Medical Supply Chain (GMSC) and Al Ittihad Drug Store (IDS) from GlobalOne Healthcare Holding (GHH), with GHH retaining a 20% stake.

This strategic acquisition enhances Mubadala's footprint in the healthcare logistics and pharmaceutical distribution sectors, aligning with the UAE's vision to establish a robust life sciences infrastructure.

Founded in 2015, GMSC provides comprehensive end-to-end supply chain services for medical products, including demand planning, procurement, logistics, inventory management, warehousing, and maintenance.

GMSC serves over 200 medical facilities, including hospitals and clinics across the UAE. With a dedicated team of medical supply chain specialists, GMSC sources a broad array of products from almost 400 suppliers, ensuring a reliable supply chain for all medical needs.

IDS, established in 1987, stands as one of the leading distributors of pharmaceutical and consumer healthcare products in the UAE. Distributing over 1,000 products from over 40 leading suppliers, IDS services every hospital, and all, or at least most pharmacies and supermarkets within the UAE. It boasts a vast portfolio that spans multiple therapeutic categories including anti-infectives, asthma, diabetes, and oncology.

Ismael Ali Abdulla, Executive Director of UAE Clusters at Mubadala's UAE Investments Platform, commented, "The expanding pharmaceutical market drives an increasing demand for specialised and efficient drug logistics solutions. By integrating GMSC and IDS into our portfolio, we are poised to create a vertically integrated life sciences sector in the UAE and enable its potential to encompass the entire value chain from logistics and distribution to specialised manufacturing."

GlobalOne Healthcare Holding serves as the dedicated Healthcare Division of Yas Holding, focusing on enhancing healthcare outcomes by investing in innovative solutions across various healthcare verticals.

Bitcoin declines to \$94,000 as rally fades

Vahid Karaahmetovic

Bitcoin declined for the fourth consecutive day on Tuesday as a rally sparked by Donald Trump's presidential election victory lost steam after the Federal Reserve turned hawkish last week.

Bitcoin fell 2.1% to \$94,350.0 by 11:55 GMT. It fell below the \$93,000 level on Monday. The token had fallen below the key \$100,000 level last week after the Fed officials signaled a slower pace for future cuts. Bitcoin has declined for six out of the last seven days.

Bitcoin recorded its first weekly fall since Trump's election win in early November, last week.

The rally had pushed prices to an all-time high of \$108,244.9, after which prices fell due to profit-taking amid macroeconomic pressures induced by the Fed rate outlook.

The central bank lowered rates by 25 basis points but indicated only two rate cuts for the upcoming year, compared with previous expectations for four cuts.

This shift led investors to reassess their positions in speculative assets like Bitcoin, contributing to its price decline.

Crypto-related stocks fell on Monday tracking the downward trend in Bitcoin prices, which reached near the \$92,000 level a day earlier.

MicroStrategy Incorporated fell nearly 9%, while Coinbase Global declined 4%. Riot Platforms also ended lower on

Monday. MicroStrategy also came under added pressure after announcing a 1.3mn-stock sale to buy 5,262 bitcoins.

The most valuable Bitcoin miner Marathon Digital Holdings dropped 3.6%.

Other cryptocurrencies were higher on Monday. Gains were limited as the demand for speculative assets was still subdued after the hawkish Fed rattled investor sentiment.

World No 2 crypto Ether was 2.2% higher at \$3,408.93. Ether fell for several consecutive days since last week but has recovered slightly in the previous two days.

Traders expect continued volatility in Bitcoin with a potential shift toward altcoins, as a significant options expiry influences market conditions in the upcoming holiday week.

"All eyes are on the massive expiry this Friday, where almost \$20bn notional across BTC and ETH options will expire," QCP Capital said in a broadcast early Tuesday. "This represents almost half the total open interest (OI) on Deribit. We believe it's quite possible especially if spot continues to range here and as option sellers continue to roll their shorts out."

"Rolling" refers to traders extending their option positions by moving them to a later expiration date, rather than allowing them to expire. This strategy helps maintain the trade if they remain confident in their market outlook.

(Source: Investing.com)



Nissan-Honda merger could boost credit for Nissan, compared to Honda: Moody's

New Delhi, India - The proposed integration between Nissan and Honda will benefit Nissan more from a credit perspective, while Honda faces more risk due to its stronger credit profile after the business integration efforts between both automobile companies, according to Moody's Ratings.

Nissan Motor Co and Honda Motor Co on December 23 inked a memorandum of understanding (MoU) to begin talks and considerations for a business integration between the two businesses through the creation of a joint holding business.

Moody's report noted that Nissan will benefit the most from a credit perspective, while Honda faces more risk due to its stronger credit profile.

"The proposed Honda-Nissan business integration is overall credit positive if executed successfully. We believe that a larger



The proposed Honda-Nissan business integration is overall credit positive if executed successfully. We believe that a larger scale through integration will result in stronger credit quality, particularly for Nissan

DEAN ENJO

scale through integration will result in stronger credit quality, particularly for Nissan, which

currently has significantly weaker credit metrics than Honda," the Dean Enjo, VP-Senior Analyst,

China vows to step up fiscal spending in 2025

Beijing, China - China's Ministry of Finance has pledged to ramp up fiscal spending and government bond issuance in 2025, aiming to provide stronger support for economic stability.

The country will adopt a more proactive fiscal policy next year, ensuring that the policy remains consistently forceful and impactful, Finance Minister Lan Fo'an said during a two-day national fiscal work conference that concluded on Tuesday.

This fiscal policy direction is in line with decisions made at the recent Central Economic Work Conference, which set the tone for economic policy. During the conference, policy-

makers agreed to implement a "moderately loose" monetary policy in 2025, marking a significant shift from the "prudent" policy that has been in place for the past 14 years.

This move comes as China prepares to face economic challenges both domestically and internationally, while striving to maintain a steady and robust recovery.

Lan stated that the country will set a higher deficit-to-GDP ratio for 2025, intensify fiscal spending, ensure faster deployment of funds, and optimise the structure of fiscal outlays, with an increased focus on improving citizens' well-being, stimulating consumption, and



sustaining growth momentum. According to a statement released after the fiscal work con-

ference, China's key fiscal priorities for the coming year will include boosting domestic

demand, building a modernised industrial system, improving public welfare, supporting integrated urban-rural development, advancing ecological sustainability, and promoting high-standard opening-up.

The government will continue its efforts to prevent and mitigate risks in key sectors, Lan said, and will maintain increased transfer payments to local governments.

Lan also emphasised that the country will intensify efforts to curb further increases in local governments' "hidden debts" and accelerate the reform of local government financing platforms.

Xinhua

Al Mouj Muscat secures two prestigious accolades at Arabian Property Awards

Al Mouj Muscat, Oman's premier lifestyle destination, has secured a double win at the Arabian Property Awards 2024-25, marking its fourth recognition at these prestigious awards. The recently held ceremony in Dubai honoured Juman 1 in the Apartment/Condominium Development category and the Community Hub for Mixed-Use Architecture.

Nasser al Sheibani, CEO of Al Mouj Muscat, commented, "We are immensely proud to receive these esteemed awards for Juman 1 and the Community Hub. This recognition is a testament to our unwavering dedication to pioneering developments that enhance quality of life while redefining industry standards. Accolades such as these inspire us to continue shaping spaces that not only embody luxury and innovation but also nurture a sense of belonging and inclusivity." Located in the heart of the Marsa District, Juman 1 redefines contemporary living through a blend of striking design and premium amenities, offering an unparalleled residential experience. Featuring infinity pools, a state-of-the-art gym, and a residents' lounge, it provides direct access to oceanfront dining, retail, and entertainment, setting benchmarks for luxury and functionality.

Meanwhile, the Community Hub stands as a landmark project, combining elegant architecture with purpose-built spaces to foster meaningful interactions, exemplifying Al Muscat's vision of culture, connectivity and convenience.

The Arabian Property Awards are judged by an independent panel of over 100 industry experts, focusing on design, quality, service, innovation, originality, and sustainability. The judging



Recognized for Excellence in Real Estate and Community Living, Al Mouj Muscat reinforces its leadership in property development

panel includes members of the UK Parliament's House of Lords, adding an extra layer of prestige

to the recognition. Building on previous successes in 2017, 2022 and 2023, these awards

reaffirm Al Mouj Muscat's commitment to delivering world-class developments that combine innovation, sustainability and luxury property to create exceptional living and community spaces.

Al Mouj Muscat is a destination without an equal. It has redefined urban living in the region with an impressive portfolio of

oceanfront residential properties, luxury and authentic hospitality, elegant Business Parks, award-winning architecture and well-designed landscapes.

A warm and diverse community at the heart of Oman's capital, Al Mouj Muscat created a sense of belonging for 8,000 residents from 85 nationalities who now call it home. With a vi-

brant dining and retail district, residents and visitors alike are able to enjoy a wide range of culinary experiences in a lively oceanfront setting.

Al Mouj Muscat provides an exclusive lifestyle that urges families and individuals to live life to the fullest, do better, see more and live richer. For work or leisure, residents and visitors can

stay, dine or relax at seven luxury hotels, including Kempinski and The St. Regis, experience boating in Oman's largest Marina, or awaken their sense of play at an 18-hole championship golf course that's listed in the world's top 100.

At Al Mouj Muscat, every moment spent, every opportunity explored, is life Inspired.

A'Saffa Foods win Rusayl city football cup 2024

A'Saffa Foods team clinched the title of Al Rusayl Industrial City Football Cup 2024 with a thrilling 5-4 penalty shootout victory over Oman Cables team, following a goalless draw in regular time. The match was held at Oman Cement football field under the auspices of Eng. Dawood bin Salim al Hadabi, CEO of Madayn, and attended by several officials from the public and private sectors.

Salim al Kharusi, supervisor of the tournament, highlighted the tournament's long-standing history, dating back to its launch in 1996. "The initiative began as part of an open day organised by

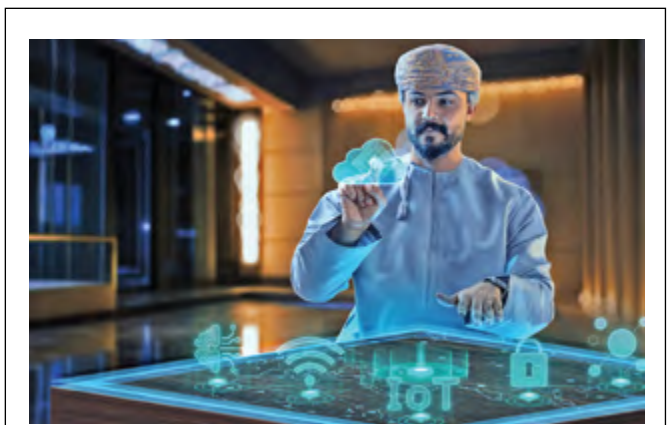


the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates 'Madayn' to strengthen social and athletic ties among employees in Al Rusayl Industrial City. Over the years, it has transformed into an annual tradition that fosters competitiveness and teamwork, and hence attracting growing participation from companies operating in the industrial city," Kharusi pointed out.

He asserted that Al Rusayl Industrial City Football Cup is more than a sports competition; it offers a platform for enhancing collaboration, celebrating workers' efforts, and promoting community spirit.

"Madayn's commitment to organising this tournament annually reflects its vision of building strong relationships with investors and employees while strengthening a positive and engaging environment in the industrial sector."

This year's teams included the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates 'Madayn', National Aluminium Products Company (NAPCO), Nuhas Oman, Nafith Logistics Services, Reem Batteries, Oasis Water, Muscat Steel, Oman Cement, A'Saffa Foods, Oman Cables, Federal Transformers and Switchgears, and United Engineering Services.



Omantel, Bank Dhofar to drive digitisation

The banking sector is facing unprecedented challenges amidst rapid digital transformations and increasing customer demands. From the need to enhance operational efficiency to strengthening cybersecurity, banks must stay at the forefront of technological innovation to meet customer expectations and deliver secure, seamless, and fast banking services.

