

Oman-Saudi trade grows to RO2.18bn; 3 pacts inked

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Economic relations between Oman and Saudi Arabia continue to grow, with trade volume between the two countries reaching RO2.18bn (US\$5.66bn) by the end of December 2024. The partnership is set to expand further following the signing of three agreements on Wednesday at the Oman-Saudi Business Forum.

Organised by Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) in collaboration with Oman-Saudi Business Council, the forum brought together key stakeholders to explore new investment opportunities. The event was inaugurated by H E Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, along with Sheikh Faisal bin Abdullah al Rawas, Chairman of OCCI.

The agreements signed at the forum cover the sectors of technology, legal services and manufacturing. Bayanat Technology Company of Oman and MBH Transport of Saudi Arabia agreed to set up a cloud-based warehouse and inventory management system.

Dr Sarhan al Raisi Law Firm of Oman partnered with Mohammed al Balawi Commercial Business Group of Saudi Arabia



to provide legal consultancy and support for commercial operations in Oman. The third agreement, between Mass International Company of Oman and Al Astura

Omani non-oil exports to Saudi was valued at RO764mn till November 2024

International Company of Saudi Arabia, will see the establishment of a gold and jewellery manufacturing facility in the sultanate.

Saudi Arabia was the second-largest market for Omani non-oil exports, valued at RO764mn till November 2024, behind the UAE at RO935mn.

H E Yousef stressed the importance of continued partnership and integration, citing initiatives such as supply chain enhancement, logistical advancements and the Future Factories Programme. Efforts to reduce transportation costs and improve operational efficiency at border crossings were also discussed.

OCCI chairman Rawas reaffirmed the deep-rooted historical and commercial ties between Oman and Saudi Arabia, underscoring the commitment to strengthen economic collaboration. Following the forum, the Oman-Saudi Business Council held its first meeting of the year, addressing key issues including export of Omani products to Saudi Arabia and the efficiency of Rub al Khali border crossing.

Bilateral meetings at the forum facilitated discussions between business leaders of the two countries, focusing on investment opportunities in real estate, mining, industry, oil and gas, logistics, healthcare, information technology, finance, insurance, retail, and food security. Participants emphasised the importance of economic diversification and sustainable development in alignment with the long-term economic visions of both nations.

As part of ongoing efforts to strengthen ties, a Saudi delegation will visit Dhahirah on Thursday to meet Governor Najib bin Ali al Rawas. The visit will explore investment and commercial opportunities in the governorate, further expanding the scope of economic cooperation.

SAYYID ASAAD RECEIVES MONGOLIAN FM



H H Sayyid Asaad bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for International Relations and Cooperation Affairs and Personal Representative of His Majesty the Sultan, met Battsetseg Batmunkh, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Republic of Mongolia, on Wednesday. They discussed ways of promoting relations between the two countries to serve joint interests and regional and international matters of common concern

Award launched to fete trade union excellence

Our Correspondent
Muscat

In a move to support and enhance trade union work, General Federation of Oman Workers (GFW) has launched an award designed to encourage excellence and innovation within the sector.

The award aims to honour trade unions, sectoral unions and their representatives who have made outstanding contributions to the development of union activities in the sultanate.

GFW officially opened the registration period for the award on Wednesday, which will run until March 13.

A federation official informed

that this initiative is part of GFW's broader commitment to advance union work and promote a spirit of healthy competition among unions.

GFW has registered the award as an intellectual property, underscoring the importance of protecting and promoting the union movement within Oman.

To be eligible for nomination, trade unions must be officially registered with Ministry of Labour and must comply with the founding regulations of their respective unions. Additionally, nominees must be active members of a trade union in Oman and must have made notable contributions to union work.



Research makes breakthrough in early breast cancer detection



Muhja al Namani - Oman's first female international hockey referee

135TH منفذ Outlet

Follow for offers      

www.nestoooffers.com 

UNVEILING THE
NEW ADDRESS
OF AL ANSAB





نستو
NESTO
All that you need.



Al Ansab, Muscat
Sultanate Of Oman



99730425

Open to the Public @ 12.00pm

INAAAM

انعام

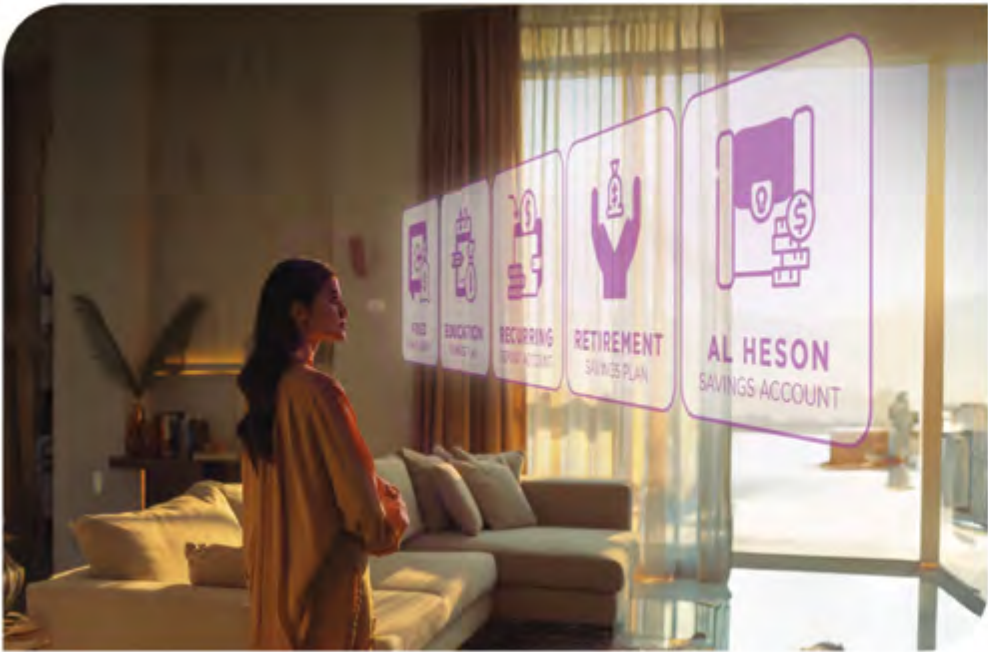
rewards in return

مكافآت في المقابل

NATION

02 | MUSCAT DAILY | THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 20, 2025

Terms and conitions apply



Empower your future today

With **BankDhofar** Ladies Account

Start Saving with BankDhofar Ladies account!
To know more, visit www.bankdhofar.com

f

X

@

in

bankdhofar

2479 1111

www.bankdhofar.com



بنك ظفار
BankDhofar

OCO to distribute 40,000 iftar vouchers

Our Correspondent Muscat

As part of its efforts to support low-income families during Ramadan, the Oman Charitable Organisation (OCO) has begun distributing iftar vouchers.

Forty-thousand vouchers will be provided to eligible Omani citizens through social development committees across the country, an OCO official said, adding that this initiative is part of OCO's ongoing mission to strengthen social solidarity during the holy month.

Badr al Zaabi, Chairman of OCO, emphasised that this initiative reflects the organisation's commitment to supporting deserving families.

He explained that OCO's aid distribution follows a structured and effective process, carried out in coordination with key partners, including social development committees, Omani Women's Associations, and various charitable teams across Oman. "OCO is continuously working to enhance and refine its humanitarian efforts, ensuring the highest levels of efficiency and transparency in delivering Ramadan vouchers to those in need," Zaabi stated.

He further added that the organisation adopts best practices in managing charitable initiatives, particularly during periods requiring increased efforts.

Parade on Friday to mark HM's Accession Day

Our Correspondent Muscat

Twenty riders from across Oman will take part in a horse parade on Friday to celebrate the fifth anniversary of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik's accession to the throne.

The event, organised by the Ministry of Youth and Sports in cooperation with the Oman From Horseback team, aims to showcase Oman's equestrian heritage while bringing together the community in a national celebration.

The parade will begin at 8am in front of Majlis Oman in the Bustan area of Muscat. The riders will travel through some of the capital's most iconic locations, including Qasr Al Alam Palace Street and Muttrah Corniche, before concluding at Shatti al Qurm beach near the Mandarin Oriental Hotel at around 4pm.

Participants will wear jackets bearing the parade's slogan, 'Our Sultan Haitham, the Renewer of the Omani Renaissance', while carrying Omani flags and singing national songs.

Saif Ali al Rawahi, the event supervisor, said the closing ceremony at Shatti al Qurm will feature a series of festive activities, including a paragliding display where multiple paragliders will soar through the sky carrying im-

ages of His Majesty and Omani flags. "It will be a striking visual tribute to His Majesty and a proud moment for all attendees," he said.

To make the event inclusive for families, a special children's corner will be set up, featuring face painting and interactive sessions with mini horses that young visitors can ride.

"We want this to be a celebration for all ages, where everyone can take part in the joy of the oc-

casation," Rawahi said.

He encouraged both citizens and residents to join in, stating, "The more people who come out to celebrate, the more it strengthens our sense of unity as a nation. This is a national event, and we want as many people as possible to feel part of it."

Looking ahead, Rawahi revealed that similar events are being planned throughout the year.

A horse parade in Jabal

Akhdar during the summer will highlight the beauty of Oman's highlands, while equestrian marches in Salalah during the Khareef season will promote the southern region's tourism appeal.

"Our goal is to not only honour our equestrian culture but also to showcase Oman's breathtaking landscapes and encourage more young people to take up horseback riding," he said.

Oman, Nepal sign MoU to strengthen cooperation in tourism sector

Muscat - Oman and Nepal on Wednesday signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) to strengthen cooperation in the tourism sector.

The MoU was signed by H E Salem bin Mohammed al Mahrouqi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism, and Arzu Rana Deuba, Nepal's Minister of Foreign Affairs, representing the Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation.

The understanding has been reached to enhance tourism ties between the two countries by encouraging investments in tourism infrastructure, including the establishment of hotels and development of tourism facilities.

It also seeks to improve expertise in hotel management and promote direct communication between travel agencies and tour operators in both countries.

Under the MoU, Oman and

Nepal will work to boost visitor exchanges in accordance with existing regulations. Both countries will facilitate participation in international tourism exhibitions, seminars, conferences, and workshops, allowing industry professionals to share knowledge and expertise.

The MoU also focuses on cooperation within international tourism organisations, including the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO). It includes provisions for joint programmes, exchange of information on vocational training, and sharing of tourism statistics, promotional materials, and research findings.

The partnership is expected to create new opportunities for tourism growth in both nations, fostering closer ties between their travel industries and strengthening their presence in the global tourism market.

Recall



BMW

Recall Date: 20 / 02 / 2025

Brand of commodity	Number of affected commodities	Year of Production
BMW X3	2	2024
BMW 5 Series	3	
BMW 7 Series	21	
BMW X2	1	

Recall consequence

As a result of changes in the opening mechanism of the tailgate lock, it is possible that the tailgate might no longer lock completely after an opening procedure. In this case, the tailgate has a gap. Tightness is not ensured, and interior monitoring cannot be activated.

Recall Action

Renew the tailgate lock.

To check the serial Numbers of the affected commodities, please visit the website for Recalls & Warnings: <http://recall.pacp.gov.om>

بنك ظفار

Customer Service

80079009

80077997

Al Jenaibi International Automobiles L.L.C

Call No: 80050008

on all working days (Sunday to Thursday)

between 8.00 A.M-5.30 P.M



Musandam's natural diversity showcased to global media

Our Correspondent Musandam

The Ministry of Information (MoI) organised a media tour of Musandam governorate, welcoming 26 media professionals from 16 media institutions from 10 countries on Wednesday.

The tour was conducted to spotlight the governorate's rich cultural, historical, and natural diversity while showcasing its economic and social development.

In collaboration with the Office of the Governor of Musandam, the delegation explored key landmarks, gaining insights into the region's rapid growth in tourism, investment, and infrastructure.

During a special briefing, Sayyid Ibrahim bin Saeed al Buisaidi, Governor of Musandam, outlined the governorate's strategic vision for sustainable development, emphasising its ambition to become a premier investment and tourism destination. He highlighted Musandam's unique location at the gateway to the Arabian Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz, one of the world's most

crucial maritime routes.

The governor detailed major development projects designed to enhance connectivity, tourism, and economic diversification. These include significant infrastructure expansions, luxury hospitality projects such as the North Gate resort, and adventure tourism initiatives in Khasab.

Additionally, environmental projects focusing on green spaces and modern waterfront developments are set to elevate Musandam's appeal.

To attract investors, the governorate is offering competitive incentives, including tax and customs exemptions, along with streamlined processes for

tourism and real estate ownership. These initiatives align with Oman Vision 2040's broader goal of fostering economic diversity and attracting high-value investments.

The planned projects are expected to generate new employment opportunities, strengthen the tourism sector, and upgrade essential infrastructure, positioning Musandam as a key hub for regional growth.

Beyond Musandam, the media delegation's itinerary also includes visits to Buraimi and Dhahirah governorates, further highlighting Oman's commitment to comprehensive national development.

MHT highlights role of guides in tourism sector

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman will celebrate International Tourist Guide Day on February 21 in recognition of the vital role of guides in enriching visitors' experiences and promoting the country's heritage and attractions.

Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MHT) marks this occasion annually acknowledging the contributions of tourist guides in shaping Oman's tourism industry.

Anwar bin Mohammed al Mahrooqi, Head of Tour Guides Section at MHT, said guides act as "ambassadors of Oman, offering visitors an understanding of the country's diverse cultures, rich history, natural landscapes and unique heritage".

He emphasised their role in enhancing the tourism sector and ensuring that visitors re-

TOURIST GUIDES
TOTAL 1,175

WOMEN 101 | 52 ADVENTURE TOURISM (INCLUDING SIX WOMEN)

Tour guides are ambassadors of Oman, offering visitors an understanding of the country's diverse cultures, rich history, natural landscapes and unique heritage

ANWAR AL MAHROOQI



(Supplied photo)

ceive accurate and engaging insights.

By the end of 2024, Oman had issued approximately 1,175

tourist guide licences, with English being the most commonly licensed language. Licences have also been granted for French,

German, Spanish, Italian, Russian and other languages, reflecting the growing diversity of tourists visiting the country. Mahrooqi

noted that the ministry is working to increase the number of guides fluent in non-English languages to meet market demand.

Adventure tourism is another focus area for MHT, with 52 Omani guides now licensed for this segment, including six women. The ministry has partnered with relevant organisations to train and certify adventure tourism professionals, ensuring safe and informed experiences for visitors.

Omani women are also increasingly joining the profession, with 101 female guides now licensed across various tourism sectors. Mahrooqi stressed that women play an important role in the industry, and the ministry remains committed to ensuring their active participation in tourism development.

As Oman continues to expand its tourism sector, the role of trained and knowledgeable guides remains essential in delivering high-quality experiences and promoting the country as a leading travel destination.

Oman, Mongolia explore ways of promoting cooperation



Muscat – H E Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidi, Foreign Minister, received in his office Battsetseg Batmunkh, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Mongolia, on Wednesday within the context of her current official visit to Oman.

During the meeting, the two sides discussed means of promoting relations between the two countries and exploring new horizons for cooperation in diplo-

matic, commercial and cultural areas.

They also exchanged views on a set of regional and international issues of common concern.

H E Sayyid Badr stressed Oman's keenness to enhance cooperation with Mongolia in the fields of investment, trade exchange, tourism, technology and academic cooperation.

On her turn, the Mongolian minister underlined her country's

eagerness to boost cooperation with Oman. She lauded Oman's vision in backing international peace and stability.

The meeting was attended by H E Bulgan Enkhtuvshin, Ambassador of Mongolia to Oman, Sheikh Abdulaziz bin Mohammed al Hosni, Head of Asian and Pacific Department in Foreign Ministry, and several officials from both sides.

ONA

Research makes breakthrough in early breast cancer detection

Our Correspondent
Muscat

A recent research breakthrough could help in the early detection of breast cancer, making it easier to identify even the smallest and deepest tumours.

Led by Dr Mohammed Abdullah Salim al Husaini, Assistant Professor at Arab Open University in Oman, the research used a cooling gel to improve thermal imaging techniques, offering hope for more accurate and non-invasive detection methods.

The research focused on understanding how temperature variations in breast tissue, influenced by factors such as tumour size, depth and blood flow, can aid in detecting breast cancer. By developing a numerical simulation model using COMSOL software, Husaini and his team were able to explore how these factors



By improving thermal contrast with cooling techniques, we can detect tumours that might otherwise go unnoticed

DR MOHAMMED AL HUSAINI

affect heat distribution in breasts of different sizes.

One of the research's key findings is that smaller or deeper tumours are often difficult to detect due to minimal temperature differences. For example, tumours located deeper within the breast tissue or smaller than 0.5cm are particularly challenging to detect with conventional thermography, with temperature variations between tumour-affected and non-affected areas ranging from only 0.27°C to 2.58°C.

However, the research re-

vealed that applying a situ-cooling gel significantly improves thermal contrast, especially for deeper tumours. In a simulation, a tumor located 10cm deep was detected with a 6°C temperature difference when the cooling gel was applied, a result that was unattainable through thermography alone.

"This breakthrough could greatly enhance the accuracy of early breast cancer detection," said Husaini. "By improving thermal contrast with cooling techniques, we can detect tumours

that might otherwise go unnoticed, especially in patients with larger breasts or those with tumours located deep within the tissue."

Husaini added that while the results are promising, further clinical studies are required to validate the findings. He also emphasised the potential for situ-cooling to be integrated into existing thermography-based detection methods, offering a non-invasive approach to identifying cancer at its earliest stages.

The research, published in Applied Sciences in 2023, involved a team of experts from King Khalid University and International Islamic University Malaysia, and was awarded in the PhD category of the 11th National Research Award organised by Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation.



Dr Yousra Juma al Sinani

Omani academic joins global education council

Muscat - Dr Yousra Juma al Sinani, Associate Professor in Department of Curriculum and Instruction (Physical Education) at Sultan Qaboos University, has been appointed a member of International Council on Education for Teaching (ICET).

Yousra described the appointment as a proud achievement, stating that it marks a significant step in advancing education in Oman while consolidating its global presence. "This appointment provides an opportunity to promote inclusivity and equality in education policies, aligning with Oman's vision for educational reform and societal progress," she said.

She added that the role would help raise the university's profile in international academic forums and highlight Oman's contributions to global education.

A US-based international non-governmental organisation, ICET holds consultative status with the UN Economic and Social Council. It focuses on improving teacher training and educational practices worldwide, particularly enhancing quality of education.

Seminar celebrates 70 years of Oman-India diplomatic relations



(ONA)

Our Correspondent
Muscat

In celebration of the 70th anniversary of diplomatic relations between the Sultanate of Oman and the Republic of India, the Embassy of Oman in New Delhi organised a seminar highlighting the rich historical ties between the two nations spanning over 5,000 years on Wednesday.

Held in collaboration with Jamia Millia Islamia University, the event focused on the extensive trade and cultural connections that have shaped relations between Oman and India.

The seminar underscored the significance of Omani ports in Muscat, Suhar and Qalhat in maritime trade, while also exploring the impact of cultural exchange on language, arts, architecture, and the promotion of pluralism and religious toler-

ance by Indian communities in Oman.

Ashok Kumar Attri, former ambassador to Oman, shared his personal experiences of living in Oman, highlighting the Indian community's long-standing presence and the strong diplomatic bonds between the two nations.

Prashant Bissi, Director General of Indian Council for World Affairs, emphasised the historical richness of Oman-India relations, noting the friendship, mutual benefits and principle of coexistence at the core of the diplomatic ties. He presented a research paper titled 'History of Omani-Indian Relations and the Impact of Pluralism and the Culture of Difference on Religious Pluralism and Civilisational Understanding'.

Dr Saud bin Abdullah al Zadjali, a researcher from Oman, de-

livered a working paper titled 'Historical Reasons for the Strength of Relations from Western and Eastern Perspectives', examining India's strategic role in the Gulf region and its emphasis on diversity to promote mutual interests and civilisational dialogue.

The symposium was attended by Indian officials, former Indian ambassadors to Oman, academics and students interested in the cultural and historical relations between the two countries.

In closing, the symposium called for continuation of cultural and scientific dialogues and strengthening cooperation in economic and educational fields, with the aim of further consolidating the longstanding relations and opening new avenues for future collaboration between Oman and India.



Sultanate of Oman سلطنة عُمان
وزارة التراث والسياحة
Ministry of Heritage and Tourism

ANNOUNCEMENT OF AN INTERNAL TENDERS

Tender No.	36/2025/MHT/HQ-8 37/2025/MHT/HQ-9	Tender Name	project of maintaining a number of archaeological sites and fencing works with the iron fence at the archaeological site of Bsia and Slood. Maintenance of Khasab and Bukha forts in Musandam Governorate.
Fees of Tender Documents (Non-refundable)	36/2025/MHT/HQ-8 37/2025/MH/HQ-9	25 O.R 30 O.R	
Tender Document Sales End Date		10/ 03 /2025	
Last Date for Bid Submission		02/04/2025	
Grade	36/2025/MHT/HQ-8 37/2025/MH/HQ-9	Fourth First	
E-Tendering Portal	https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om		
Interested Companies registered with Tender Board (in the mentioned Grade) may obtain Tender documents from the E.Tendering website: https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om , against non-refundable payment as mentioned above for each set of documents.			
The Tenderers must acknowledge commitment to the bid.			
The Ministry shall not be obligated to accept the lowest or any other bids			
The bid submission period starts after the end of the inquiry period shown in the e-tendering system, until the last date for submitting bids before (10:00 am, Oman time).			
Support and inquiries	For more information, related to the tender, kindly communicate through the website of the e-tendering system: https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om For inquiries related to the technical support for the e-tendering system, kindly communicate through etenderhd@gstb.gov.om or 24402200		
For further information	Email : sotic@mht.gov.om Phones : 22088348 - 22088085		

MARKET WATCH

MSX30	4,452.67
Sensex	75,939.18

FOREX RATES

(RO1 equals)

India	225.65
Pakistan	728.28
Bangladesh	315.38
Philippines	150.74
Sri Lanka	770.69

*Rates as on February 19

Source: xe.com

BRIEFS

Ukraine's economy up 1.5%

Gross domestic product (GDP) in war-torn Ukraine rose 1.5% in January, the country's Economy Ministry said.

"The drivers of growth remain the construction industry, the processing industry, as well as domestic trade," said Oleksiy Sobolev, Ukraine's first deputy economy minister.

He stressed that a drop in exports caused the growth rate to fall significantly, but that this effect was partially mitigated by aggressive budget funding.

Ukraine's GDP grew 1.7% in December, with GDP growth of 2.7% expected for 2025.

Road rebuilding, housing development, and the restoration of vital infrastructure all played significant roles in bolstering the economy.

Asyad Shipping sets price range for RO128mn initial public offering

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Asyad Shipping, a subsidiary of Asyad Group, has announced the price range for its highly anticipated initial public offering (IPO), which is set to open for public subscription on Thursday. The offering, expected to raise up to RO128.1mn at the top end of the price range, will value the company at up to RO640.7mn.

The IPO will consist of 1,041,748,856 existing shares being sold by Asyad Group, representing 20% of Asyad Shipping's total issued share capital. Post-offering, Asyad Group will remain the majority shareholder.

The offering is split into two categories: A Category I institutional offer (representing 75% of the total offer size) and a Category II retail offer (representing the remaining 25%). The Category I offer includes a significant 30% of the offering allocated to Anchor Investors.