Moreover, the banking sector requires the ability to scale rapidly in a dynamic environment of ever-growing digital transactions, all while ensuring a reliable and effortless customer experience. These pressures compel banks to strike a delicate balance between optimising performance, reducing costs, and offering innovative solutions that support sustainable growth and foster customer loyalty.

As banks increasingly rely on technology, they not only prioritise protecting sensitive data and enhancing cybersecurity but also focus on driving operational efficiency, fostering innovation, and improving customer experiences. To address these challenges, Bank Dhofar and Omantel have joined forces in a strategic partnership aimed at facilitating digital transformation and overcoming technical hurdles. Through this collaboration, Bank Dhofar has leveraged Omantel's advanced cloud solutions to enhance operational efficiency, strengthen cybersecurity, and ensure regulatory compliance through zero trust architectures and encryption. This has enabled the bank to provide secure and innovative services that align with its customers' aspirations.

Kia EV6: Built to deliver exceptional experience

With transforming habits and shifts in mind-sets of the current generation, the world is opting for alternative ways to utilise the new mobility resources along with greater consciousness to conserve and harness sustainable energy.

EVs are becoming popular globally for no fossil fuels usage with zero carbon emissions and noiseless acceleration capabilities. Embarking on the trend, Kia brand is among the first to extend its portfolio of models from conventional engine models to next-generation range of EVs.

The Kia EV6 is not just a vehicle - it's a glimpse into the future of driving. Combining sustainability, cutting-edge technology, and luxury, the EV6 is designed



to meet the demands of drivers while staying relevant to the growing needs of today's era.

As part of its e-mobility range, the all-new Kia EV6, an all-electric

crossover AWD, is an innovative modern-era sedan, built to deliver an exceptional driving experience. Based on Kia's advanced Electric - Global Modular

Platform, the EV6 offers ultra-fast charging capabilities that make long trips and everyday use easier than ever.

In just 4.5 minutes of charging,

the EV6 can add up to 100km of range using the ultra-fast charging (800V) device. For more substantial charges, it takes less than 18 minutes to go from 10% to 80%, allowing you to spend more time on the road and less time waiting.

For domestic convenience, Kia also provides a Home charging AC unit with 5 years warranty to be installed at owner's house as part of its deal with the customer at no extra cost. To further ensure peace of mind, Kia offers a stress-free warranty solution for 5 years or 105,000km (whichever is earlier) on the EV's conventional parts and an 8-year or 160,000km (whichever is earlier) manufacturer's warranty on its battery system.



Mitsubishi celebrates 50 years in Oman

General Automotive Company (GAC), the authorized distributor of Mitsubishi Motors in Oman, marks half a century of partnership with Mitsubishi Motors and proudly celebrates 50 years of excellence in the sultanate with the exciting Golden Anniversary Celebratory offers.

This long-standing partnership has made Mitsubishi Motors one of the country's most trusted and respected automotive brands. Over the decades, Mitsubishi Oman has been recognized for its vehicles' exceptional reliability, performance, safety, and long-term value.

The celebration includes a chance to win 250 grams of gold through five raffles, each awarding 50 grams of gold. Additionally, customers who test-drive a Mitsubishi vehicle can win up to 10 grams of gold coins (1 gram x 10 winners through raffle). Other offers include free service up to 50,000km/four years, cashback up to RO5,238, 1 year of free insurance, and registration on all models along with a six-year unlimited mileage warranty, and roadside assistance on all models. Adding to the excitement, there is also a special 50th-anniversary gift and a free fuel card worth RO50 for all buyers. Furthermore, free LLUMAR CLASSIC window tint is applicable on select models.

"Celebrate this milestone with us and take advantage of exclusive offers that reflect our commitment to delivering superior quality products and customer experience. GAC has announced a range of special offers for our esteemed customers to mark this golden anniversary. We are celebrating and giving out the best offer, and I can assure everyone that there's never been a more golden time to own a Mitsubishi than now," said Manoj Ranade, General Manager of GAC.

The Mitsubishi range meets the needs of every driver, offering diverse vehicles for various preferences. Whether you seek comfort and fuel efficiency for city driving, ruggedness for off-road adventures, or spacious, reliable options for family journeys, Mitsubishi has a model to fit your lifestyle.

The Attrage is a compact saloon known for its comfort, fuel efficiency, and performance, ideal for economy and reliability. The Mirage, a compact hatchback, is perfect for urban environments with its fuel efficiency and ease of parking.

For a sporty feel, the Eclipse Cross stands out with striking aesthetics. The ASX fits seamlessly into any lifestyle, balancing performance and affordability as a practical SUV.

The All-New XFORCE offers power, style, and versatility, setting a new benchmark in the compact SUV segment.

The Xpander, designed for families, seats up to seven passengers, offering space, economy, and reliability. The Montero Sport, carrying the Pajero legacy, is a robust 4x4 for both urban and extreme terrains.

The Outlander, Mitsubishi's flagship SUV, is built for those who value craftsmanship and a pioneering spirit, handling versatile terrains with ease. And the legendary L200 is a versatile pickup truck and a reliable partner, ready for any challenge.

The current offers are valid across the entire range of models and variants. Whether you're seeking superior performance, outstanding comfort, or proven toughness, Mitsubishi has a vehicle for you. "This is the right time to make a memorable start to an endless journey with Mitsubishi," concluded Manoj.

The offer which opened on December 15, will remain valid till February 13.



Ford Trucks adds 40 vehicles to Al Tasnim Group's fleet

In a significant milestone, Ford Trucks Oman has proudly delivered a fleet of 40 Ford F-line 1833 CC (Crew Cab) trucks to Al Tasnim Group, a leading Omani conglomerate.

The versatile trucks, fitted with cargo bodies with cranes, will support critical operations for PDO, enhancing the company's capacity to transport goods efficiently to PDO sites.

The delivery reaffirms Ford Trucks' commitment to empowering Omani businesses with cutting-edge solutions designed for performance, reliability, and safety. The Ford F-line 1833 CC is renowned for its robust design, superior load capacity, and advanced features, making it the ideal choice for demanding applications in the oil and gas sector.

This partnership further solidifies Ford Truck Oman's position as a trusted partner in Oman's industrial and energy sectors, underscoring its ability to deliver high-performance solutions tailored to the region's unique challenges.

Mohsin Hani al Bahrani, CEO MHD ACERE remarked, "At Ford Trucks Oman, we take immense pride in supporting Omani enterprises like Al Tasnim Group in achieving operational excellence. This milestone delivery of 40

underscores our unwavering commitment to providing state-of-the-art, reliable, and efficient solutions tailored to the demanding needs of the oil and gas sector. Together, we drive progress and contribute to the growth of Oman's key industries." MHD ACERE is a division of the Mohsin Haider Darwish Group, known for its robust portfolio of world-class automotive brands. Under the visionary leadership of CEO Mohsin Hani al Bahrani, MHD ACERE champions innovation, excellence, and community engagement across Oman's automotive landscape.

On this occasion, Saleh al Maaini emphasised Bank Muscat's commitment to implementing sustainable programmes and initiatives in social responsibility that serve Omani society and promote volunteerism among community members, reaffirming the Bank's dedication to strengthening cooperation with various government and private entities concerned with this important area.

'Maliyat Academy' from Bank Muscat wins CSR impact award

Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman, has been honoured with the 'CSR Impact on Education: Financial Literacy by Maliyat Academy Award' at the Oman CSR Summit & Awards 2024, organised by the United Media Services Group.

The award ceremony was held under the auspices of H E Dr Mahad bin Said Ba'owain, Minister of Labour, and attended by representatives of leading government institutions and corporates.

Saleh Mohammed al Maaini, Deputy General Manager - Capital Region at Bank Muscat, received the award on behalf of the bank.

The Oman CSR Awards are designed to recognise institutions and individuals who promote social responsibility across all societal segments and adopt innovative, sustainable solutions to social challenges to achieve a clear impact and positive outcomes.



cat's commitment to implementing sustainable programmes and initiatives in social responsibility that serve Omani society and promote volunteerism among community members, reaffirming the Bank's dedication to strengthening cooperation with various government and private entities concerned with this important area.

Maaini added that this award highlights the significant impact of the academy in disseminating financial literacy and effective financial planning, which has become crucial for the sustainability of financial resources.

Bank Muscat launched the Maliyat Academy initiative for youth aged 13 to 16 to enhance their understanding of financial management and prepare them for life with better financial planning skills. Through these training courses, the Bank aims to equip participants with funda-

mental financial management skills and the ability to make informed decisions, thus preparing them for financial independence.

During the academic year 2023-2024, more than 23,000 students benefited from the Academy programme, which was implemented in 395 schools across various governorates of Oman, involving 488 trainers in cooperation with the Ministry of Education.

Bank Muscat adopts clear strategies and implements sustainable annual programmes and initiatives aimed at making a positive impact on Omani society across several sectors. These strategies focus on achieving long-term benefits for diverse community segments, creating positive impacts in areas such as education, youth, sports, alternative energy, health, and the SME sector. The bank also runs numerous community service initiatives, benefiting thousands across the sultanate, including 'Green Sports', 'Tadhamun', and Al Wathbah Academy, among others.

OABC hosts annual holiday gathering at SiO2 Beach

The Oman American Business Council (OABC) held its much-anticipated Holiday Gathering at the newly opened SiO2 Beach Lounge, Shangri-La Muscat. The festive evening brought together valued members, partners, and special guests to celebrate the successes of the year and foster meaningful connections.

The event was honoured by the presence of H E Ana Escrogima, US Ambassador to the Sultanate of Oman, who addressed the attendees and underscored the importance of strengthening bilateral relationships and fostering collaboration between the US and Oman.

The SiO2 Beach Lounge, with its stunning seaside views and elegant atmosphere, provided the perfect setting for the OABC community to network, celebrate, and enjoy the spirit of the season.

"This year's Holiday Gathering was a reflection of the strong partnerships and collaborative efforts that drive the OABC forward," said Rebecca Olson, CEO of OABC. "We are honoured to have US Ambassador Escrogima join us as our Guest of Honor, and we look forward to continuing to support business connections and opportunities for our members in the coming year."



The OABC also extends its sincere gratitude to the generous raffle prize sponsors, whose contributions added excitement and joy to the evening. Their support was instrumental in making the event a success and further exemplified the strong community spirit within the OABC network.

The OABC remains committed to fostering business growth, knowledge sharing, and strategic networking opportunities for its members in Oman and beyond.

This council is Oman's largest business network, fostering trade, investment, and partnerships between Oman and the United States. Through events, resources, and advocacy, the OABC supports its members in navigating the complexities of international business and advancing bilateral economic ties.

Whether you're cheering from the stands or catching up with loved ones, Ooredoo ensures seamless connectivity throughout your trip, making it easier than ever to enjoy the Gulf Cup and share the excitement with friends and family, no matter where you are.

Customers can easily activate the GCC Passport Bundle through the Ooredoo App.

Omani Qatari Telecommunications Company SAOG (Ooredoo) was founded and registered in the Sultanate of Oman in December 2004.

Services were launched in March 2005, initially operating under the name Nawras. Ooredoo provides individuals and businesses with cutting edge products and services and a digital-first customer experience.

Ooredoo generated revenues of RO259.1mn as of December 31 and is listed on the Muscat Stock Market (MSM) under the 'ORDS' ticker.

Ooredoo brings GCC Passport Bundles for Gulf Cup in Kuwait

Ooredoo has started GCC Passport Bundles - the roaming deal for anyone heading to Kuwait for the 2024 Gulf Cup. One can grab a three-day bundle with 4 GB and 15 minutes of talk time for just RO6.

"It's unbeatable value and perfect for staying connected while catching all the action," the company stated. Backed by Ooredoo's advanced 5G network and strategic partnerships, GCC Passport offers travellers reliable connectivity at competitive rates.

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Magdeburg attack mobilising Germany's extreme right

Berlin, Germany - The motive of the perpetrator of the deadly Christmas Market attack in Magdeburg, is still unclear. What has been confirmed is that he is a Saudi citizen and is in custody.

Nonetheless, shortly after the attack, the extreme-right scene in Germany began to antagonise migrants. "I have never experienced such a hostile and threatening environment," said a student studying automotive engineering in Magdeburg, the state capital of Saxony-Anhalt.

Salam, a violence prevention centre in Saxony-Anhalt, gave a similar account. The association has observed a significant increase in incidents against people seen as foreigners by right-wing extremists.

According to Salam, perceived migrants are branded as 'terrorists', 'criminals' and 'lowlives', some are pushed around and spat at. Threats have gone so far that migrant communities have warned each other in WhatsApp groups and on Facebook against going out in public.

That the perpetrator of the Magdeburg attack is suspected of being an Islamophobe and a right-wing extremist is a paradox, Hans Goldenbaum, a radicalisation expert at Salam, told German broadcaster MDR. "It shows the power of this right extreme discourse and how sealed off he is from reality."

Mobilisation of extremists

Since the Christmas market at-



Extreme-right demonstrations took place in Magdeburg after the attack on a Christmas market in the city

Since the Christmas market attack, extreme-right and neo-Nazi parties, associations and individuals have mobilised across Germany. They demand the mass deportation of migrants

tack, extreme-right and neo-Nazi parties, associations and individuals have mobilised across Germany. They demand the mass deportation of migrants from the country.

Hundreds of neo-Nazis gathered at an extreme-right rally in Magdeburg on Sunday, two days after the attack. The demonstration saw attacks on journalists. On Monday night, participants at a rally held by the

far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) chanted: "Deport! Deport! Deport!"

One of the speakers at a rally on Sunday was Thorsten Heise. The militant neo-Nazi has several previous convictions. He once tried to run over a refugee with his car. Videos of the rally show Heise calling on the demonstrators to infiltrate associations, fire departments and authorities.

Journalists and observers reported that participants in the rally shouted 'Wake up Germany', a phrase used during Nazi Germany under Adolf Hitler. Its usage is a punishable offense in Germany.

Politicisation of the attack

David Begrich, a right-wing extremism expert from the association Miteinander in Magdeburg, expects a broader politicisation of the Christmas market attack. The AfD political party has organised large demonstrations in Magdeburg. Begrich strongly criticised the demonstrations, saying that the focus after the attack should remain on the five victims and the 200 others wounded.

"I am witnessing great bewilderment and shock in Magdeburg," he told DW. "This attack has deeply wounded the city. That also applies to me personally: my wife was one of those injured."

Begrich said he thinks no one should politicise the attack as long as there are victims in the hospital: "The fate of the victims must be the main focus. The reappraisal comes afterward. Communities do not want any politicisation."

Despite all the fake news, speculation and attempts at politicising the deadly attack on social media, Begrich sees his city as truly affected. "The city is coming together."

DW

S Korea's acting president faces impeachment

Seoul, South Korea - South Korean main opposition party has accused acting president and Prime Minister Han Duck-soo of 'prolonging insurrection'.

"We will immediately begin impeachment proceedings against Han," Democratic Party's Park Chan-dae said.

The Democratic Party is likely to propose an impeachment bill against Han on Thursday.

The opposition party's accusation against Han comes after the prime minister 'refused to promulgate two special counsel bills' targeting President Yoon Suk Yeol and first lady Kim Keon Hee, Seoul-based Yonhap News reported.

Yoon was suspended from his duties after he was impeached by parliament on December 14 over his short-lived martial law. Han is acting president until Constitutional Court decides whether to remove Yoon or reinstate him to his office.

The opposition dominated parliament had later passed bills to appoint special counsels to probe Yoon over martial law and his wife over graft allegations.

"There is no other way to interpret this than (as a tactic) to buy time and prolong the insurrection," said Park.

Yoon has been charged with insurrection and treason over his failed bid to impose martial law on December 3.

The opposition party has also threatened to impeach Han over his refusal to promulgate bills adopted by the parliament.



South Korean main opposition party has accused acting president and PM Han Duck-soo of 'prolonging insurrection'

Separately, Yoon's lawyer Seok Dong-hyeon said on Tuesday the president was 'unlikely to appear for questioning' related to the martial law case.

A joint probe team has asked the 63-year-old embattled leader to appear for questioning on Wednesday.

He has already refused to attend questioning twice since the cases were filed early this month.

Yoon has also blocked investigators to search his office while he has refused to entertain notices from the country's Constitutional Court which is set to hold its first hearing into impeachment on Friday.

Anadolu Agency

Philippines witnesses alarming rise in STI and HIV infections

Manila, The Philippines - The waiting room on the third floor of a bustling Manila shopping mall feels like a cozy lounge. Young men and women sit on a plush, light blue sofa next to a table where condoms - plain and chocolate flavour - and lubricants are lined up next to tiny pamphlets with tips to keep hookups fun and safe.

Dr Jeremy Jordan Castro, medical officer of the Klinika Eastwood HIV and sexually transmitted infection (STI) testing centre, told DW that the focus on wellbeing rather than illness is deliberate.

"We want to normalise HIV and STI testing as part of regular health care. With advancements in medication and technology, HIV is now manageable like other chronic conditions such as hypertension or diabetes."

Most of the clinic services, which include STI screening as well as medications to prevent HIV before or after potential exposure, are free and are explained by a gender-diverse team trained to provide confidential counselling. Klinika Eastwood is part of the government's broader efforts to destigmatise sexual health care, encourage HIV testing and treatment and reverse the Philippines' continuous rise in HIV infections, especially among young people.

According to the UNAIDS global report released earlier this month, the country has seen a staggering 543% increase in new infections between 2010 and 2023

Nearly half of new infections in 2024 were among individuals aged 15-24 years, with MSM (men who have sex with men) accounting for 89% of these cases. "We're seeing infection



the Department of Health (DOH) warned that if the current trend continues, the number of PLHIV could reach 448,000 by 2030.

Young people most affected

Against a general global trend of managing and reducing HIV infections, the Philippines stands as an outlier, grappling instead with an estimated 50 new infections diagnosed a day.

According to the UNAIDS global report released earlier this month, the country has seen a staggering 543% increase in new infections between 2010 and 2023

Nearly half of new infections in 2024 were among individuals aged 15-24 years, with MSM (men who have sex with men) accounting for 89% of these cases. "We're seeing infection

rates reminiscent of New York or San Francisco during the height of the AIDS crisis in the 1980s," Benedict Bernabe, head of the HIV advocacy and awareness group The Red Whistle, told DW.

Bernabe noted that since 2005, new infections have shifted primarily to men who have sex with men and emphasised the need for government health resources to adapt, focusing on increased testing and targeted interventions for this demographic.

Gibby Gorres of the Southeast Asia Against Stigma collective acknowledged that the rise in recorded HIV cases among the youth partly reflects the government's decision to lower the HIV testing age without parental consent to 15. However, he warned against moral panic in the predominantly Catholic country.

"We cannot afford to ignore that young people are sexually active, some perhaps with one or multiple partners. We need to equip them with correct sexual health information and allow them safe access to testing and treatment," said Gorres.

DW

Highest court in Mozambique confirms results of disputed presidential election

Maputo, Mozambique - The Constitutional Council, the highest court in Mozambique, on Monday confirmed the results of the country's disputed presidential election, extending the ruling Frelimo party's grip on power into a 50th year.

The seven-judge bench ruled that Frelimo candidate Daniel Chapo had secured 65% of the vote, revising down the initial results of nearly 71%. Frelimo has governed Mozambique since 1975.

Opposition groups have been claiming since the October election that the results were rigged, sparking massive protests across the country.

At least 130 people were



killed in clashes with police, according to the civil society monitoring group Plataforma Decide.

Western observers have also said the election was neither free nor fair, while Frelimo has denied

vote-rigging accusations.

Opposition protests in Maputo

Opposition leader Venancio Mondlane claimed that the

election was stolen from him and, before the court's verdict, had vowed to call 'a popular uprising' if the Constitutional Council approved Daniel Chapo's victory.

"Even though the signs were there, we never thought that the electoral truth would be trampled," Judite Simao, a representative for Mondlane, told reporters. "The will of the people was obliterated."

Mondlane's supporters again took to the streets in the capital of the southern African nation, Maputo, burning tires and blocking roads.

"Difficult days will come," the 50-year-old Mondlane said.

DW

A TRAIN BY THE SEA IN COLOMBO



The coastal railway line, located on the west coast of Sri Lanka and close to the Indian Ocean, is a famous tourist attraction (Xinhua)

Over 4,000 families seek relatives missing, detained by Assad regime

Gaziantep, Turkey - Since 2017 more than 4,000 families have sought help from an association based in southeastern Turkey to locate relatives imprisoned or kidnapped by Syria's Assad regime.

Families whose relatives were lost have been applying to the Association of Detainees and the Missing in Sednaya Prison in the border province of Gaziantep to find their relatives. The group arranges video calls between families and former prisoners to help trace missing relatives in

Syrian prisons.

Riyad Avlar, a founder of the group who himself endured torture during his 21-year imprisonment in the notorious Sednaya Prison near Damascus, created a database in 2017 to record information from former inmates he met during his confinement.

The database contains photos and information from former detainees, helping Syrian families locate their missing relatives.

"Unfortunately, I've had to deliver sad news to many families," Avlar told Anadolu.



Hopeful for missing relatives

Fatma al-Hariri, 58, is searching for her two sons, Suhayb, 34, and Mehmet Iqbal, 32, both arrested for being regime opponents. She said she last spoke to Suhayb by phone in 2012, just two days before his arrest. Saying that she has not heard from their children in years, Hariri added that many of her other relatives are also missing.

"I still keep up hope and ask relevant authorities to act quickly," Hariri said.

Ruveyda Recep Aha has not heard from her brother, Mohammed Hamza, an anti-regime university student when he was taken by police, for a decade.

"He was arrested in 2008, and we visited him until 2014. Then we lost contact ... My brother was being held in Sednaya Prison," she said.

Aha also described the joy of the Assad regime's fall earlier this month: "We felt reborn, our spent hopes were renewed. The happiness we felt in those hours can't be expressed in words.

Though we haven't heard from my brother, we shared the joy of every Syrian family with missing relatives."

"There are reports of secret prisons still operating in Syria ... We'll maintain hope as long as there's no evidence of his death," she added.

Sednaya Prison, located near Damascus, has been widely documented as a site of systematic torture and extrajudicial killings under the now-ousted Assad regime.

Anadolu Agency

Israel targets hospitals in northern Gaza

Witnesses said Israeli forces laid a siege around the Indonesian Hospital in Jabalia amid heavy gunfire

Gaza City, Palestine - The Israeli army continued to target hospitals on Tuesday as Tel Aviv pressed ahead with a deadly offensive in the northern Gaza Strip, according to witnesses.

Witnesses said Israeli forces laid a siege around the Indonesian Hospital in eastern Jabalia amid heavy gunfire around the facility. The army ordered the medical staff, patients, and displaced civilians taking shelter at the hospital to evacuate the medical facility and head to Gaza City immediately, they added.

An Israeli artillery shell also hit the Al-Awda Hospital in Tel al-Zaatar area in Jabalia, witnesses said. The attack came hours after the hospital administration warned of relentless Israeli airstrikes in its vicinity, causing several fires.

Meanwhile, the Israeli army continued to blow up Palestinian homes and residential buildings around the Kamal Adwan Hospital in the northern town of Beit Lahia, witnesses said.

Israel has continued a large-scale ground operation in northern Gaza since October 5 to allegedly prevent the Palestinian resistance group Hamas from regrouping. Palestinians, however, accuse Israel of seeking to occupy the area and forcibly displace its residents.

Since then, no sufficient humanitarian aid including food, medicine and fuel has been allowed into the area, leaving the remaining population on the verge of imminent famine.



The Israeli army continued to blow up Palestinian homes and residential buildings around the Kamal Adwan Hospital in the northern town of Beit Lahia, witnesses said

Gaza death toll reaches 45,338

At least 21 more Palestinians were killed in Israeli attacks in the Gaza Strip, taking the overall death toll since last year to 45,338, the Health Ministry in the enclave said on Tuesday.