A total of 468,786,985 offer shares (45% of the total shares on offer) will be allocated to institutional investors in the Category I offer, which will be open to local, regional, and international applicants. The minimum subscription for Category I investors is 100,000 shares, with additional



Subscription price for Category I offer is expected to fall between 117bz and 123bz per share, with final price determined through book-building process. Category II offer will have a fixed subscription price of 123bz per share

subscriptions in multiples of 100 shares thereafter.

The Category II retail offer will be allocated 260,437,214 shares (25% of the total offering). Subscriptions will be made on a proportionate basis. The Category II allocation is split between large retail investors and small retail investors, with the minimum subscription for large investors set at 81,400 shares. There is no maximum limit for Category II large

retail investors, while small retail investors can subscribe for a minimum of 100 shares, with a maximum limit of 81,300 shares.

The subscription price for the Category I offer is expected to fall between 117bz and 123bz per share, with the final price determined through a book-building process. The Category II offer will have a fixed subscription price of 123bz per share.

The IPO subscription opens on

February 20, 2025. The Category I offer will close on February 27, 2025, and the Category II offer will close on February 26, 2025.

Anchor investors

Asyad Shipping has secured firm commitments from two strategic anchor investors – Mars Development and Investment, an Oman-based firm, and Falcon Investments, a subsidiary of the Qatar Investment Authority. To-

gether, the two investors have committed to subscribing to 30% of the total offer, with Mars Development and Investment agreeing to take up 10% and Falcon Investments 20%, at the offer price of 123bz per share.

The commitments by the two anchor investors demonstrate a substantial vote of confidence in Asyad Shipping's value proposition, track record, and strategic vision.

Shares of Asyad Shipping are expected to begin trading on the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) on or around March 12, 2025, subject to receiving all necessary regulatory approvals.

Sohar International Bank has been appointed as the issue manager, with Oman Investment Bank, Sohar International Bank, EFG Hermes, Jefferies, and JP Morgan acting as joint global coordinators. Crédit Agricole Corporate and Investment Bank and Société Générale have been appointed as joint bookrunners.

Dividend policy

Asyad Shipping has outlined an attractive dividend policy, with an expectation of strong cash flows and long-term earnings growth. Prior to the IPO, the company has declared a dividend of RO9.9mn, payable in February 2025 to pre-IPO shareholders.

Post-IPO, the company plans to pay dividends of RO22.3mn in March 2025 and RO29mn in September 2025, based on its financial performance for the year ending December 31, 2024, and for the six-month period ending June 30, 2025, respectively. A further dividend of RO29mn is expected in March 2026, based on the performance for the year ending December 31, 2025.

Looking ahead, for the year 2026, Asyad Shipping aims to distribute a fixed annual dividend of RO58mn, with 50% payable in September 2026 and the remaining 50% in March 2027.



GCC hospitality sector records strong growth

Dubai, UAE – The hospitality sector in the GCC is experiencing a strong resurgence, with new data compiled by STR on behalf of Arabian Travel Market (ATM) revealing significant growth across the region in 2024.

According to the report, aggregated Revenue per Available Room (RevPAR) across Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE last year rose by 5.4% compared to 2023, fuelled primarily by an increase in occupancy rates.

In 2024, occupancy rates across the GCC reached 69.5%, surpassing the levels observed prior to the pandemic, underscoring the region's successful efforts to establish itself as a world-class tourism and investment hub.

Key government initiatives have played a pivotal role in this transformation by promoting economic diversification, enhancing infrastructure, and elevating the overall tourism experience. These efforts aim to boost occupancy and establish the GCC as a competitive player in the global tourism landscape.

The research also found that Average Daily Rate (ADR) grew by 2.4% in the GCC last year, with the luxury hotel rooms segment significantly

contributing to ADR growth. The region has added more than 35,000 hotel rooms over the last 10 years, with 19% of rooms now belonging to the luxury category, growing from 16% a decade ago.

STR's report suggests that hotel rooms under all phases of development will continue to be dominated by the luxury segment, stating that with more than 33,000 rooms under development, Saudi Arabia alone has more luxury rooms in the pipeline than currently exist in the country.

Commenting on STR's latest research, Danielle Curtis, Exhibition Director ME, Arabian Travel Market, said, "Luxury hospitality continues to be a driving force behind the region's tourism growth, offering exceptional experiences that attract high-spending travellers from around the world."

"Luxury hotel exhibitors will be a key part of ATM 2025, showcasing the innovative hospitality concepts that are re-defining the industry. As demand for premium travel

risers, the GCC is well-positioned to strengthen its reputation as a global luxury tourism hotspot."

IHG's Managing Director across India, Middle East and Africa, Haitham Mattar said, "Several markets across the GCC region are experiencing an exciting phase of growth in tourism and hospitality, driven by key government initiatives resulting in an increase in demand across hotel segments. Historically, markets in the GCC region have been driven

by luxury hospitality and demand is set to rise owing to factors such as development of giga and mega projects, increased business activity and rise in leisure travel."

ATM 2025, which will take place from April 28 to May 1, brings together travel professionals from around the world to share exclusive insights and visions on the future of the industry. Across four days, attendees will have the opportunity to meet with leading industry experts, forge new connections, and uncover fresh perspectives.

OQEP wins IPO Deal of the Year Award

Dubai, UAE - OQ Exploration and Production (OQEP) has been awarded the prestigious Sharia-Compliant IPO Deal of the Year 2024, at the Islamic Finance News (IFN) Awards, recognising its commitment to ethical investment and leadership in Islamic finance. The award was received by Ahmed bin Said al Azkawi CEO of OQEP on Tuesday at Address Sky View in Dubai.

Azkawi expressed his gratitude upon receiving the prestigious award of Sharia-Compliant IPO Deal of the Year 2024 for its landmark RO780mn IPO transaction, highlighting the company's commitment to Sharia-compliant investment opportunities in oil and gas sector.

He emphasised that this achievement marks a significant milestone for OQEP, as it aims to deliver solid cash flow generation, as well as expand its assets, all vital for sustainable growth. Azkawi thanked investors for their trust and acknowledged the banks that contributed to this success.

Looking ahead to 2025, the OQEP CEO conveyed a sense of optimism and enthusiasm, stat-



OQEP's RO780mn IPO was the largest in Oman's history and marked the first IPO in the oil exploration and production sector

ing that OQEP is dedicated to leveraging this momentum to reach new heights, celebrate further achievements, and enhance shareholder returns.

OQEP recognises the increasing demand for Shariah-compli-

ant investment solutions. The company remains committed to fostering opportunities aligned with Islamic finance principles and strengthening our engagement with Islamic banks and a diverse investment base.

The subscription of two billion shares offered by OQEP on the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) stands as the largest in Oman's history and marks the first IPO in the exploration and production sector.

The award highlights OQEP's dual value proposition: offering Shariah-compliant investment opportunities while maintaining a rigorous, performance-driven

business model. This approach ensures strong returns for investors without compromising ethical values, addressing the growing demand for Islamic financial products across the GCC and beyond.

OQEP's strong balance sheet and tangible assets allow it to mitigate risks effectively, while its consistent dividend policy reinforces its commitment to long-term shareholder value. Winning the IPO Deal of the Year is a testament to the company's excellence in structuring and executing a successful IPO, solidifying its reputation in Islamic capital markets.

Oil prices increase over supply concerns

London, UK – Oil prices increased on Wednesday following reports of Ukraine's attack on a Russian oil station and concerns that cold weather in the US could disrupt production, while trade tariff concerns and uncertainty over US monetary policy continue to impact prices.

International benchmark Brent crude traded at \$75.95 per barrel in morning trade in London, up 0.6% from the closing price of \$75.45 per barrel in the previous trading session. US benchmark West Texas Intermediate (WTI) traded at \$72.26 per barrel, a 0.7% rise from the previous session when it closed

at \$71.74 per barrel.

Russian Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak announced that Ukraine launched an unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) attack on an oil pumping station belonging to the Caspian Pipeline Consortium (CPC), which transports Kazakhstan's oil, describing it as a 'reaction to the US.'

While briefing Russian President Vladimir Putin in Moscow, Novak stated that the station's capacity had dropped by 30-

40% after the attack and warned that the repair process could take a long time.

CPC said that oil supplies from Kazakhstan could decrease by 30% for about 45 to 60 days, resulting in a loss of 300,000 barrels per day (bpd) in global markets.

Novak emphasised that the oil transported on the line belongs to international partners such as Chevron and ExxonMobil, as well as some European companies.

Novak stated that the attack was carried out in response to



statements made at the Munich Security Conference, suggesting that Ukraine was likely reacting to the US' planned negotiations.

Adding to global supply concerns, cold weather conditions in the US threaten output in the world's biggest crude consumer.

The North Dakota Pipeline Authority estimates that production in the country's third largest oil-producing state could fall by up to 150,000 bpd.

Meanwhile, global oil markets experience volatility amid concerns that US President Donald Trump's plans to increase import tariffs could deepen trade wars.

Anadolu Agency

Trump threatens 25% tariffs on cars, chips

Tina Teng

US President Donald Trump said he may impose a 25% tariff on auto, pharmaceutical, and semiconductor imports as soon as April 2. He indicated that companies would be given time to relocate their manufacturing plants to the US before new levies are announced.

The announcement marks the latest escalation in Trump's tariff plans, further heightening the risk of a trade war between the US and its global trading partners. Last week, the president signed an executive order to investigate trade relations with the aim of introducing reciprocal tariffs, expected to take effect as early as April 1. Previously, he announced 25% tariffs on steel and aluminium, likely starting from March 4.

These import duties will particularly impact the US's largest trading partners - Mexico and Canada. Once implemented, both countries will face compound tariffs across the three sectors, as Trump has paused blanket 25% levies that may take effect in March. He has also imposed a 10% tariff on China this month, prompting retaliatory measures from Beijing.

Speaking to reporters at his Mar-a-Lago club on Tuesday, Trump confirmed that auto tariffs would be set at 25%. Levies on pharmaceutical products and



US President Donald Trump

The announcement marks the latest escalation in Trump's tariff plans, further heightening the risk of a trade war between the US and its global trading partners

computer chips could be even higher. "It'll be 25% and higher, and it'll go very substantially higher over the course of a year," he said when asked about

potential tariff costs for the two sectors.

Trump has used tariff threats as leverage to rebalance US trade relations, aiming to reduce

the trade deficit and bring manufacturing back to the country. His proposed tariffs are likely to take effect in April, allowing time for negotiations.

Impact on EU

Cars and pharmaceutical products are two of the European Union's (EU) major exports to the US. According to the US Census Bureau, the US imported \$127bn worth of pharmaceutical products in 2024. A significant portion of these imports came from the EU, particularly GLP-1 weight-loss drugs, where Novo Nordisk's Wegovy holds a sub-

stantial market share.

Novo Nordisk's shares have fallen 6% this year, following sluggish earnings results and growing concerns over competition from US rival Eli Lilly. The healthcare sector has also been one of the worst-performing sectors in the Pan-European Stoxx 600 over the past five trading days.

European car makers could

also face mounting challenges if Trump imposes compound import levies on goods from Mexico and Canada.

Major manufacturers such as Volkswagen and Stellantis have production plants in both countries. However, despite the tariff threat, European auto stocks have been rallying this year due to delays in action from the US president.

In response to Trump's tariff threats, particularly on car imports, the European Union said in a statement on Tuesday: "No specific offer on reducing tariffs has been made by either side. Any tariff reductions must be mutually beneficial and negotiated within a fair and rules-based framework. The EU remains committed to deepening transatlantic trade relations and addressing tariff concerns through constructive dialogue."

Despite Trump's widening tariff threats, European stock markets have performed strongly this year. The recent surge in defense stocks has repeatedly pushed benchmarks such as the DAX and the Euro Stoxx 600 to new highs. However, the rally could take a breather as rising European government bond yields threaten to put pressure on equity markets.