A ministry statement added that some 107,764 others were injured in the ongoing assault.

"Israeli forces killed 21 people and injured 51 others in three

massacres of families in the last 24 hours," the ministry said.

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

Israel has continued a genocidal war on the Gaza Strip since a Hamas attack on October 7 last year despite a UN Security Council resolution calling for an immediate ceasefire.

The second year of genocide

At least 21 more Palestinians were killed in Israeli attacks in the Gaza Strip, taking the overall death toll since last year to 45,338, said the Health Ministry

in Gaza has drawn growing international condemnation, with officials and institutions labelling the attacks and blocking of aid deliveries as a deliberate attempt to destroy a population.

Last month, the International Criminal Court (ICC) issued arrest warrants for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and former Defence Minister Yoav Gallant for war crimes and crimes against humanity in Gaza.

Israel also faces a genocide case at the International Court of Justice for its deadly war on Gaza.

Fresh raids in West Bank

Meanwhile, the Israeli army rounded up at least 15 more Palestinians in fresh military raids in the occupied West Bank, according to prisoners' affairs groups on Tuesday. An injured person and former prisoners

were among the detainees in the raids that targeted Hebron, Bethlehem, Nablus, Qalqilya, Tubas, Tulkarem and Ramallah, the Commission of Detainees' Affairs and the Palestinian Prisoner Society said in a joint statement.

"The raids were marked by abuse, threats against detainees and their families, and acts of vandalism and destruction on citizens' homes," it added.

The new arrests brought the number of Palestinians detained by the Israeli army in the West Bank since October last year to over 12,100, including those who were released after being arrested, according to Palestinian figures.

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

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

At least 825 Palestinians have since been killed and over 6,500 others injured by Israeli army fire in the occupied territory, according to the Health Ministry.

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

Israeli army reports new missile attack by Houthis

Jerusalem - The Israeli army claimed on Tuesday to have intercepted a missile fired from Yemen, marking the third attack by the Houthi group within a week.

A military statement said air-raid sirens were activated in central Israel, including Tel Aviv, after rocket fire from Yemen.

The army said the missile was shot down before entering Israeli airspace by the long-range Arrow air defence system. According to the Israeli public broadcaster KAN, 'millions of Israelis' ran to shelters after air-raid sirens were activated in central Israel.

An Israeli woman was seriously injured while running to a shelter, KAN said. There was no comment from the Houthi group on the Israeli claim.

On Monday, the Yemeni group said that it launched two combat drones towards military targets in Jaffa and Ashkelon in Israel. The attack came two days after at least 20 Israelis were injured on Saturday when a missile launched from Yemen landed in the Tel Aviv-Jaffa area in central



Israel. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu vowed on Sunday to act against the Houthis in Yemen.

According to Israeli media, the Houthis have launched over 200 ballistic missiles and 170 drones at Israeli targets since the outbreak of the Gaza war last October. The Houthis have targeted Israeli cargo ships or those associated with Tel Aviv in the Red Sea with missiles and drones in a show of support with the Gaza Strip.

Meanwhile, Israel confirmed on Monday that it assassinated Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh and issued a stark warning to the leadership of Yemen's Houthi group, threatening similar action.

Defence Minister Israel Katz's

comments, aired on Israel's public broadcaster, followed a ballistic missile strike two days earlier by the Houthis which Israel's air defence systems failed to intercept. The missile struck Tel Aviv, injuring 20 people and damaging dozens of apartments, according to Israel's *Haaretz* daily.

Earlier that evening, the Houthis also claimed responsibility for attacking two military targets in central and southern Israel using drones. Addressing the ongoing attacks, Katz said that 'in these days when the Houthi is firing missiles at Israel, I want to deliver a clear message: We will severely paralyse the Houthis in Yemen, which remains the last standing group of its kind'.

Anadolu Agency

'Bashar Assad should face justice at ICC'

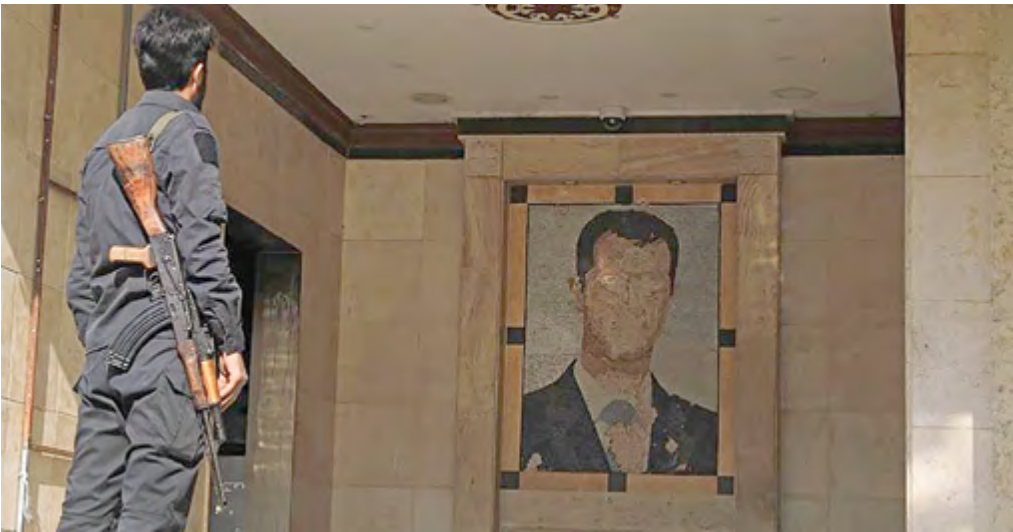
Geneva, Switzerland - UN special rapporteur Alice Jill Edwards said ousted Syrian President Bashar Assad should face justice for crimes committed in Syria, identifying the International Criminal Court (ICC) as the most appropriate venue for his trial.

Edwards, the UN special rapporteur on torture, and other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment, told Anadolu that the Assad regime used torture for years to control the population, instil fear, and suppress any legitimate opposition, with many falling victim to these practices.

The Australian lawyer noted that the crimes exposed by recent developments in Syria are in line with documents compiled by the UN special rapporteur on torture since 2011.

"It is time that Assad face justice, and the ICC is the appropriate venue for him," she said, calling on Syria's new administration to ratify the ICC statute and other countries to apply to the court regarding the crimes committed by the regime.

Edwards emphasised the need for independent and impartial investigations into all interna-



tional crimes.

"Now, the former government of Assad will and may be responsible for the large majority of those, but other people have also been harmed by other actors. So it will be important that all of the crimes are brought to bear," she added.

"My preference would be in the case of Syria, that in addition to any referrals to the ICC for the most senior actors, that there is a hybrid or internationalised tribunal that is set up," Edwards said, explaining that this model helps build national capacity

through legislation, training, and oversight. She proposed establishing a hybrid tribunal for Syria, similar to those in Sierra Leone and Cambodia, combining national and international judicial elements.

'A wonderful new Syria'

Edwards stressed the importance of international community involvement in supporting democracy and inclusive governance in Syria's transition.

"I think it is a watershed moment for the Syrians. I think we

should be optimistic, but of course, cautious, and make sure that there is a safe process of transition to democratic principles and human rights," she said.

"Just need to all handle this very carefully, and all try to come to create a wonderful new Syria for the future," she concluded.

Bashar Assad, Syria's leader for nearly 25 years, fled to Russia after anti-regime groups took control of the capital Damascus on December 8, ending the Baath Party regime, which had been in power since 1963.

Anadolu Agency

North India shivers as mercury drops

The IMD stated temperatures are likely to drop further in the Delhi-NCR region, Punjab, Haryana, and Rajasthan over next two days

New Delhi, India - North India is reeling under cold weather with temperatures plummeting across several states. Delhi recorded a minimum temperature of 7 degrees Celsius on Tuesday, with a thin layer of fog enveloping parts of the national capital. On Monday, the minimum temperature stood at 8 degrees Celsius, while the maximum reached 20 degrees Celsius.

Residents of the national capital were seen gathering bonfires to combat the chill, while others took refuge in night shelter homes as temperatures continued to drop in Delhi.

In Rajasthan, the cold weather persisted, significantly impacting daily life due to the falling temperatures. In Bikaner, the temperature was recorded at 9 degrees Celsius, according to the Indian Meteorological Department (IMD).

Cold wave continues to affect the daily life of the people in Jammu and Kashmir, with temperatures dropping below zero in many areas. Srinagar recorded a temperature of -5.2 degrees Celsius at 5:30am on Tuesday. Other recorded temperatures in-



People stand around bonfire to keep themselves warm on a cold winter day, in Ramban, J&K, India on Tuesday (ANI)

Cold wave continues to affect the daily life of the people in Jammu and Kashmir, with temperatures dropping below zero degrees Celsius in many areas. Srinagar recorded a temperature of -5.2 degrees Celsius at 5:30am on Tuesday

cluded -0.6 degrees Celsius in Gulmarg, - 6.8 degrees Celsius in Pahalgam, - 0.8 degrees Celsius in Banihal and - 4.6 degrees Celsius in Kupwara. On Monday, Srinagar experienced a minimum temperature of -7 degrees Celsius and a maximum temperature of 7 degrees

Celsius, as reported by the IMD. As per the IMD, a cold wave is considered when the minimum temperature of a station is 10 degrees Celsius or less for plains and 0 degrees Celsius or less for Hilly regions. The IMD forecasts a severe cold wave in Jammu and Kashmir starting from December 24. Additionally, dense fog conditions and a cold wave are expected to prevail till December 25 in Rajasthan, Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, and other states.

The Air Quality Index (AQI) in the national capital was classified in the 'severe' category on Tuesday, with visibility limited by the fog. According to the Central

Pollution Control Board (CPCB), the AQI was recorded at 401 at 8am. On the previous day, the AQI also fell into the 'severe' category, measuring 403 at 7am.

Specific AQI readings included 417 in Alipur, 423 in Anand Vihar, 425 in RK Puram, and 402 at ITO.

Meanwhile, the IMD stated that temperatures are likely to drop further in the Delhi-NCR region, Punjab, Haryana, and Rajasthan over the next two days.

According to IMD scientist Naresh Kumar, a western disturbance currently situated near Punjab and adjoining areas is expected to bring light rain or snowfall to isolated parts of the western Himalayan region.

"Yesterday's rain in parts of northwest India, including Delhi-NCR, and light to moderate snowfall in higher reaches was due to a western disturbance. Today, this disturbance lies near Punjab and adjoining areas, which may result in light rain or snowfall in isolated areas of the western Himalayan region," Naresh Kumar told ANI.

"The wind flow will be north-westerly, leading to a temperature drop of about 2°C in Punjab, Haryana, Delhi-NCR, and Rajasthan over the next two days. This may cause a cold wave in Rajasthan and Haryana, with temperatures possibly falling to 4°C," he added.

Naresh Kumar also mentioned that a significant western disturbance is expected to arrive on the night of December 26. This system may bring hailstorms and thunderstorms to northwestern and central India, along with light to moderate snowfall in the Himalayan region on December 27 and 28.

ANI

South Korea formally joins 'super-aged' nations

Seoul South Korea - South Korea has formally joined 'super-aged' nations as 20% of its population has surpassed the age of 65 with women topping the list, the Interior Ministry said on Tuesday.

The number of people aged 65 or older stood at 10.24mn of the country's total population of 51.22mn, the ministry data showed.

According to the UN, any country with more than 7% of the population 65 or older is an aging society, those with over 14% an aged society and those with more than 20% a super-aged society, Seoul-based Yonhap News reported.

South Korea is grappling with the demographic challenge of aging population and low birth rates.

"By installing a population-focused ministry, fundamental and systematic response measures are urgently needed," said a ministry official.

The data showed women constitute 5.69mn, compared with 4.54mn men, of the total 10.24mn super-aged population.

South Jeolla province topped the regions with this age group while the central city of Sejong had the lowest share at 11.57%.

Capital Seoul accounted for 19.41% of the total super-aged population in the country.