In addition to US-EU trade tensions, the upcoming German election is expected to weigh on investor sentiment.

(Source: Euronews.com)

EU economy struggles amid political turmoil, Trump's tariff pressures

Brussels, Belgium - The European Union economy is facing significant challenges due to political instability, structural issues, and US policies on trade and defense spending.

The region is experiencing a high-risk period marked by economic stagnation, trade fragmentation, and geopolitical uncertainty, compounded by the ongoing war in Ukraine and strained relations with the US, particularly since President Donald Trump took office in January.

The EU's historically close ties with the US have been greatly affected by Trump's trade and defense policies. His "America First" approach introduced protectionist measures that included EU nations.

Trump's executive order imposing a 25% tariff on steel and aluminum imports sparked concerns across the EU, with officials arguing the tariffs were unjustified and pledging to protect European industries from these policies.

The EU views these US tariffs as a source of economic uncertainty, disrupting market efficiency and integration. Additionally, the bloc opposes Trump's decision to impose reciprocal tariffs on countries that retaliate.



Many European nations are grappling with high public debt and budget deficits amid slowing economic growth, as well as rising social expenditures

Slow growth, high debt

Many European nations are grappling with high public debt and budget deficits amid slowing economic and population growth, as well as rising social expenditures. For these countries, increasing defense spending presents a significant challenge.

The EU's economic growth

forecast for 2025 stands at 1.5%, reflecting a sluggish trend in recent years compared to the US and China. Reports suggest that the eurozone's growth rate may hover around 1% this year.

Over the past 15 years, the European economy has fallen significantly behind the US, which has led in technology and digital transformation. While the US increased its GDP by 70%, the EU saw only a 20% rise.

Declining productivity and competitiveness, coupled with rising labor costs, have eroded the region's industrial strength, particularly against the US and China.

To regain its competitive edge, the EU aims to cut bureaucracy, expand investments in artificial intelligence (AI) and

tech firms, and lower energy costs. However, whenever the EU implements economic stimulus measures, the US responds with larger and more rapid initiatives.

Meanwhile, several EU nations have not adhered to the bloc's fiscal rules, which mandate that public debt should not exceed 60% of GDP and budget deficits should remain under 3% of GDP.

Greece, Italy, France, Belgium, and Spain all have public debt exceeding 100% of their GDP, while 13 EU member states surpass the 60% threshold.

Additionally, 10 EU countries, including Italy, Hungary, and Romania, have exceeded the 3% budget deficit-to-GDP ratio limit set by the bloc.

High public debt and budget deficits make it increasingly difficult for these nations to allocate funds toward their defense industries.

At the same time, inflation across Europe remains elevated. The European Central Bank (ECB) targets 2% inflation in the medium term, but the eurozone's inflation rate has remained around 3% in recent months.

Anadolu Agency

UK inflation hits 10-month high

London, UK - UK inflation hit a 10-month high in January, reaching 3% and up from 2.5% on December, according to official figures from the Office for National Statistics (ONS). That was above analyst expectations for 2.8%.

The higher-than-expected rise is likely to dampen hopes of a speeding up of interest rate cuts by the Bank of England.

The spike, which took inflation further above the bank's target of 2%, was largely due to increases in airfares, food costs and private school fees in the wake of the Labour government's decision to impose an additional tax on private schools.

Economists had anticipated an increase to 2.8% but the scale of the spike has come as a big surprise and is likely to cause concern among rate-setters at the central bank at a time when they are voicing worries about about the UK's tepid economic growth.

Earlier this month, the bank cut its main interest rate by a quarter of a percentage point to 4.5%, its third reduction in six months, as it halved its 2025 growth forecast for the UK to 0.75%.

If growth remains modest, it will be disappointing news for the government, which has



Higher inflation is likely to dampen hopes of a speeding up of interest rate cuts by the Bank of England

stressed the importance of growth. With growth proving elusive, the party's popularity has fallen sharply since its election victory in July.

Most economists predict inflation will rise further in the coming months as a result of higher domestic energy bills but start to fall in the second half of the year, which will give policymakers room to cut interest rates again - but maybe not as much or as often as previously thought.

"Another rate cut in March looks pretty unlikely, with the bank continuing with its gradual pace of easing for now," said Luke Bartholomew, deputy chief economist at abrdn, formerly Aberdeen Asset Management.

"But any speeding up of the pace of rate cuts in the second half of the year will depend on inflation pressures heading back towards 2%."

Nick Saunders, the chief executive officer (CEO) of stock trading platform Webull UK, said in an email note: "With interest rates trickling down, the sharp uptick in the inflation rate demonstrates the tightrope the Bank is walking. While food prices and wholesale energy costs are keeping the headline rate down, the 3% figure is a real cause for concern while the core inflation rate hints at an unfavourable longer term prognosis.

(Source: Euronews.com)

China's property market continues to warm as trading improves

Beijing, China - Home prices in first-tier Chinese cities maintained an upward trend in January, adding to signs of stabilisation in the country's property sector amid active trading and improved sentiment.

In the country's four first-tier Chinese cities, namely Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou and Shenzhen, prices of new and second-hand homes both went up by 0.1% from the previous month, data from the National Bureau of Statistics showed on Wednesday.

Moreover, the recovery trend

extended beyond the biggest cities. New home prices in second-tier cities recorded their first monthly increase since June 2023, rising by 0.1%. Prices of second-hand homes dipped by 0.3%.

Among 70 large and medium-sized cities, 24 reported month-on-month increases in new home prices, while seven saw gains in second-hand home prices.

The data points to continued momentum in a market that began stabilizing in the final quarter of last year after author-



ities moved to reverse the market downturn and stabilize the sector.

Policymakers have rolled out a raft of measures to support the sector, including cuts to mortgage rates, lower down payment requirements, and relaxed purchase restrictions.

Market activity has picked up. Between January 1 and 27, the total sales area of newly built commercial housing in 30 cities rose four percent year on year, while the transaction volume of second-hand homes in 20 cities surged 19%, according to data

from the China Index Academy.

This warming trend has also fueled demand for home loans. New personal housing loans jumped to 244.7bn yuan (approximately \$34.13bn) in January, up by 151.9bn yuan from a year earlier, official data showed.

Amid recovering market confidence, major property developers are stepping up land acquisitions, with multiple industry giants announcing new project acquisitions in January.

Poly Developments and Holdings Group announced recent purchases of six land parcels in

cities such as Guangzhou, Foshan and Sanya, with total payments nearing 10bn yuan. Vanke said it has recently secured four development sites in Tianjin, Tangshan, Guangzhou and Guiyang, with a total land area of 213,000 square meters.

Analysts said the latest acquisitions by leading developers signal renewed confidence regarding the sector's prospects and growing optimism in the market's long-term outlook as government support measures gain traction.

Xinhua

OMTB AWARDS

Sohar International most trusted brand in Oman's Local Banking sector

Sohar International, Oman's best bank, has been honoured with the prestigious 'Oman's Most Trusted Brand 2024' award in the Local Bank category, underscoring its long-standing reputation as a trusted financial institution.

The award, which was presented at a distinguished ceremony organised by Apex Media on Monday, at Shangri-La Barr Al Jissah, highlights the bank's unwavering dedication to delivering exceptional financial services while maintaining the highest levels of integrity.

The event, attended by senior delegates, top executives, and industry leaders, celebrated 50 outstanding brands that have earned public trust. The award, determined entirely through public voting, underscores the bank's focus on trust and its relentless commitment to building long-lasting relationships with its customers.

Abdul Wahid al Murshidi, Acting Chief Executive Officer of Sohar International, attended the event and accepted the award on behalf of the bank. The accolade serves as a testament to the bank's transparency, reliability, and ongoing efforts to enhance the banking experience, thereby reinforcing its role in serving the financial needs of the Omani community.

Commenting on the achievement, Murshidi stated, "Earning



The award, presented at a distinguished ceremony organised by Apex Media on Monday, at Shangri-La Barr Al Jissah, highlights the bank's dedication to delivering exceptional financial services

the title of 'Oman's Most Trusted Brand 2024' is a powerful endorsement of Sohar International's unwavering commitment to setting new benchmarks in banking excellence. Trust is the cornerstone of sustainable financial leadership, and this recognition reflects our

strategic focus on innovation, customer-centricity, and long-term value creation.

"As we continue to drive transformation in the financial sector, we remain dedicated to empowering individuals, businesses, and the national economy with forward-thinking

solutions that inspire confidence and growth."

The latest edition of the awards witnessed an exceptional response, with one million votes cast across various categories - underscoring the critical role of brand loyalty, market leadership, customer engagement, and corporate integrity in shaping brand equity. The recognition serves as a validation of public confidence in distinguished institutions, highlighting those that have set new benchmarks for excellence. Sohar International's strong public endorsement reinforces

its position as a trusted financial partner and a leading force in Oman's banking sector.

As Sohar International continues to strengthen its market position, the award reaffirms its ongoing commitment to excellence, innovation, and customer empowerment. With a strategic focus on delivering seamless banking experiences, leveraging digital advancements, and fostering financial inclusion, the bank remains dedicated to exceeding customer expectations while contributing to the nation's economic prosperity.

This recognition serves as further motivation to uphold the highest standards of service and trust, ensuring that Sohar International continues to be the preferred banking partner for individuals and businesses alike.

Sohar International remains steadfast in its mission to redefine banking by driving progressive change and enhancing the overall financial ecosystem. By embracing a customer-first approach, investing in next-generation solutions, and fostering meaningful relationships, the bank is well-positioned to lead the future of banking in Oman.

With trust at the core of its values, Sohar International will continue to innovate, inspire, and empower, reinforcing its role as a key enabler of financial success for its customers and stakeholders.



Malabar Gold & Diamonds honoured for seventh time

Malabar Gold & Diamonds, currently ranked as the 6th largest jewellery retailer globally with over 375 showrooms across 13 countries, has been honoured with 'Oman's Most Trusted Brand' award in the Jewellery category.

This is the 7th time that Malabar Gold & Diamonds is emerging as 'Oman's Most Trusted Brand'.

H H Sayyid Dr Faris bin Turki al Said, Member of the Technical Team for Oman's Promotional Identity, handed over the award to Najeeb K, Regional Head - Oman, Malabar Gold & Diamonds in the presence of Muhsin P, Branch Head, Malabar Gold & Diamonds; Shereef Padincharath, Deputy Head-Supply Chain, Malabar Gold & Diamonds; and Saleh Zakwani, Executive Chairman, Apex Media.

The award - instituted by Apex Media - is one of Oman's premier publishing houses involved in a host of publishing and digital activities. Oman's Most Trusted Brand Awards acknowledges brands that have won the confidence of their customers through a voting process, which is also an opportunity for customers to prove their loyalty towards their

favourite brands.

"We are extremely delighted to have been awarded this prestigious honour. Malabar Gold & Diamonds being crowned as Oman's Most Trusted Brand for the 7th time is testament to our acceptance as the most preferred jeweller amongst both citizens and residents alike," said Najeeb K.

"Our commitment to providing jewellery lovers in Oman with exquisite jewellery and exceptional remains as strong as ever. We dedicate this inspiring triumph to our millions of satisfied customers, team members and investors, without whose wholehearted support, this exceptional accomplishment would not have been possible," he added.

Malabar Gold & Diamonds currently operates 12 outlets in Oman, providing customers its multi-national customers with a wide variety of jewellery in both traditional and contemporary designs, curated from over 20 countries. The brand is renowned globally for offering an unparalleled jewellery buying experience with convenience and customer-friendly policies along with the 'Malabar Promise' of incomparable quality and service assurance.

Bank Muscat Meethaq Equity Fund

Unaudited Statement of Comprehensive Income for the period 25th August 2024 till 31st December 2024

	25-Aug-24 to 31-Dec-24
	RO'000
Income	
Dividends	40.72
Realised gain/(losses) on financial assets at fair value through profit or loss	41.23
Unrealised gain/(losses) on financial assets at fair value through profit or loss	155.12
Foreign exchange gain/(losses)	(24.72)
Total Income	212.35
Expenses:	
Management, Administration and custody fees	(50.90)
Brokerage commission	(63.28)
General and administrative expenses and Management body fees	(14.72)
Total expenses	(128.90)
Net Profit for the period	83.45
Earnings per unit (Rial)	0.009

Unaudited Statement of Financial Position as at 31st December 2024

	31-Dec-24
	RO'000
Assets	
Financial assets at fair value through profit or loss	8,775.10
Cash and cash equivalents	391.37
Other receivables	14.16
Total Assets	9,180.63
Liabilities:	
Accruals, account and other liabilities	(20.99)
Net Assets	9,159.65
Net units issued	9,077.27
Composition of net assets:	
Proceeds from issue of units, net of redemptions	9,076.20
Retained Earnings	83.45
Net Assets Value (NAV)	9,159.65
Net Asset Value (NAV) per unit (Rial)	1.009

*The fund commenced its operations on 25 August 2024
Note: Due to figures displayed in 000's, immaterial variance is likely with actual numbers. The complete accounts will be sent by mail to any Unitholder who requests them, in either Arabic or English, as requested, within 7 days of receipt of request.

Managed by Bank Muscat SAOG, Investment Banking & Capital Markets Division
PO Box 134, Postal Code 112, Ruwi, Sultanate of Oman
Email us on AssetManagement@bankmuscat.com

BankDhofar's Savings Plan promises financial comfort after retirement

BankDhofar, Oman's second-largest bank in terms of its branch network, is committed to serving all segments of society - from childhood to post-retirement. To support individuals in securing their financial future, the bank has introduced the Long-Term Retirement Deposit Account, designed to help customers grow their savings and achieve long-term financial stability.

Planning for a financially secure and comfortable retirement begins with setting clear goals - defining the desired lifestyle, location, and activities. The next step is assessing financial needs, which involves estimating future income requirements in consultation with financial specialists while considering factors such as



inflation, healthcare expenses, education costs, and travel plans.

A well-diversified investment portfolio is crucial to financial stability during retirement. Individuals should consider a mix of assets such as bonds, stocks, and

real estate rather than relying on a single investment type. BankDhofar provides tailored financial solutions, including the Retirement Savings Account, which offers substantial benefits. Customers can start saving with

as little as RO10, with flexible plans ranging from one to ten years and a competitive interest rate of up to 5%.

In addition to retirement-focused savings, BankDhofar offers a range of investment and deposit plans, including fixed and recurring deposit accounts and a long-term deposit account designed to help parents save for their children's higher education. The bank also provides specialized financial services for women, youth, children, and high-income customers, including exclusive benefits for Al-Riadah and Al-Rifaa cardholders. For high-net-worth individuals and their families, BankDhofar ensures secure, prudent, and confidential wealth management services.

Reflecting its commitment to growth, innovation, and customer satisfaction, BankDhofar reported a 12.5% increase in net profits for 2024, reaching RO43.6mn, compared to RO38.7mn in 2023. The bank continues to invest in technology and business enablement, becoming one of the first banks in Oman to launch Apple Pay and Samsung Pay.

With a network of 131 branches, including Dhofar Islamic, and more than 400 ATMs, cash deposit machines, and multi-service interactive machines across Oman, BankDhofar remains a trusted partner in helping individuals plan and achieve financial security at every stage of life.

Alizz Islamic Bank participates in SQU Career Fair

As part of Alizz Islamic Bank's strategy of supporting youth, the bank recently participated in the Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) Career Fair, the bank stated in a press release.

Through this partnership, the bank reaffirmed its commitment to partner with various educational institutions in providing the best opportunities and training programmes for students, which can help them refine their skills in various fields and job specialties, especially those related to the Islamic

banking and finance sector.

The bank strives to develop the future leaders of Oman; placing great importance on education, training and development, empowering future generations and equipping them with the skills and capabilities needed to contribute their creative potential towards serving their communities.

As part of this directive, Alizz Islamic Bank continuously develops learning and development programmes that targets youth such as the 'Manar Alizz'

and 'Manahil Alizz' programmes that focus on educating the Omani youth about Islamic banking as an industry and various leadership competencies.

The 'Manar Alizz' programme is designed to educate youth about Islamic banking products, encourage banking innovation, and enable the bank's experts to generate and share knowledge in their various fields of expertise. It is one of the bank's strategic directions to share knowledge of Islamic Fi-

nance and business as a platform for sustainability under the pillar of education.

Additionally, Alizz Islamic Bank has the 'Manahil Alizz' Internship programme which was designed to train third and fourth year university and college students and augment their capabilities by equipping them with the essential skills and knowledge required to successfully enter the workforce.

The 'Manahil Alizz' Internship Programme has more than 50 graduates so far from differ-

ent regions across the country. The candidates of the program were able to develop their leadership skills, project management capabilities and learn how to overcome challenges in an actual working environment.

It is worth mentioning that Alizz Islamic Bank recently launched 'Alizz Youth' a value proposition specifically for the youth. This comprehensive programme offers a wide range of attractive benefits and services designed to meet the unique needs of today's youth needs.

Vietnam approves bold reforms 'to streamline' its bureaucracy

Hanoi, Vietnam - Vietnam's communist government plans to cut one in five public sector jobs over the next five years as part of a sweeping effort to streamline its bureaucracy.

On Tuesday, the country's parliament approved a reduction in the number of ministries from 18 to 14. The rubber-stamp National Assembly also approved two new deputy prime ministers, bringing the total to seven.

According to the government, around 100,000 employees will either be made redundant or offered early retirement.

What changes are taking place?

As part of the restructure, state-owned media organisations, the civil service, the police and the military will face cuts. The ministries of transport, planning and investment, communications and labour have all been scrapped.

The planning and investment ministry, which approves foreign investment projects, will join the finance ministry, while the transport ministry and the construction ministry will be merged. The natural resources and environment ministry and the agriculture ministry will also be merged.

Such moves are not unprecedented in Vietnam, which steadily reduced the number of ministries from 36 in the early 1990s to 22 by 2021.

However, analysts note that the scale and pace of the reforms



The country's parliament approved a reduction in the number of ministries from 18 to 14

are vast, with the general secretary of the Communist Party, To Lam, referring to the process as an institutional 'revolution'.

The primary goals are 'modernising Vietnam's state apparatus, tackling persistent inefficiencies that impede governance and economic growth, and streamlining a bloated bureaucracy', said Nguyen Khac Giang, a visiting fellow at ISEAS Yusof Ishak Institute.

If executed well, these reforms could establish To Lam, considered Vietnam's most powerful politician, and Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh's legacy 'as ac-

tion-oriented reformists', he added.

Economic challenges

During November's Central Committee meeting, To Lam called the changes an economic necessity, describing institutions as 'the bottleneck of bottlenecks', adding that the reforms aim to make the government 'lean, compact, strong, efficient, effective, and impactful'.

Nguyen Dinh Cung, former director of the Central Institute for Economic Management, one of the country's main national institutes, was quoted by Vietnamese

state media this month as saying the reforms should greatly improve economic efficiency.

"An investment project may take many years to complete its procedures," he said. "By the time the procedures are finished, the business opportunity may have passed, and initial plans would have to be revised."

Streamlining ministries and commissions should ease the paperwork on investment as well as on infrastructure and real estate schemes, Cung noted, adding that it would also solve some of the institutional overlap that pulls the government in opposite di-

rections: "one requiring you to go right while another demands you go left. This problem is quite common."

The reforms come amid concerns in Hanoi about the pace of economic change.

As an export-reliant economy, Vietnam faces uncertainty about its trade relationship with its largest market, the United States, which has intensified ahead of Donald Trump's upcoming presidency.

Trump has threatened to impose blanket tariffs of 10%-20% on all imports and has previously labelled Vietnam 'the worst

abuser' of US trade due to its large surplus, which has massively increased since 2019.

Hai Hong Nguyen, a senior lecturer at Vin University, noted that 40 years after adopting free-market principles, Vietnam is now a lower-middle-income country and viewed internationally as a development model.

Yet 'its institutional framework is seen as a 'bottleneck' that hinders further economic development', he added, and 'by all indications, Vietnam should have developed faster and stood at a higher level of development'.

DW

Pakistan: Militants kill 7 bus passengers

Islamabad, Pakistan - At least seven passengers were killed by militants in the southwestern Balochistan province of Pakistan, police said on Wednesday.

"The terrorists stopped a passenger bus on its way from Quetta to Faisalabad in the Barkhan area and killed the passengers last night," Ali Baloch, a local police official at the police emergency control room, told Anadolu over the phone.

According to Baloch, the militants took seven passengers, who belonged to the Punjab province, to a nearby mountain and killed them.

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and Balochistan Chief Minister Sarfaraz Bugti also confirmed the attack and condemned the killing of passengers.

No militant group has so far claimed responsibility for the attack.

On Friday, at least 11 people were killed when an explosion targeted a van carrying coal miners in southwestern Pakistan.

Last year in August, militants killed 23 passengers in the Musakhel district of southwestern Balochistan province after forcing them to disembark from several vehicles.

Pakistan has seen a surge in terror attacks in recent years.

Anadolu Agency

Brazil: Bolsonaro charged with attempting a coup

Mexico City, Mexico - Brazil's prosecutor-general formally charged former President Jair Bolsonaro on Tuesday with attempting a coup to stay in office after his election defeat in 2022 that involved a plot to kill his successor and current President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva.

Prosecutor-General Paulo Gonet filed a formal complaint with Brazil's Federal Supreme Court (STF) against Bolsonaro and 33 other people for participating in a plan to remain in power by encouraging and executing acts against the government and the 'democratic rule of law'. Gonet accused Bolsonaro of knowing about and approving a plot to poison Lula while he was president. The plan also called for shooting dead Supreme Court



Brazil's ex-President Jair Bolsonaro

Justice Alexandre de Moraes, a foe of Bolsonaro.

Top officials from Bolsonaro's government including Augusto Heleno, Anderson Torres and Bolsonaro's former advisor Mauro Cid were also accused.

Besides being accused of participating in the coup, the 34 de-

fendants are accused of participating in an armed criminal organisation, attempted violent abolition of the democratic rule of law, damage qualified by violence and serious threat against the state's assets.

Bolsonaro and his co-conspirators plotted to overturn the 2022 general election and prevent Lula from taking office.

According to the prosecution, since 2021, the Bolsonaro administration had attempted to subvert the election by systematically attacking the country's electronic voting system and accusing Lula of committing electoral fraud.

The accusation details that state security agencies were deployed to prevent voters from voting for Lula.

Kabul voices concern over 'mass expulsion' of Afghans from Pakistan

Islamabad, Pakistan - Afghanistan on Wednesday expressed concerns over the mass expulsion of Afghan refugees from Pakistan's capital Islamabad and garrison city Rawalpindi.

In a statement, the Afghan Embassy in Islamabad said Afghan nationals in Islamabad and Rawalpindi have recently been subjected to arrests, searches, and orders from the police to leave the twin cities and relocate to other parts of Pakistan.

"This process of detaining Afghans, which began without any formal announcement, has not been officially communicated to the Embassy of Afghanistan in Islamabad



through any formal correspondence," said the embassy on X.

The embassy added that they had taken up the issue with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), but they were also unaware of the ongoing situation.

"The Embassy has held multi-

ple meetings with relevant Pakistani authorities and officials to seek clarification on the matter - whether these actions are isolated incidents that need to be stopped or part of an official policy that should be publicly disclosed," it said.

Anadolu Agency



شركة مسندم للطاقة ش م ع ع

Musandam Power Company SAOG

ص ب ٢٢٨، الرمز البريدي ١٢٤، القرية، جوهرة الشاطئ، مسقط، سلطنة عمان.