Anadolu Agency

Pakistan PM decries US sanctions on local firms

Karachi, Pakistan - Pakistan's Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Tuesday decried the latest US sanctions on four local firms for their alleged involvement in the country's ballistic missile programme, asserting that the move has 'no justification'.

"The sanctions placed upon our National Development Complex (NDC) and other entities have no justification," Sharif told a Cabinet meeting in the capital Islamabad, state-run Pakistan Television reported. The NDC, an aerospace and defence agency under the Defence Ministry, is among the four firms struck by the US sanctions last week.



Pakistan's PM Shehbaz Sharif

"Pakistan has absolutely no intention to have an aggressive nuclear system. It is 100% for Pakistan's defence; nothing else,"

Sharif further said. Islamabad has already expressed regret over the US sanctions, saying Washington's 'biased' policies have dangerous implications for the strategic stability of the region and beyond.

In September this year, the US also sanctioned Chinese suppliers and a Pakistani entity for their alleged involvement in Pakistan's ballistic missile programme.

The sanctions follow a similar US action in April when Washington blacklisted four Belarusian and Chinese companies for supplying missile-related items to Pakistan's long-range missile programme.

Swiss flight makes emergency landing due to smoke in cabin

Zurich, Switzerland - A Swiss International Air Lines (SWISS) flight was forced to make an emergency landing in the Austrian city of Graz because of smoke in the cabin and cockpit, the carrier said.

The Airbus 220-300 aircraft was headed to Zurich from Bucharest, Romania on Monday when the crew decided to abort the flight 'due to engine issues', the airline said in a statement.

There were 79 people on board flight LX1885, including five crew members. The aircraft landed safely and all passengers were evacuated.

Twelve passengers received



There were 79 people on board flight LX1885

medical attention and one cabin crew member was transported to a hospital in Graz by helicopter. Their condition remains unclear.

The other four crew members are also under medical care, the

airline said.

SWISS, which is part of the Lufthansa Group, said it remains in close contact with authorities and is working diligently to determine the cause of the incident.

DW

Arctic territory 'will never be for sale', says Greenland premier

Copenhagen, Denmark - Greenland's prime minister firmly stated on Monday that the Arctic territory 'will never be for sale' following renewed comments by US President-elect Donald Trump expressing interest in owning the island.

"Greenland is ours. We are not for sale and we will never be for sale," Mute Egede told Danish newswire Ritzau. He also emphasised Greenland's autonomy and openness to trade partnerships globally, adding: "Our international relations and trade can't all go through Denmark."

"For purposes of National Security and Freedom throughout the World, the United States of America feels that the ownership and control of Greenland is an absolute necessity," Trump said on Sunday, announcing his nominee for ambassador to



Denmark. The statement followed a 2019 proposal by Trump during his first term to buy the island, which is an autonomous territory of Denmark, a proposal that was met by surprise and confusion.

Although not explicitly proposing a purchase, Greenlandic MP Aaja Chemnitz of the Inuit Ataqatigiit viewed Trump's words as a signal of intent to buy

the territory.

Chemnitz called Trump's comments 'very disrespectful' and stressed that any decision about Greenland's future would rest with its people, who have

extended autonomy. "No political party in Greenland wishes to become American citizens," she added. Citizens of Greenland are full citizens of both Denmark and the European Union.

Aki-Matilda Hoegh Dam, another Greenlandic MP, called Greenland 'not an asset for trade or a geostrategic trophy' but expressed openness to dialogue about Trump's intentions.

Ritzau reported it had sought comments from Danish Premier Mette Frederiksen and Foreign Minister Lars Lokke Rasmussen, but none had been provided at the time of reporting.

Greenland, an autonomous territory within the Danish kingdom, maintains its own parliament and administration while electing two members to Denmark's Folketing.

Meanwhile, Denmark on

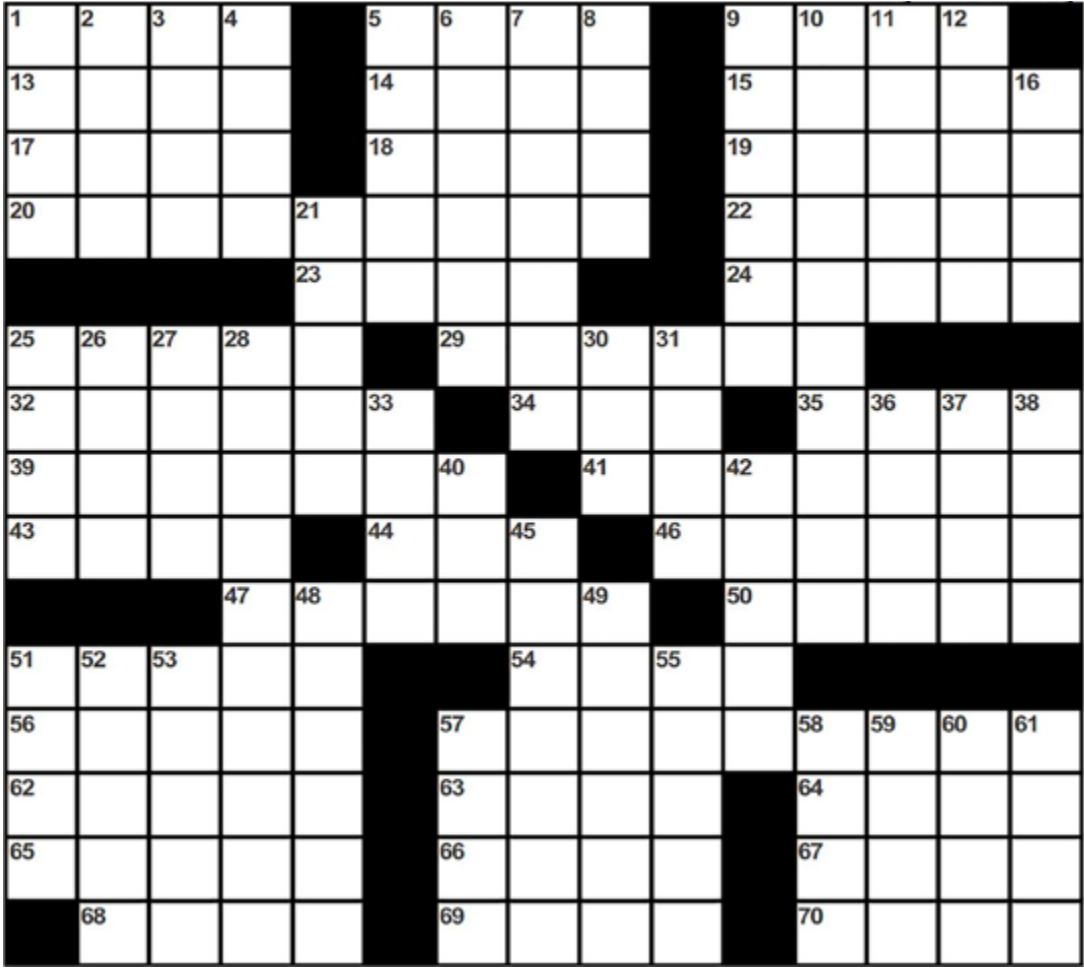
Monday backed Greenland's response to a suggestion by Trump that Washington should purchase the Arctic territory, saying it is 'not for sale' but 'open for cooperation'.

In response to a question from Anadolu concerning renewed comments by Trump expressing interest in owning the island, the Danish Prime Minister's Office said that 'in a complex security political situation as the one we currently experience, transatlantic cooperation is crucial'.

"As far as statements about Greenland, the Prime Minister's Office has no comments other than reference to what was stated by the Premier of Greenland about Greenland not being for sale, but open for cooperation," it added.

Anadolu Agency

DAILY CROSSWORD



- ACROSS**
- 1) "Check this out!"
 - 5) Puppet maker?
 - 9) Off in the distance
 - 13) Pro_
 - 14)_ -applejuice
 - 15) Stiff as a board
 - 17) Kind of hygiene
 - 18) One of the Windsors
 - 19) C offee seller
 - 20) Hearth
 - 22) French chapeau
 - 23) Assign an "R" or "PG"
 - 24) Letter paper?
 - 25) Big mess
 - 29) R uns off to wed
 - 32) Thin layer or plate
 - 34) Erie Canal mule
 - 35) C hanel of fashion
 - 39) P ut under the yoke
 - A CASE OF ARSON
 - 41) P lundered
 - 43) Safe place on a dia-mond
 - 44) Young goat
 - 46) R ely (on)
 - 47) Springtime holiday
 - 50) P opular mints
 - 51) Bee's revenge

- 54) "_ Smile Be Your Umbrella"
 - 56) W indow sill
 - 57) Unbumable
 - 62) Dined at home
 - 63) R emove wrinkles
 - 64) Dwindling Central Asian sea
 - 65) 18th president
 - 66) W ork up
 - 67) Tiny insect
 - 68) P ub mixtures
 - 69) Sweet shoppe order
 - 70) Turkish title
- DOWN**
- 1) VMI VIP
 - 2) Draped Indian garment
 - 3) Non-numerical phone button
 - 4) An angler may spin one
 - 5) La_ (opera house)
 - 6) Elaborately designed
 - 7) Nixes
 - 8) "Trick" joint
 - 9) Suitable for producing crops
 - 10) W ay out?
 - 11) Greece marketplace
 - 12) C ontry music's LeAnn
 - 16) C alendar number
 - 21) R emove branches
 - 25) Messy dresser
 - 26) C alifornia county or its seat
 - 27) C oncert equipment, briefly
 - 28) Hook and ladder
 - 30) Dolt
 - 31) Trudge
 - 33) Inquires
 - 36) and terminator
 - 37) A bit of change
 - 38) "What are the_?"
 - 40) Form a lap
 - 42) Postgame activity
 - 45) Mad states
 - 48) Middlemen
 - 49) Proceed after getting doubles in Monopoly
 - 51) R efinery residue
 - 52) Aquarium fish
 - 53) Just right
 - 55) Belief
 - 57) Business
 - 58) "_ Lama Ding Dong"
 - 59) R eproduction's opp.
 - 60) P ledge
 - 61) C higger

NOTE PAD

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE

ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

With so many positive signs coming your way, you may be a bit impatient with those who try to waste your time with their tales of woe. Even if their problems seem a little silly or neurotic, show some compassion and understanding. You never know when you might need a supportive shoulder in return. For now, the ground under your feet is solid and your steps are sure.

LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

Wanderlust has grabbed your fancy and won't let go. Maybe your nose is pressed hard to the grindstone at the moment and you can't whisk yourself away on an impromptu adventure, but you can live up the day-to-day routine with some creative thinking. One option is to start planning for the trip of a lifetime. Just collecting travel information and reading about exotic places will help channel your longing. With the right planning, you can achieve this dream.

SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

You have a good handle on what you need to do and the focus to get on with it. You may even finish the necessary tasks so early you have loads of extra time to devote to a favorite hobby or relax in a comfy chair with a good book. Your happy smile as you go about your business will spread sunshine and influence people's moods today in ways you can't always see.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

1. Which of these won the Grammy Award for Record of the Year in 2008?
- A. Beat It by Michael Jackson
 - B. Rehab by Amy Winehouse
 - C. Hotel California by The Eagles
 - D. Killing Me Softly with His Song by Roberta Flack

2. Football athlete, broadcaster and actor, O.J. Simpson, ran in the Torch Relay for which Olympic Games?
- A. 1976 Winter Olympics
 - B. 1986 Winter Olympics
 - C. 1996 Summer Olympics
 - D. 1984 Summer Olympics

3. Who were the Persians defeated by in the sea battle at Salamis in 480BC?
- A. Phoenicians
 - B. Rome
 - C. Greece
 - D. Venice

Answers: 1.B 2.D 3.C

TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

A feeling of being hemmed in and constrained by circumstances could cause you to look for a way to break free of the ties that bind. Investing a large sum in a can't-miss opportunity or a business deal that promises a stupendous return, however, could leave you holding an empty bag. You cannot buy your way out of a stranglehold, but you may be able to negotiate a loosening of the pressure. Think creatively.

VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

The vision is tantalizing, but you are having trouble. Something is preventing you from reaching out and grabbing what you want. Are you magnifying real restrictions into insurmountable obstacles? Perhaps you're creating artificial constraints to help insulate you from failure. Remember, every new venture involves risk. When the potential payoff is good and the conditions are right, you owe it to yourself to give it a try.

CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

Contending with wild mood swings, either yours or other people's, could consume most of your energy, leaving you with little to show at the end of the day. Although stops and starts normally wouldn't bother you so much, you're feeling an intense urgency right now to push forward. Running in place leaves you frustrated and exhausted. Instead of fighting these conflicting forces, take control by making a plan of action.

GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

You have something to settle with your partner, and you may as well get on with it. Starting the dialogue with a preachy attempt to influence future behavior is likely to have exactly the opposite effect you desire. Show some restraint; invite the other person to go first and allow them to talk without interruption until they're finished. Respond rationally. Your intellect is your best negotiating tool.

LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

Don't try to sugarcoat your message today. Say what you mean and mean what you say without dancing around the issue. That's not to imply you should blurt out the first thing that comes to mind. Collect and structure your thoughts first, but once you have them organized, don't be afraid to lay your cards on the table. Responses from others will be just as direct, opening the door to a productive exchange.

AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

You just love being the center of attention (most of the time) and you are definitely in the mood for performing today. Whether telling stories to coworkers in the break room, charming a sales clerk, or flirting with a server in a restaurant, you leave them all wreathed in smiles. This surfeit of goodwill can serve you well whether you're throwing a party or approaching the boss with an idea. Keep everyone laughing.

CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

Words aren't enough today. You may have everything you want to say worked out perfectly in your head, but as soon as you open your mouth it's as if some trickster has grabbed your words and twisted them into unrecognizable knots. Others may try to be patient, but what they are hearing from you sounds nonsensical. Take a deep breath, pause, and start over.

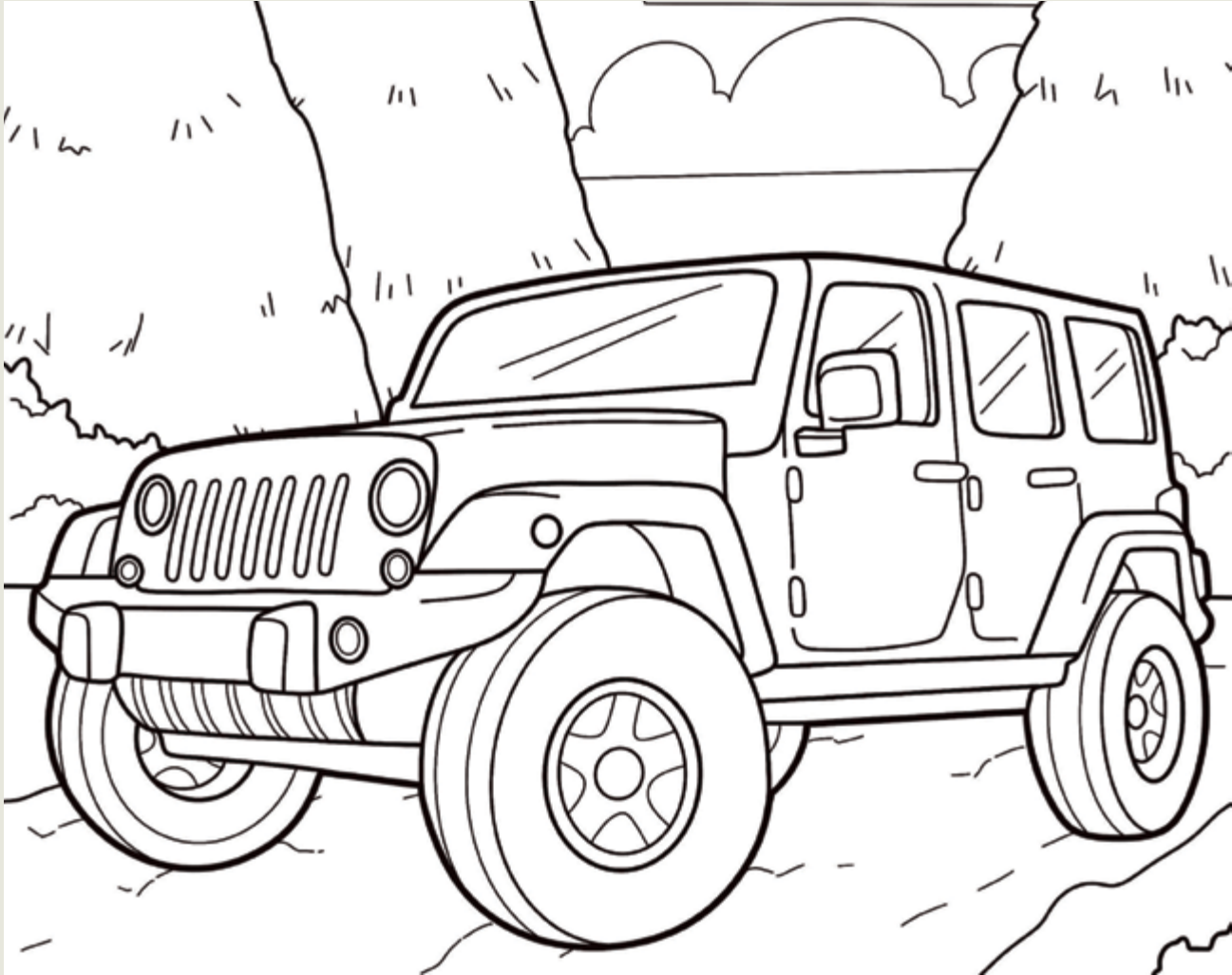
SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

Peer pressure and the pack mentality are hard to resist. But the fact that you prize your individuality and wave it like a banner will give you more than enough strength to resist any urge to fall in line. Nevertheless, the tendency to jump on the bandwagon is very powerful, especially if someone extends a personal invitation. It may be hard to hear your inner voice urging caution.

PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

Trying to impose your agenda on others could backfire today, so think twice before getting up on your soapbox. Despite your conviction that you really know what's best for everyone, the people around you might not be quite ready to buy into your beliefs. Lead by example instead of lecturing. Concrete results will have much more persuasive power than criticism or grandiose pronouncements.

KIDS COLOURING



BOGGLER

S	S	E	O
M	E	C	N
S	B	Y	G
K	M	A	E

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

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

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



Inter Milan coach Simone Inzaghi with Lautaro Martinez

Inter’s Inzaghi not worried about Martinez goal drought

Milan, Italy - Inter Milan coach Simone Inzaghi hailed his side's 2-0 Serie A home win over Como on Monday and said he was not worried about hard-working captain Lautaro Martinez's goal drought.

Despite the defending champions lacking the firepower from last week's 6-0 thrashing of Lazio, Inzaghi stressed his team were up to the challenge posed by battling Como.

"Clearly we are maintaining a very high level. All teams are running ahead, there are opponents like Como who come to play great games, but we played an important game as a mature and aware team," the Italian told reporters.

"I feared this match a lot, we had some weaknesses in the back line. We played a game of concentration, in the first half we weren't as sharp as usual. Then in the second half we raised the intensity and struck at the right moments."

Goals from Carlos Augusto

and Marcus Thuram earned Inter the victory that keeps them third with 37 points and a game in hand on leaders Atalanta, who sit on 40 points.

Martinez has struggled to reach the form that made him Serie A top marksman last season and has failed to score in over a month since securing a 1-0 win over Venezia in early November. Yet Inzaghi remains confident in his forward, saying the Argentine is playing a key role in his side's packed schedule.

"I was a striker, I know these moments happen," he said. "Lautaro was one of the outstanding performers against Lazio.

"The forwards are working hard, we ask a lot of them and are trying to rest them as much as possible in the circumstances.

"I told Lautaro to relax, because he has always scored goals and always will, luck will turn and he should only be worried if he doesn't get scoring opportunities."



Alessandro Nesta

Serie A strugglers Monza replace Nesta with Bocchetti

Monza, Italy - Monza have appointed Salvatore Bocchetti as manager to replace Alessandro Nesta, the Serie A club said on Monday, with the side bottom of the standings having won just one league game this season.

Nesta was sacked on Monday, and Bocchetti has signed a contract until June 2027 with the club.

Bocchetti's only previous managerial experience came as caretaker coach at Hellas Verona in 2022, losing all six games in charge, including a defeat to Monza, after his temporary promotion from managing the club's youth team.

The 38-year-old's first match in charge of Monza will be on Saturday when they face Parma, who are five points ahead of them in 16th place.

A former Italy international and defender with Lazio and AC Milan in his playing days, Nesta took charge at Monza when Raffaele Palladino left for Fiorentina at the end of last season.

It was his first managerial role in Serie A.

Nesta saw Monza suffer a 2-1

defeat by Juventus on Sunday in what proved to be his final game in charge.

Nesta's his first managerial role in Serie A ended with Monza suffering their third consecutive defeat at the weekend, extending their winless run to nine matches.

"The club thanks the coach for

Bocchetti's only previous managerial experience came as caretaker coach at Verona in 2022, losing all six games in charge, including a defeat to Monza

what he has done so far and wishes him the best for the future," Monza said in a statement.

Having won the 2006 World Cup with Italy, Nesta made his managerial debut with Miami FC in 2015 before stints with Italian lower division sides Perugia, Frosinone and Reggiana.

HEADING IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION

Inter hot on heels of Serie A leaders with win against Como

Milan, Italy - Inter Milan toiled to a 2-0 victory over lowly Como thanks to second-half goals from Carlos Augusto and Marcus Thuram on Monday to remain within touching distance of the Serie A summit.

The win lifted third-placed Inter to 37 points, leaving them three points off leaders Atalanta, who beat Empoli 3-2 on Sunday, and one behind second-placed Napoli, after they won 2-1 at Genoa on Saturday. Inter have a game in hand on the top two.

Defending champions Inter dominated the first half but squandered a number of chances, with the unmarked Denzel Dumfries firing over from close range and Federico Dimarco shooting straight at Como's veteran goalkeeper Pepe Reina. Inter finally scored with Augusto's towering far-post header from a Hakan Calhanoglu corner three minutes after the break.

"Happy for the goal, but more important is the victory. We knew it was a tough game but we got three points," left back Augusto told Sky Italia.

"We knew it was a different league last year, this year there are many strong teams. But I have confidence in my team mates who are the best in the world. We'll see at the end".

The visitors looked more dangerous after going behind, with man of the match Augusto making a crucial interception to deny Edoardo Goldaniga an equaliser and Yann Sommer pulling off a great save to keep out an effort from Nico Paz.

Inter kept pushing to extend their lead but captain Lautaro Martinez saw his 68th-minute effort disallowed for offside, ex-



Inter Milan's Carlos Augusto celebrates his goal against Como on Monday

We knew it was a different league last year, this year there are many strong teams. But I have confidence in my team mates who are the best in the world. We'll see at the end.

CARLOS AUGUSTO

tending his goal drought that has lasted more than a month.

Thuram sealed the win two minutes into stoppage time with a powerful shot past Reina to reach 12 league goals, level with Atalanta's Mateo Retegui in the Serie A scoring chart.

"Even in matches in which we are not 100% brilliant, it's important to win," said Inter centre-back Alessandro Bastoni. "Especially because the others had already played and won, so we had to give a positive response."

Former Inter owner Thohir wants to take Indonesia back to World Cup

Jakarta, Indonesia - Erick Thohir once owned Inter Milan and still has an interest in English club Oxford United but the abiding football dream of the Indonesian businessman cum politician is to take his country back to the World Cup.

Football is followed passionately by tens of millions in the Southeast Asian archipelago but Indonesia's sole World Cup appearance came as the Dutch East Indies in 1938 and the country has rarely threatened a return since independence in 1945.

Thohir, who became chairman of the national soccer association (PSSI) last year, believes that Indonesia should at least be in the frame for a trip to the finals in 2026 with up to nine slots available to Asian teams.