P.O. Box 228, PC 134, Al Qurum, Jawharat Al Shatti, Muscat, Sultanate of Oman.

www.musandampower.com

INVITATION TO ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF MUSANDAM POWER COMPANY SAOG

The Board of Directors of Musandam Power Company SAOG invites its respective shareholders to attend the Annual General Meeting ("AGM") which shall be held at 3:00 pm, on 06-March-2025 on the e-portal for convening general meetings which may be accessed through the Muscat Clearing and Depository SAOC ("MCD") website (www.mcd.gov.om). The agenda include the following:

Failing quorum of the AGM, a second AGM shall be convened at 3:00 pm, on 10-March-2025 on the e-portal for convening general meetings which may be accessed through the Muscat Clearing and Depository SAOC ("MCD") website (www.mcd.gov.om). The agenda include the following:

- To consider and approve the report of the Board of Directors for the financial year ended on 31 December 2024.
- To consider the Corporate Governance Report for the financial year ended 31 December 2024.
- To consider the Auditor's report and to approve the Financial Statements in respect of the Company for the year ended on 31 December 2024.
- To approve the proposal authorizing the Board of Directors' to determine and distribute cash dividends to the Company's Shareholders who are registered with the MCD as of the dates to be decided by the Board of Directors in March 2025 and September 2025 out of the retained earnings as per the audited financial statements for the financial year ended 31 December 2024, provided that the amount shall not be more than 27.6 Baisas per share.
- To disclose the transactions that the Company entered into with related parties during the financial year ended on 31 December 2024 (Annexure 1).
- To consider and approve the proposed transactions to be entered by the Company with related parties during the financial year ending on 31 December 2025 (Annexure 2).
- To ratify the payment of sitting fees to the Board of Directors and Sub-Committees for the financial year ended 31 December 2024 and to determine the sitting fees of the Board of Directors and Sub-Committees for the next financial year ending on 31 December 2025 (Annexure 3).
- To ratify the payment of Directors' remuneration for an amount of RO 78,150 (Bais Omani Seventy-eight thousand one hundred fifty) for the financial year ended on 31 December 2024 (Annexure 4).
- To notify the General Assembly of donations disbursed to support community services during the financial year ended on 31 December 2024. (Annexure 5).
- To consider the Proposal the allocation of an amount of RO 20,000 to support community services during the financial year ending 31 December 2025.
- To approve the independent consultant report for the appraisal of the performance of the Board of Directors during the year ended 31 December 2024.
- To appoint the statutory auditors for the financial year ending on 31 December 2025 and approve its fees.
- To elect new Board of Directors from amongst the shareholders or non - shareholders.

Any person who wishes to nominate himself/herself to the Board of Directors should complete a nomination form available with the Company. The nomination form can be obtained from the Company's head office. The completed forms should be delivered to the Company minimum five days prior to the AGM date. Nomination forms received after 5pm on Thursday, 27th of February 2025 shall not be accepted.

According to the CCL promulgated vide the Royal Decree No. 18/2019 and the Regulation for Public Joint Stock Companies Decision No. 27/2021, the Shareholders shall have the right to nominate a proxy to attend and vote on their behalf on decisions/resolutions of the meeting, such proxy must be on the proxy form issued by Muscat Clearing and Depository Company, save the shareholders who owned shares in the Company after it has delivered the invitation of the general meeting, provided that such shareholders shall provide a proof to that effect. If the proxy is on behalf of more than one shareholder, it must not be on behalf of more than five percent (5%) of the shares of the Company, else the proxy shall be deemed null and void. The natural shareholder shall enclose a copy of the ID card, or the passport copy for minors who do not have an ID card, residence card or passport copy for non-Omani along with the proxy form. The juristic shareholder's proxy must be signed by an authorized signatory and sealed with entity's stamp and should be submitted along with a commercial registration certificate and copy of the authorized signatory. The proxy will not be valid if a member of the board of directors represents a shareholder.

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

(a) only a corporate person may authorize a natural person to attend and vote on its behalf on decisions/resolutions of the AGM general meeting, through electronic means, provided such natural person must have an investor number at MCD;

(b) voting on any item of the agenda shall commence prior to the convention of the AGM general meeting at a maximum of three (3) days and ends on the day of the AGM. If a shareholder's balance is changed either by increase or decrease the voting process shall stand canceled and must revoke at the AGM.

Please attend at the e-portal at least 30 minutes prior to the AGM.

For more information, please contact Mr. Abdulhamed Al Jabri of Musandam Power Company (SAOG) on telephone No. 24063555.

Chairman

Auditor

Legal Advisor

Proxy Form

No. of Shares:

We/I _____ the shareholder of Musandam Power Cpmpany Co. SAOG hereby authorise Mr. _____ to attend the Annual General Meeting ("AGM") at 15:00 hrs (3:00 pm) on 06-March-2025 at the e-portal for convening general meetings which may be accessed through the Muscat Clearing and Depository SAOC ("MCD") website (www.mcd.gov.om). Failing quorum of the AGM, a second AGM shall be convened at 15:00 hrs (3:00 pm), on 10-March-2025 at the e-portal for convening general meetings which may be accessed through the Muscat Clearing and Depository SAOC ("MCD") website (www.mcd.gov.om), to vote on our behalf on all matters set out in the agenda of the meetings.

Date: _____ Signature: _____ Stamp: _____

Deadly floods, record-breaking cold grip multiple US states

Kentucky, US - At least 14 people have died as catastrophic flooding and severe winter weather wreak havoc across multiple states in the US, with rescue operations continuing amid rising waters and plunging temperatures.

The Southern state of Kentucky has borne the brunt of the devastation, with 12 fatalities and widespread destruction following torrential rainfall that dumped over a month's worth of precipitation in just 24 hours.

"We just got hit by one of the most significant natural disasters we've seen in our lifetime,"

Kentucky Governor Andy Beshear said on Monday, cautioning that emergency crews are still working to reach stranded residents. More than 1,000 rescues have been performed, including evacuations by boat and helicopter.

West Virginia also faces a crisis, with 'significant levels of flooding' and several missing persons, according to Governor Patrick Morrisey.

Five flash flood emergencies were issued across Virginia, West Virginia, and Tennessee over the weekend, with Obion County, Tennessee declaring a



Five flash flood emergencies were issued across Virginia, West Virginia, and Tennessee over the weekend

state of emergency as floodwaters breached a levee, prompting mandatory evacuations.

Arctic blast intensifies

The devastation comes as a brutal Arctic blast grips the Central US, bringing life-threatening cold to over 60mn Americans.

Wind chills as low as -60F (-15C) are expected in the Northern Plains, while temperatures in the Southern and South Central states of Texas, Oklahoma, Arkansas, and Tennessee will plummet by double digits.

"If your power isn't scheduled to come back on for another couple days, find a warm place," Beshear urged, warning of the heightened risk of hypothermia as freezing air moves in.

More than 340 roads remain closed in Kentucky, with infrastructure damage mounting.

"At least 10 bridges in Pike County are completely gone," said County Judge Executive Ray Jones, underscoring the widespread destruction. The flooding follows deadly 2022 floods that claimed 43 lives in the state, compounding recovery efforts.

Anadolu Agency

Trump blames Zelensky for starting war

Donald Trump said Ukrainian President Zelensky could have made a deal to avoid the war with Russia

Washington, D.C., US - US President Donald Trump levelled sharp criticism on Tuesday at Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, saying Kyiv could have made a deal to avoid the war with Russia.

Speaking to reporters at his Mar-a-Lago estate in Florida, Trump said the Ukrainian leader 'should have never started' the war, criticising Zelensky after he expressed concern that Ukraine was not included in talks between the US and Russia in Saudi Arabia.

"But today I heard, 'oh, well, we weren't invited'. Well, you've been there for three years. You should have ended it in three years. You should have never started it. You could have made a deal," he said.

Trump reiterated that 'it's a senseless war. It should have never happened. Would have never happened if I was president. And it's a shame to see'.

Stating that he likes Zelensky personally, Trump said his leadership however has 'allowed a war to go on that should have never even happened, even without the United States'.

"Look, we had a president who was grossly incompetent. He had no idea what he was doing. He said some very stupid things, like going in for portions and all those things. He made a lot of bad statements, but he's grossly incompetent. And I think



Stating that he likes Zelensky personally, Trump said the Ukrainian president was grossly incompetent

everyone knew that," referring to former President Joe Biden.

In response to a question on whether he would support an election in Ukraine, Trump said there has not been an election under the Ukrainian president since the war.

"We have a situation where we haven't had elections in Ukraine, where we have martial law, essentially martial law in Ukraine, where the leader in Ukraine, I mean, I hate to say it, but he's down at a 4% approval rating, and where a country has

been blown to smithereens, you got most of the cities are laying on their sides," said Trump.

Ukrainian cities 'look like Gaza'

"You know, when they want a seat at the table, you could say

the people have to, wouldn't the people of Ukraine have to say, like, you know, it's been a long time since we've had an election. That's not a Russia thing. That's something coming from me and coming from many other countries also," he said. "Ukraine is

being just, just wiped out."

"Look at what's happening to the cities. There's not even a building standing. It's massive. You talk about Gaza, I mean, it's literally, these cities look like Gaza. Actually, many have, percentage wise, more buildings knocked down than in Gaza. So, you know, people are tired of it," he added.

Russia reportedly said it wants to force Ukraine to hold new elections in order to sign any kind of a peace deal.

and Russian officials met in Saudi Arabia earlier in the day for the first high-level talks since Russia began its war on Ukraine in February 2022. The talks concluded with the delegations agreeing to hold additional rounds of discussions aimed at ending the war and improving bilateral ties.

Meanwhile, Zelensky on Trump of being caught in a 'bubble of disinformation', saying he hopes Trump's team gets a clearer understanding of what he

Meanwhile, Zelensky accused Donald Trump of being caught in a 'bubble of disinformation', saying he hopes Trump's team gets a clearer understanding of what he called the 'truth about Ukraine'

Trump also commented on the talks in Riyadh, saying he has emerged 'much more confident' that a peace deal can be struck to end the war on Ukraine after an initial round of talks between senior US and Russian officials concluded there.

The president described the discussions, which included Secretary of State Marco Rubio, his Russian counterpart Sergey Lavrov and other senior officials, as 'very good', saying he believes the Kremlin 'wants to stop the savage barbarianism' of the war.

The comments came after US called the 'truth about Ukraine'.

In an interview with German media, Zelensky rebuffed Trump's recent remarks suggesting that the Ukrainian president's job approval rating in his own country stands at just 4%.

"We have seen this disinformation, and we understand that it originates from Russia. We have evidence that these figures are being discussed between American and Russian representatives. Unfortunately, Trump is trapped in this bubble of misinformation," claimed Zelensky.

Agencies

US: Judge declines to stop Musk from firing workers

Washington, D.C., US - Washington-based US District Judge Tanya Chutkan on Tuesday declined to immediately block Elon Musk's Department of Government Efficiency, or DOGE, from directing the laying-off of workers and accessing sensitive information.

However, Chutkan did say the case - filed by more than a dozen US states - raised legitimate questions about Musk's seemingly unchecked authority.



The states have argued that DOGE is not authorised by Congress and that Musk is exercising the kind of power that can only be exercised by a nominated government official

What did the judge say?

In her decision, Chutkan wrote that the states 'legitimately call into question what appears to be the unchecked authority of an unelected individual and an entity that was not created by Congress and over which it has no oversight'.

However, the judge said the states had not shown why they were entitled to an immediate restraining order.

Chutkan could ultimately rule in favour of the states, but said in her ruling that their request for an emergency court order

was too broad and speculative.

What is the lawsuit about?

14 states requested a judicial

order barring DOGE from accessing computer systems at federal agencies or purging government workers while litigation plays out.

The Democratic attorneys general of the states that sued argued that DOGE's actions have harmed those states' ability to carry out states' ability to carry out educational and other programmes.

The states have argued that DOGE is not authorised by Congress and that Musk is exercising the kind of power that can only be exercised by a government official who has been nominated by the president and confirmed by the Senate.

Since Donald Trump returned to office last month, the DOGE has been sweeping through federal agencies, cutting thousands of jobs and dismantling various programmes.

Trump put tech billionaire Elon Musk in charge of rooting out what they see as wasteful spending as part of the US president's dramatic overhaul of government.

DW

Germany's far-right AfD surging as the centre-right loses protest votes: Pollster

Berlin, Germany - Germany's far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) is gaining support as centre-right parties have failed to capture protest votes, a senior polling expert has told Anadolu ahead of Sunday's elections.

Manfred Guellner, head of the Forsa polling institute, said many Germans were dissatisfied with Chancellor Olaf Scholz's collapsed three-party coalition, but the main opposition Christian Democrats (CDU/CSU) failed to win over these voters.

"Christian Democratic Union (CDU) leader Friedrich Merz was unpopular even in the early days of his political activity, and this has not changed even to this day," he said. "Merz is unpopular especially among female voters, young people, and also voters in East Germany."

With just days to go, Merz's Christian Democrats hold a clear lead of 27% in the latest polls, but this represents a sharp decline from the conservative alliance's previous electoral showings - 41.5% in 2013, 41.4% in 1994, and 48.8% in 1983.

The far-right AfD, meanwhile,



has almost doubled its tally since the previous election, from 10.3% in 2021 to approximately 20% in current polls.

According to Guellner, the AfD has attracted protest votes from those uncomfortable with the policies of Scholz's coalition government - commonly known as the 'traffic light coalition' due to the party colours of its members: the Social Democratic Party (SPD), the Greens, and the liberal Free Democratic Party (FDP).

The AfD has now become the first far-right party in Germany's post-WWII history to gain such broad public support, as past surveys show that right-wing ex-

tremist views were never supported by more than 10% of German voters. "The AfD's vote share now surpasses that of any previous right-wing radical movement - groups that have existed continuously in the Federal Republic since the collapse of National Socialism," Guellner said, referring to the collapse of Adolf Hitler's Nazi regime in 1945.

"The AfD has not only won over these right-wing radical voters, but has also benefited from dissatisfaction with Chancellor Scholz's traffic light coalition. Those unhappy with this coalition have turned to the AfD rather than the main opposition Chris-

tian Democrats," he explained.

Scholz's coalition fell apart in November after escalating disagreements over government spending and borrowing plans.

Its three-year term generated widespread public discontent, struggling to address rising energy prices, increased living costs, migration challenges, and broader socioeconomic issues.

Guellner said the number of undecided voters remains unusually high this time compared to previous pre-election surveys.

He attributed this partly to the unpopularity of both chancellor candidates - frontrunner Merz and the incumbent Scholz.

While the AfD has largely benefited from public discontent, the expert highlighted a concerning trend: many who initially supported the AfD as protest voters are now beginning to embrace the party's extremist views.

"The main core of AfD voters are those who have always been susceptible to a right-wing extremist world view, for xenophobia and ethnic-nationalist ideas," he explained.

Anadolu Agency

Israel destroyed 50 homes in Tulkarem refugee camp, says Palestinian official

Ramallah, Palestine - The Israeli army has completely destroyed some 50 homes and 280 shops in the Tulkarem refugee camp in the northern occupied West Bank as part of its ongoing military operation in the occupied northern West Bank, a Palestinian official said.

Speaking to Anadolu on Tuesday, Tulkarem Deputy Governor Faisal Salama said the Israeli army is 'working to reshape the features and geography of the Tulkarem camp through extensive demolition of Palestinian properties'.

He added that what's happening in Tulkarem camp is 'a systematic occupation plan, through which new roads are opened on the ruins of the buildings'.

Salama described the Israeli military operation in Tulkarem as 'a massacre and an illegal plan carried out amid Arab and international silence'.

"We are living in tragic conditions and a real catastrophe that has targeted women, children, the elderly, and everything," the Palestinian official said, adding that only 50 families are still in the camp amid a lack of water and electricity.

On Tuesday, the Israeli army destroyed 16 homes in the Tulkarem refugee camp, the largest demolition operation in the occupied West Bank since last month.

The army has been conducting military operations in the northern West Bank since January 21, killing more than 55 Palestinians and displacing thou-



Israeli army also completely destroyed 280 shops in the Tulkarem refugee camp in the northern occupied West Bank as part of its ongoing military operation

sands, according to Palestinian officials.

Tensions have been running high across the occupied West Bank, where at least 917 Palestinians have been killed and nearly 7,000 others injured in attacks by the Israeli army and illegal settlers since the start of the Gaza war on October 7, 2023, according to the Health Ministry.

Meanwhile, the Israeli government of Prime Minister Benjamin

Netanyahu has advanced six new settlement projects in occupied East Jerusalem since the inauguration of US President Donald Trump last month, an Israeli group said on Wednesday.

"The accelerated pace of settlement expansion shows that the Israeli government views Trump's return to office as a green light to revive and expedite plans that were previously frozen due to international criticism,"

the Jerusalem-based NGO Ir Amim said in a statement.

It said the Israeli government revived plans to build the Atarot settlement, locally known as the Qalandia Airport area north of East Jerusalem, which includes 9,000 housing units.

Tel Aviv also planned to carry out the Ohr Somayach Religious Institute project in the Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood of East Jerusalem.

Both projects had been frozen for years due to legal and environmental issues, Ir Amim said.

There is also the Umm Haroun settlement project in East Jerusalem, which 'threatens to completely uproot the Palestinian community in the Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood, after decades of failed attempts by authorities to displace them under the pretext of urban renewal', the group said.

The move 'constitutes a dan-

gerous precedent for forced displacement by exploiting legal loopholes', it warned.

According to Ir Amim, the Israeli government also plans to expand the Nof Zion settlement in the Jabal al-Mukaber area.

Israel also advanced plans to build 400 new settler homes in the Givat Shaked settlement in the Beit Safafa neighbourhood and 659 units in the Novi Rachel settlement in the neighbourhood

of Sur Baher-Umm Tuba.

"The Israeli government's increasing disregard for international law could lead to heightened tensions in the region," it warned.

Meanwhile, Palestine called on the US on Wednesday to halt the ongoing Israeli military escalation in the occupied West Bank.

Israeli government of Netanyahu has advanced six new settlement projects in occupied East Jerusalem since the inauguration of US President Donald Trump last month

"The (Israeli) occupation forces are waging a campaign of systematic destruction of homes and displacement of citizens," Palestinian Authority spokesman Nabil Abu Rudeineh said in a statement.

Abu Rudeineh urged the US administration to intervene to stop the Israeli assaults and 'not to encourage Israel to continue its aggression, which will lead to an explosion of the situation in an uncontrollable manner, and everyone will pay the price'.

"The Palestinian people will not accept any plans, whether displacement or an alternative homeland," he stressed.

Agencies

Pentagon layoffs to begin soon: Report

Washington, D.C., US - The Pentagon is expected to begin layoffs this week as part of a broader cost-saving initiative, according to a report on Tuesday.

The Washington Post, citing five people familiar with the matter, said the Trump administration has instructed defence agencies to submit a list of their probationary employees by the end of Tuesday, anticipating that many may be terminated later this week.

The directive for the cuts came after personnel from Elon Musk's Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE), which has overseen significant staff reductions at other federal agencies, visited the Pentagon, it reported.

While it remains unclear whether any probationary employees at the Pentagon will be exempt from the cuts, the expectation is that most will not, the sources added.

The Department of Defence, with a budget of over US\$840bn, is the largest federal agency in the United States, employing approximately 950,000 civilian staff.

DOGE and the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) did not immediately comment on the report.

In a Fox News interview earlier this month, President Donald Trump said he expected Musk to uncover 'billions' of dollars in fraud and abuse at the Pentagon.

Lebanon recovers 23 bodies after Israeli forces' withdrawal

Beirut, Lebanon - Lebanon's civil defence said on Tuesday that it recovered the bodies of 23 people from towns in its southern region following the withdrawal of Israeli forces under a ceasefire agreement.

In a statement, the civil defence said its rescue teams, working in coordination with the Lebanese army, are conducting search and field assessment operations in areas affected by Israeli attacks.

The teams recovered 14 bodies in the town of Meiss El Jabal, three in Markaba, three in Kfarkela and three in Odaisseh, according to the statement.

The bodies will undergo necessary medical and legal examinations, including DNA testing, under the supervision of relevant authorities to confirm their identities, it added.

Emergency teams also trans-



ported an injured person from Meiss El Jabal to Tebnin Governmental Hospital after he was shot by Israeli forces, though the timing of the injury was not specified.

Earlier on Tuesday, Lebanon's official National

News Agency (NNA) reported that the Israeli army had withdrawn from the villages and towns it occupied in southern Lebanon during the recent war.

However, Israeli forces remain stationed at five points along the border inside

Lebanese territory.

Israel was initially expected to complete its full withdrawal from southern Lebanon by January 26, in line with the ceasefire agreement, but requested an extension until February 18.

Anadolu Agency



Craig and Lindsay Foreman

Iran: Jailed British couple charged with espionage

London, UK - Two British nationals arrested last month in southern Iran have been charged with spying, Iranian authorities said on Tuesday.

The UK Foreign Office identified the couple as Craig and Lindsay Foreman, saying later on Tuesday it was 'deeply concerned' by the charges.

"We continue to raise this case directly with the Iranian authorities," the Foreign Office said in a statement.

According to Iranian judiciary spokesperson Asghar Jahangir, the pair had entered Iran 'posing as tourists' and were gathering information around the country before their arrest in Kerman province.

The judiciary's Mizan news agency cited Jahangir as saying that they were being held by the Iranian Revolutionary Guards (IRGC) on 'espionage charges' and were accused of having links to intelligence agencies of 'hostile countries'.

Who are the Foremans?

British media reported that the Foremans are a married couple

in their 50s who had been on a motorbike trip around the world at the time of their arrest.

According to social media posts, they had crossed into Iran from Armenia in December and were planning to travel on to Pakistan before making their way to Australia.

Britain's Foreign Office said last week that it was 'providing consular assistance to two British nationals detained in Iran' and was in contact with Iranian authorities. British Ambassador Hugo Shorter met with the couple at the Kerman prosecutor's office last week.

Dozens of citizens from Western countries detained

Iranian authorities have arrested dozens of foreigners and dual nationals on security and espionage-related charges in recent years. Some Western countries accuse Tehran of holding people prisoner on trumped up charges so that they can later be used as bargaining chips in negotiations with the West. Iran denies those accusations.

The British Foreign Office advises against all travel to Iran.

DW

US halts legal aid for migrant children

Washington, D.C., US - The Trump administration has ordered legal service providers assisting unaccompanied migrant children to cease operations, a move that has drawn sharp criticism from advocacy groups.

A memo obtained by CNN revealed that the Interior Department issued the directive on Tuesday to the Acacia Center for Justice, a nonprofit that provides legal assistance to nearly 26,000 migrant children in and released from the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) custody.

Shaina Aber, executive director of the Acacia Center for Justice, condemned the decision, warning of its harmful conse-



quences for vulnerable children.

"The administration's decision to suspend this programme undermines due process, disproportionately impacts vulnerable children, and puts children who have already experienced severe trauma at risk for further harm or

exploitation," Aber said in a statement.

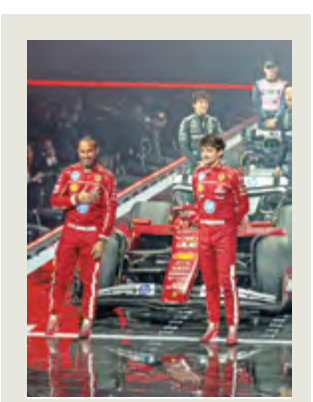
Roxana Avila-Cimpeanu, deputy director of the Florence Project, which provides free legal services, social services, and advocacy to immigrants facing detention and potential

deportation, echoed similar concerns, emphasising the challenges unaccompanied children will face in immigration court without legal representation.