"Indonesia should be in the top nine in Asia, with our population and our passion for football from all of the people of Indonesia. But of course it takes time," the 54-year-old cabinet minister said.

"We want to be in the top 50 in the world by 2045, because by that time our GDP per capita will be around \$27,000 to \$30,000. This is a big country, so by then



Erick Thohir

the quality of the football will have increased."

Indonesia's per capita GDP is currently around \$5,000 and the national team are 127th in the FIFA rankings, leaving plenty to do over the next two decades for Thohir and his colleagues in both the realms of economics and football.

"Many people have mentioned that we're sleeping giants and this is why we have to create

a programme for how we can be better," he said of the task facing the PSSI. "Government support is very important, the private sector is very important, and also the federation."

As well as plotting the long-term strategy for improvement, Thohir has overseen efforts to entice members of the Indonesian diaspora, mostly born in the Netherlands, to play for the land of their heritage.

Elsewhere on Monday, Fiorentina missed a chance to go fourth when they lost at home to Udinese 2-1.

The Florence side won a record eight consecutive Serie A games before losing to Bologna 1-0 on December 15, and they looked to be back on track when Moises Kean converted a penalty after eight minutes to become the first Fiorentina player to reach double figures in the league since Federico Chiesa in 2019-20.

However, Udinese were a different prospect after the break. Lorenzo Lucca equalised with

the aid of sloppy defending four minutes into the second half and then Florian Thauvin found space on the edge of the box to curl in the second eight minutes later.

The result left Udinese in ninth place and Fiorentina in fifth.

The match was a special one for Edoardo Bove, the Fiorentina player whose collapse with a heart issue led to the suspension of its game with Inter Milan on December 1. Bove was fitted with a defibrillator implant soon after and sat on the Fiorentina bench for the first time since his collapse.



Ruben Baraja

Valencia fire manager Baraja

Valencia, Spain - Valencia have sacked manager Ruben Baraja, the LaLiga club said on Monday, after a dismal start to the season leaves the team in the relegation zone.

Baraja, a former Valencia player, took charge in Feb. 2023, with the club also battling relegation, and led them to safety before taking his side to a ninth place finish last season, but their poor end of season form has continued into this campaign.

"The dynamic of results during this season has required a decision that has been very difficult to make, but which aims to reverse the situation and achieve better results," the club said.

Valencia failed to win any of their final seven games last season and began this season with three losses, and with only two wins in 17 games, are second from bottom on 12 points.

KOHLIDOR OF UNCERTAINTY

Indian captain Rohit backs Kohli to fix his off-stump troubles

Melbourne, Australia - India captain Rohit Sharma has backed Virat Kohli to overcome his problems with deliveries outside the off-stump in Australia, saying on Tuesday that players of his calibre always find a way to succeed.

Kohli arrested a long run of poor form with an unbeaten century in the first test in Perth but has frequently chased balls moving away from his stumps in the current five-match series, resulting in his dismissal.

"Modern-day greats will figure out their own ways (to deal with the issue)," Rohit told reporters ahead of the Boxing Day Test in Melbourne.

Rohit's own batting frailties in the longest format have been laid bare in recent matches. The captain has managed scores of three, six and 10 since rejoining the team for the second Test following the birth of his son. His move to the middle order has done little to inspire confidence but Rohit was tight-lipped about a potential switch back to the opening slot where he can be devastating.

"Let's not worry about that. I think 'who bats where?' is some-



Virat Kohli has been uncomfortable dealing with the balls outside his off stump in the ongoing series against Australia

thing that we need to figure out within ourselves. It's not a thing I should be discussing in every press conference. Whatever it takes for our team to look good or gives us the best chance to succeed, we'll try and do that."

After winning the first Test by 295 runs, India crashed to a 10-wicket defeat in Adelaide before battling to a draw in the rain-hit third match in Brisbane.

"At 1-1, I think it's a fair reflection," Rohit added.

"Both teams have played solid cricket and these two tests are going to be so important for both teams.

"We want to break it down to

Melbourne and focus on what we can achieve here, get things right and play well."

India added uncapped Mumbai all-rounder Tanush Kotian to the squad for the final two tests after ruling out the inclusion of seamer Mohammed Shami due to a knee injury.

Kotian is expected to be back-up for Washington Sundar and Ravindra Jadeja, the two spinners in the squad, with Axar Patel unavailable. When asked a day after Kotian's call-up, Rohit Sharma joked: "Tanush was here a month back [with India A], and Kuldeep [Yadav] I don't think has a visa... we wanted somebody to get here

as quickly as possible. Tanush was the one who was ready and he played here."

Rohit quickly clarified that he had been joking, and elaborated: "Not that Tanush is not good enough. He's shown in the last two years what he's done in domestic cricket. And we really wanted just a back-up in case we need two spinners playing here [MCG] or Sydney. You need a back-up option.

"Kuldeep of course is not 100% fit. He went through a hernia surgery. And the other options, like Axar - Axar had a baby, so he's not going to travel. Tanush was the right option for

us at this point. He's certainly shown in the domestic level what he's capable of. He's probably one of the reasons why Mumbai has gone on to win the Ranji Trophy last year. He played a major role as an allrounder, so a very good option for us."

Kotian, 26, has played 33 first-class games and taken 101 wickets at an average of 25.70. He has also scored 1525 runs in 47 innings, at 41.21 with two centuries and 13 fifties. He was part of India A's tour of Australia that preceded the Border-Gavaskar Trophy - he played one match, scoring 44 runs and taking one wicket.

India to play Champions Trophy matches in Dubai

Dubai, ICC - The Champions Trophy will be held in Pakistan and Dubai, after hosts Pakistan selected the UAE as a neutral venue for their rivals India, the International Cricket Council (ICC) said on Tuesday.

The eight-team competition kicks off on Feb. 19 in Karachi and wraps up with the final on March 9, featuring a total of 15 matches across Pakistan and Dubai.

Tournament matches will be held in Rawalpindi, Lahore, and

Lahore will also host the final on 9 March, unless India qualify, in which case it will be played in Dubai. Both the semi-finals and the final will have reserve days.

ICC

Karachi. Each venue in the country is set to host three group-stage games, with Lahore also staging the second semi-final.

"Lahore will also host the final on 9 March, unless India qualify, in which case it will be played in Dubai. Both the semi-finals and

the final will have reserve days," the ICC said in a statement.

"The three group matches involving India, as well as the first semi-final, will be played in Dubai."

Pakistan face New Zealand in the Group A opener in Karachi on Feb. 19, while India meet Bangladesh in Dubai a day later.

Due to strained political ties, India haven't toured Pakistan since 2008, and the Indian

Cricket Board (BCCI), citing government advice, has refused to send its team for the Champions Trophy.

The two sides now meet only in multi-team events, with Pakistan last visiting India for the 50-over World Cup.

The ICC said last week that matches between India and Pakistan in tournaments from 2024 to 2027 organised in either nation would be played at neutral venues.

South Africa aim to seal their place in World Test Championship final

Pretoria, South Africa - South Africa are within touching distance of a place in next June's World Test Championship final at Lord's but must win at least one of their two tests against Pakistan, which start with the Boxing Day encounter in Pretoria.

A run of five successive test victories in the last five months - over the West Indies, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka - has catapulted South Africa to first in the WTC standings and given them a strong chance of a place against either Australia, India or Sri Lanka in the one-off final in London.

They get two chances to advance to the WTC final, hosting a second test at Newlands in Cape Town from Jan. 3-7, and with home advantage and a winning record against Pakistan will be expected to do so.

The young South African side have exceeded expectations and gained momentum since success in Guyana in August set them on a winning streak.



Temba Bavuma

Meanwhile Pakistan have never won a test series in South Africa, and lost their last seven tests there.

The tourists also arrived without coach Jason Gillespie, who dramatically quit this month and has been replaced by former fast bowler Aqib Javed.

But a home series triumph over England in October will have boosted Pakistan, as will the 3-0 whitewash of South Africa in a One Day International series that concluded at the weekend.

Promising 22-year-old batter Saim Ayoub was outstanding in the ODIs, with two centuries, and Salman Ali Agha, Mohammad Rizwan and Naseem Shah also contributed. They have stayed on for the two-test series, where Shan Masood captains the team.

Pakistan do look light on bowlers, where South Africa have Kagiso Rababa and Marco Jansen leading a fiery attack on surfaces favouring the quicks.

England's Stokes out for three months with hamstring injury

London, England - England test captain Ben Stokes will be sidelined for at least three months after further tests revealed he has torn his left hamstring, the England and Wales Cricket Board said on Monday.

All-rounder Stokes, who missed four tests after tearing the same hamstring in The Hundred domestic competition in August, sustained the injury in the third test of England's 2-1 series win over New Zealand last week.

"Something else to overcome...go on then!", Stokes wrote on his X account.

"I've got so much more left in this tank and so much more blood sweat and tears to go through for my team and this shirt. There's a reason I have a Phoenix permanently inked on my body."

The 33-year-old all-rounder bowled 24 overs in New Zealand's first innings and was two balls into his 13th over of the



Ben Stokes

second when he suffered the injury -- a much heavier workload than in the first two tests.

"The Durham all-rounder will undergo surgery in January," the ECB added in a statement.

England do not play again in the longest format until a one-off test against Zimbabwe in May before a five-match home series against India in July and August.



Sam Konstas

Australian teen Konstas to make his debut in Boxing Day Test

Melbourne, Australia - Teenager Sam Konstas will make his test debut in the cauldron of the Boxing Day test at Melbourne Cricket Ground on Thursday as Australia look to take the game to India's bowlers, coach Andrew McDonald said on Tuesday.

Konstas, 19, was brought into the squad at the expense of Nathan McSweeney after Australia's top order struggled for runs in the first three tests of the series, which is tied 1-1 with two games to play.

not, time will tell (but) we're really confident that Sam can do the job."

McDonald was also confident Travis Head, who has scored 409 runs with two centuries in the first three tests, would be fit to play despite a quad strain preventing him from training on Monday.

"Has he got some things to work through? Yeah, he has," McDonald said.

"There's no concern at the moment. Has he been officially ticked off? I'm not sure. I

He's composed, relaxed, knows his game is in a good place at the moment, he'll play Boxing Day

ANDREW MCDONALD

"He's composed, relaxed, knows his game is in a good place at the moment, he'll play Boxing Day," McDonald told reporters at the MCG.

"We said from the get-go that age was no barrier. And what he's shown is an array of shots, the ability to put pressure back onto opponents and he gets his opportunity.

"We're really excited for him, Boxing Day, the biggest stage. He might as well get that one out of the way early."

With bowlers, particularly Indian pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah, having had the upper hand in the series so far, McDonald said switching McSweeney for Konstas was a tactical move.

"We want to throw a different challenge at India at this point in time," he said.

"We believe Nathan is good enough for test level. We weren't sure about how the top order was functioning. We challenged ourselves for that decision. Whether it works or



Juric promises high-intensity football from Southampton

Southampton, England - Ivan Juric said he will try to implement a high-intensity brand of football at Southampton as he bids to guide the Premier League strugglers out of the relegation zone.

The former Croatia midfielder, who was appointed on an 18-month contract on Saturday, was previously in charge of AS Roma but was dismissed in November after only 12 matches in charge.

"When I was young I liked death metal music a lot, and that's something I think my style of football is like," Juric told reporters on Monday.

"Work hard, press hard, play good, be intense, all this stuff. I think (the players) can do it. They are young, they are positive, they want to work hard. It's not easy to change the style immediately, but we have to be clever."

Bottom of the league with six points from 17 matches, Southampton are winless in their last seven league games and sit eight points adrift of safety.

"I know it will be a very tough job and I know that in the history nobody has stayed in the Premier League from this situation," the 49-year-old said.

Juric's first game in charge is on Thursday when Southampton host West Ham United.

STUNNING WIN FOR OMAN

Issam al Sabhi hits brace in 2-1 win against Asian champions

Muscat - Issam al Sabhi scored a brace as Oman defeated Asian champions Qatar 2-1 to provisionally go top of Group A in the Gulf Cup on Tuesday.

In the match played at Jaber al Mubarak al Hamad Stadium in Sulaibikhat, Kuwait, Oman were off to a terrible start as Almoez Ali put Qatar ahead in the second minute.

The Qatari striker ran down a delightful through ball through the middle from Ibrahim al Hassan and expertly finished it past an advancing Ibrahim Saleh al Mukhaini in Oman goal.

Oman fought back bravely and got their reward when they were awarded a penalty in the 20th minute which Al Sabhi converted emphatically.

Oman continued their fight and took the lead in the 52nd minute when Al Sabhi swept home a beautiful cross from left full back Ali al Busaidi.

Though Qatar tried to come



Oman's Issam al Sabhi celebrates after scoring against Qatar on Tuesday

back, Oman held on for an important win.

Oman, who played out 1-1 draw with Kuwait in their opening match, are on four points from two matches. They now take on UAE on Friday.

Earlier on Sunday, Bahrain got their campaign off to a roaring start with a 3-2 win over Saudi Arabia in Group B while defending champions Iraq edged Yemen 1-0.

Bahrain, whose only title triumph came in the 2019 edition, produced brilliant counter attacking football to seal victory.

While Saudi Arabia dominated the tie, Bahrain's clinical finishing saw them taking a 2-0 lead into the break courtesy of goals from Mahdi Abduljabbar (19th) and Mahdi Faisal (38th).

Herve Renard's Saudi Arabia pressed hard in the second half but had to wait till the 73rd minute to reduce the deficit through Musab Fahz Aljuwayr.

Mohammed Marhoon, however, restored Bahrain's two-goal advantage three minutes later with Saleh Al Shehri's spot-kick in the 86th minute proving to be a mere consolation for three-time champions Saudi Arabia.

Seeking a fifth title, Iraq had to work hard to see off the challenge of a spirited Yemen.

FIFA amends transfer regulations after Diarra case

Zurich, Switzerland - FIFA has adopted an interim framework concerning the Regulations on the Status and Transfer of Players, world football's governing body said on Monday, following a Court of Justice of the European Union ruling.

In October, the EU's top court said some of FIFA's rules on player transfers went against European Union laws and free movement principles in a case linked to former Chelsea, Arsenal and Real Madrid player Lassana Diarra.

The interim regulatory framework affects the calculation of compensation payable if there is a breach of contract and the burden of proof in relation to both compensation payable and an inducement to breach a contract.

The framework adds a general definition of 'just cause' which says it "shall exist in any circumstance in which a party can no longer reasonably and in good faith be expected to continue a contractual relationship".

The interim regulatory framework is no longer based on the



Lassana Diarra

specific calculation criteria deemed problematic by the court.

Instead, compensation will be calculated in an objective and transparent way at a level required to restore the party that suffered damage due to a breach of contract to the position in which they would have been had the breach not occurred.

FIFA requested talks with all key stakeholders before making their interim amendments, which take effect on Jan. 1 2025, but players' union FIFPRO declined to take part in discussions.

FIFPRO has issued a statement criticising FIFA's decision, and said it was unable to reach a consensus under which it could negotiate amendments to the regulations to reflect the ruling.

"We do not agree with the temporary measures announced by FIFA which have been introduced without a proper collective bargaining process," FIFPRO said. "The measures do not provide legal certainty to professional footballers and do not reflect the judgement by the European Court of Justice."

United boss Amorim questions Rashford camp's decision-making

Manchester, England - Manchester United manager Ruben Amorim has questioned the decision-making of those close to striker Marcus Rashford, who has been left out of the squad for the last three games.

The Portuguese coach did not include Rashford for Sunday's 3-0 defeat at home to Bournemouth in the Premier League amid speculation that the forward want to leave Old Trafford.

Amorim initially left him out for the 2-1 derby win at Manchester City on Dec. 15, two days before the 27-year-old said in an interview that he was "ready for a new challenge" after having been at Old Trafford since the age of seven.

While Amorim said his team



Ruben Amorim with Marcus Rashford

I understand that these players have a lot of people around them, making choices that are not the first idea from the player

RUBEN AMORIM

was "better with Marcus Rashford," the former Sporting coach has now questioned the decisions from those around the player for his comments.

"It is a hard situation. I understand that these players have a lot of people around them, making choices that are not the first idea from the player," Amorim

told Sky Sports. "I am always here to help Marcus as another player. I have to do what I have to do. They chose to do the interview as it is not just Marcus. I understand that.

"As a coach I focus on performance and the way you train. The rest, it is better for me and the club to deal with that when the time comes. At the moment I focus on improving Marcus and we need a talented guy like Marcus. I forget the interview now and see what I see on the pitch."

Rashford has scored three goals since Amorim took over last month, but was taken off in the 56th minute of their 2-1 Europa League victory at Viktoria Plzen on Dec. 12, with supporters booing the striker as he left the pitch.

Jeonbuk appoint Poyet as manager

Seoul, South Korea - Former Brighton & Hove Albion head coach Gus Poyet has been appointed manager of Jeonbuk Motors, the South Korean club said on Tuesday.

The 57-year-old Uruguayan replaces Kim Do-heon at the former Asian champions, who have struggled in recent seasons.

Jeonbuk have won nine South Korean league titles, with their most recent coming in 2021, and they were Asian Champions League winners in 2006 and 2016. However, they only avoided relegation from the Korean top flight in a playoff earlier this month.

The role is ex-Chelsea and



Gus Poyet

Tottenham Hotspur midfielder Poyet's first since leaving the Greece national team after his two-year contract expired in March.

He also previously coached Sunderland, AEK Athens, Real Betis, Shanghai Shenhua and Bordeaux.

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Financial Controller/Sr. Accountant	Administration Executive, Post Graduate, 14 years experience in relevant field with accounts. Have	GM/Restaurant /Hotel /Outlet Manager; well qualified, 20 years experienced professional with valid Oman driving license seeks	Indian, Production Manager 10 years GCC experience in facade industry with valid Oman driving licence looking for job. Immediate joining. Available in Sohar. Mob: 78026010

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24K GOLD

While butter yellow is surely on your radar already, a richer tone - 24k gold - is popping up on the runways of labels like Bottega Veneta, Saint Laurent and Gabriela Hearst, emphasising the impact of a confident hue. Similar to 24k jewellery, with its lustrous, gold nugget-like appearance, this yellow can be incorporated as an accent, contrasted with muted neutrals or layered with a vibrant pattern to punctuate the look.



ICY BLUE

Ethereal, elegant and effortless to style, icy shades of blue are one of 2025's most covetable colour trends. Countless runways have endorsed the delicate hue, from rich-in-detail separates at Cecilie Bahnsen to floaty dresses at Prabal Gurung and Chloé. Wear it head-to-toe or as an accent - it's among the most versatile colours around.



TEA ROSE

The impact of Barbiecore can't be overstated and while hot pink may be shimming out of the spotlight for now, an onslaught of designers are embracing a gentle tea rose hue in 2025. From Khaite's dreamy dresses crafted in powdery pink swaths of silk gazar to Simone Rocha's and Ferragamo's ballet-adjacent, petal pink separates, all signs point toward another year of pink.



FROG GREEN

Brat Green took the fashion world by storm this year, but the hue is pivoting in a slightly quieter direction in the new year by way of frog green. These grassy hues have become a favourite on runways that often have a hand in setting trends - think Sandy Liang's cool-girl separates and Victoria Beckham's memorable green gown worn by Gigi Hadid.



CHOCOLATE BROWN

Rich, chocolate brown will play a starring role in 2025. This timeless neutral is among the easiest to style and manages to feel a bit more refined than a simple black or charcoal gray. Look to runways like Max Mara for inspiration on how to wear it: For spring, the brand weaves the elegant hue into a smattering of chic looks, from tailoring and evening attire to an oversized jacket and coordinated mini skirt that nods perfectly to '70s style.



PERIWINKLE

Every few years, periwinkle prances its way back into the trend cycle, reminding us just how striking this colour really is. Stella McCartney's a proponent of the fanciful hue, translating it into a dramatic sheer gown that would look impeccable on the red carpet. A subtler alternative can be found at Tod's by way of a structural top (best paired with slouchy slacks and sandals). And for the ultimate party dress moment, Brandon Maxwell takes the cake with his eye-popping halter neck frock.

MARIGOLD

A brand-new year often calls for a zippy colour to perk up your wardrobe. 2025's answer to this? Marigold. This cheery yellow-orange is cropping up as an oh-so-covetable skirt at Prada, a gorgeous asymmetrical ruffled skirt at Bottega Veneta, and a head-to-toe pleated dress at Simkhai (among several others) for spring.

COLOUR TRENDS OF 2025

Reflecting on the top colour trends of 2024, a few contenders swiftly come to mind. Charli xcx's Brat Green was the loud, abrasive colour no one could escape, Pantone deemed Peach Fuzz the must-have colour of the year, and at a certain point in time, it was impossible to leave the house and not see someone trotting around in siren red socks or tights. It was a year that embraced a diverse range of expressive hues, cementing the truth that there's always room for colour in your wardrobe, no matter your personal style.

In 2025, there are a few standout colours that are likely to gain traction. The spring/summer 2025 runways offer a peek at what's to come, as does the street style and influencer circuit, which is already embracing powdery pastels (icy blue and petal pink, to name a couple), saturated tones of green and red, and a certain shade of brown that we predict will be everywhere in no time flat. If you're keen to begin incorporating these into your outfits now, read on for our predictions of the colours that'll define 2025 fashion.

CARDINAL RED

Siren red has been a staple colour for the last few seasons - who can forget Tibi's red socks paired with red ballet flats? Though the fiery hue will likely continue on its trajectory (it's pretty timeless, after all), the 2025 runways have been pointing to cardinal red as a sultry alternative. Gucci's purplish-red lace dress will be hard to resist once it hits shelves, as will Louise Trotter's expertly crafted separates for Carven, which could be worn just as easily to the office as on a dinner date.



Scents need to stimulate the mind

2024 saw fragrance brands dip their toe into science-driven scents to soothe anxiety, help sleep and nurture focus - remember Charlotte Tilbury's Fragrance Collection of Emotions?

In 2025, this trend will reach new heights with people expecting their spritzes to multi-task. According to The Future Laboratory's 'Future Forecast 2025', 'One brand leading this evolution is UK-based Vyrao, whose latest fragrance, Mamajuju, aims to counteract stress from excessive screen time. The scent... draws on nature-inspired themes to ground and uplift its wearers.'

Skincare's set to go waterless - really this time

Touts have had their money on waterless skincare for sometime now, but it seems that 2025 will be the year that the category will really take off. According to Beauty Pie's 'Trends Report 2025', 'Google searches have increased by over 806% in the past six months by people searching for waterless skincare products, suggesting we *all* need to get ready for the waterless movement heading our way.'

These products make waxes, botanical oils and butters the main ingredient, leaving water behind – so, you're not leaving nourishment behind but reducing your impact on the planet at the same time.

90s 'dirty blonde' will be the top request in salons

Say good bye to the Sabrina Carpenter-esque, styled-to-the-nines looks of 2024 - grunge blondes are back, with people wanting to look like their tresses are low maintenance.

In a recent article, Hannah Coates at Vogue says: 'Luckily, dirty blonde works on all skin tones and conveys a lived-in and effortless "cool girl mood"... modern examples of the trend include Kendall Jenner's recent blonde, Gabbriette and Rihanna in the Dior J'Adore campaign.'

We all know though, this effortless look actually owes itself to a lot of effort, from initial bleach to the perfect tone – it's a tricky one to perfect.

Mocha Mousse and Cocoa Powder will lead the way

With Pantone naming 'Mocha Mousse' its colour of the year hot off the heels of WGSN predicting Cocoa Powder to be a key colour for beauty this British Beauty Week, it's clear that rich hues of brown will set the agenda in the New Year.

With 'Latte makeup' taking socials by storm in 2023, next year's iterations will be a 'dimensional sophisticated tone (with) an age-agnostic story that will appeal to mature generations and can be utilised as a new black for indie grunge looks in smudged matte applications for younger generations,' according to WGSN.



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