"Without the services the Florence Project provides through the Unaccompanied Children Programme, children, no matter their age, will be forced to represent themselves in immigration court alone. This is an unprecedented attack on immigrant children," she said.

US President Donald Trump was elected for a return term to the White House last November on an aggressive anti-immigrant platform.

Anadolu Agency



Lewis Hamilton and Charles Leclerc at F1 season launch

'Invigorated' Hamilton steps out in Ferrari red at the launch of F1 season

London, England – Seven-time world champion Lewis Hamilton appeared in Ferrari red for the first time outside of Italy as Formula One put on an unprecedented and spectacular 10-team season launch in front of 15,000 fans on Tuesday.

The 40-year-old Briton, who has moved from Mercedes, got the loudest cheer of the night when he took the stage for an event that coincided with the birthday of his Italian team's late founder Enzo. "Good evening everyone," Hamilton said as the crowd celebrated him and their first sight of the seven-time champion in Ferrari's red overalls.

"Such a great night to be here among all of you. The

I feel so full of life, so much energy, because everything's new and I'm just focused on what is up ahead. I'm so proud to be part of the team

LEWIS HAMILTON

word I am thinking about is 'invigorated'.

"I feel so full of life, so much energy, because everything's new and I'm just focused on what is up ahead," Hamilton told his home crowd at London's O2 Arena.

"I'm so proud to be part of the team. Something new and exciting for me."

The two-hour show, with British comedian and host Jack Whitehall gently ribbing the protagonists, featured lights, lasers and musical acts including former boy band Take That and U.S. country singer Kane Brown.

Liberty Media-owned Formula One said early in the evening that their YouTube channel had smashed through the one-million viewers mark, breaking a previous live-event record of 289,000.

"This event is all about the fans and without the fans there is no sport," Red Bull team principal Christian Horner told reporters before the show started.

"I'm sure it's probably the last place that the drivers want to be, paraded out in front of a stadium full of fans, but Formula One is an entertainment, it's a show, and it's the 75th anniversary (of the championship)."

"So a huge amount of effort has gone into tonight by Formula One and all 10 teams."

'I WAS OUTPLAYED'

Former world No 1 Djokovic loses to Italy's Berrettini in first round of Qatar Open

Doha, Qatar - Novak Djokovic was stunned 7-6(4) 6-2 by Matteo Berrettini in the Qatar Open first round on Tuesday as the Italian enjoyed his first win over the former world number one.

Berrettini played superbly to knock out the twice champion in one hour 35 minutes and secure his first victory against a top-10 opponent since January 2023.

"It's something that I've been looking to do," said former world number six Berrettini, who had lost all four of his previous matches against the Serbian.

"I played against him in the most important tournaments on tour, had the honour and the pleasure to play against him. I wish I could have won one of those matches as well."

World number 35 Berrettini, voted the ATP's comeback player last year, faces Dutchman Tallon Griekspoor in the next round.

Djokovic, a 24-times Grand Slam winner who was aiming for a 100th ATP title, was playing his first singles match since retiring from the Australian Open semi-finals due to a hamstring injury.

The 37-year-old, who last week said he was "almost fully recovered", had not lost a first-round match since his 2022 Monte Carlo Masters defeat by Alejandro Davidovich Fokina.

"I didn't have any pain or discomfort in that sense. I was outplayed by just a better player today," said Djokovic.

"I wasn't at my desired level, and it could be that I'm still not moving the way I want to move



Novak Djokovic (L) and Matteo Berrettini greet each other after their match in Doha on Tuesday

Things are not the same as 10, 15 years ago. I still try to take care of my body on a daily basis and it's more challenging now, no doubt. I still try to do my very best

NOVAK DJOKOVIC

but I played without pain so there is no excuse in that.

"Things are not the same as 10, 15 years ago. I still try to take care of my body on a daily basis and it's more challenging now, no

doubt. I still try to do my very best, given the circumstances."

Djokovic will now turn his attention to the doubles event, pairing up with Spaniard Fernando Verdasco against Finn

a 6-3, 6-4 winner over Alexander Bublik of Kazakhstan.

Hamad Medjedovic of Serbia knocked off sixth-seeded Stefanos Tsitsipas of Greece 7-6 (6), 5-7, 7-6 (5) in a battle lasting two hours, 45 minutes. Also advancing to the second round were Nuno Borges of Portugal, Italy's Luca Nardi, Tallon Griekspoor

and Botic van de Zandschulp of the Netherlands, Zizou Bergs of Belgium and Felix Auger-Aliassime of Canada.

Meanwhile, Top-seeded Alexander Zverev endured an up-and-down first set before emerging with a 7-6 (4), 6-4 win over China's Yunchaokete Bu in the first round at Rio de Janeiro.

WTA bans spectator with 'fixated behaviour' towards Raducanu

Dubai, UAE - The Women's Tennis Association (WTA) has banned a man who exhibited "fixated behaviour" towards Emma Raducanu and was taken away by security personnel during the Briton's match at the Dubai Championship late on Tuesday.

Former US Open champion Raducanu appeared to be in tears as she approached the umpire's chair during the first set of her second-round match against Karolina Muchova.

The match was briefly halted after Raducanu spoke with the umpire, who quickly contacted the tournament organisers. The 22-year-old stood behind the official's chair as the spectator was escorted away. Raducanu fought back from 4-0 down to force a tiebreak before losing 7-6(6) 6-4.

"On Monday Emma Raducanu was approached in a public area by a man who exhibited fixated behaviour," the WTA said in a statement on Wednesday.

"This same individual was identified in the first few rows



Emma Raducanu

during Emma's match on Tuesday at the Dubai Duty Free Tennis Championships and subsequently ejected. He will be banned from all WTA events pending a threat assessment.

"The WTA is actively working with Emma and her team to ensure her well-being and provide any necessary support."

Tournament organisers said they had worked in collaboration with the WTA's security team to identify and eject the individual.

"We support the WTA's decision to ban the individual in question from all WTA events, and share the tour's longstanding commitment to player welfare, safety and wellbeing," they said in a statement.

Arsenal's Tomiyasu undergoes knee surgery

London, England - Takehiro Tomiyasu has become the latest Arsenal player to go under the knife after the Japanese defender said on Tuesday he had undergone surgery on his right knee.

The 26-year-old did not mention an expected return date though British media reported he would likely be sidelined for the remainder of the season.

Tomiyasu is the third Arsenal player to have surgery over the past month following Kai Havertz and Gabriel Jesus.

"I've had a surgery on my knee few days ago and I've already started my rehab to do



Takehiro Tomiyasu

what I love the most again."

Tomiyasu wrote on Instagram.

"It has been the toughest period in my career for sure and it carries on a bit more but I won't give up."

The Japan international, who joined Arsenal from Bologna in 2021, made 30 appearances last season but injury has limited him to playing just six minutes in the current campaign, coming on as a substitute against Southampton in a league game in October.

Arsenal, who trail Premier League leaders Liverpool by seven points, host West Ham United on Saturday.



Tom Latham and Will Young

Young, Latham tons help New Zealand outplay Pakistan

Karachi, Pakistan - New Zealand underlined their title aspirations as Will Young and Tom Latham smashed hundreds to set up a 60-run victory over defending champions Pakistan in Champions Trophy Group A on Wednesday.

Young struck 107 and Latham smashed an unbeaten 118 to help New Zealand overcome a sluggish start and post a commanding 320-5 after being put into bat at the National Stadium.

Glenn Phillips chipped in with a brisk 61 as New Zealand passed the 300-mark, which had looked like a distant dream after their wobbly start.

Pakistan were all out for 260 in 47.2 overs with Babar Azam (64) and Khushdil Shah (69) scoring half-centuries but the hosts never looked in the hunt.

Pakistan captain Mohammad Rizwan elected to field in the opening match of what is the first global tournament to be held in the country since the 1996 World Cup.

The hosts began well, conceding 39 runs in the first seven overs before Rizwan introduced spin and fast bowler Naseem Shah opted for a change of ends which immediately paid off. Spinner Abrar Ahmed struck in his second over when he pegged back opener Devon Conway's off-stump with a turning delivery.

In the next over, Naseem had Kane Williamson caught behind for one and Daryl Mitchell's innings was cut short by seamer Haris Rauf.

Young combined with Latham in a century stand to set the stage for a late acceleration. The opener took a single off Abrar to bring up his hundred but fell to Naseem after a stellar knock that included 12 fours and a six. Phillips counter-attacked in spectacular fashion in a 39-ball cameo that included four sixes.

TALBI STARS AS BRUGGE COMPLETE ITALIAN JOB

Teenager's brace helps Belgians stun Atalanta and reach Champions League last 16

Bergamo, Italy - Club Brugge teenager Chemsidine Talbi's double helped his side to get a three-goal lead at Atalanta before they held off a second-half onslaught for a 3-1 victory in their Champions League playoff on Tuesday to reach the last 16 by 5-2 on aggregate.

Ferran Jutgla netted the visitors' other goal as Brugge stunned the Italian side by taking a 3-0 halftime lead, but they had to fight a desperate rearguard action in the second period as the hosts tried to conjure up an unlikely comeback.

Ademola Lookman pulled back one goal for Atalanta but then had a penalty saved by veteran goalkeeper Simon Mignolet, who made several other important stops to stymie home hopes and see the Belgian side advance to the next round.

They will face either Lille or Aston Villa, with their opponents to be decided in Friday's draw.

Brugge took a slender 2-1 lead from last week's first leg to the



Club Brugge's Chemsidine Talbi celebrates after scoring against Atalanta on Tuesday

Stadio di Bergamo but extended it within three minutes through Talbi. Jutgla hooked the ball across goal to the 19-year-old, whose quick feet worked a shooting chance and he fired low into the bottom corner of the net from 15 metres.

The visitors doubled their advantage midway through the first half when Atalanta goalkeeper

Marco Carnesecchi could only parry Christos Tzolis's shot and Talbi fired in the rebound for his second goal.

Three minutes into stoppage time at the end of the first period, Brugge had a third goal from Jutgla's rasping low shot after catching Atalanta on the counter-attack.

Seconds earlier, the home

side had seen Davide Zappacosta's shot pushed on to the Brugge post by the hand of Mignolet and then a follow-up save before a third effort was cleared off the line by Brandon Mechele.

Atalanta brought on Lookman, recently returned from injury, at the start of the second half in the hope that last season's

But he squandered the opportunity to get his name on the scoresheet again when his penalty on the hour was saved by the 36-year-old Mignolet.

A lengthy VAR check saw Atalanta awarded the spot kick after Tzolis was adjudged to have tugged back Juan Cuadrado after a free kick.

Mignolet's stop proved decisive as it drained some of the atmosphere and although Atalanta kept up their relentless attacks, they became increasing desperate in the closing stages and were competently dealt with by the Belgians.

"From the first half onwards, we defended the box together with body and soul. Even in the second half, when you know they are coming at you, we held that line and when a ball did get through, I was in the right place,"

From the first half onwards, we defended the box together with body and soul. Even in the second half we held that line and when a ball did get through, I was in the right place

SIMON MIGNOLET

Europa League final hero could spark a comeback.

The London-born Nigeria international took all of 35 seconds to pull back a goal, stretching his leg to steer home Zappacosta's cross and revive the home crowd.

said Mignolet.

"These things happen in football. We took to the field with the desire to do well but they were perfect on the counter-attacks, while we didn't take advantage of the opportunities we had," said Cuadrado.



Pascal Bosschaert

Bosschaert 'proud of Feyenoord's character'

Rotterdam, Netherlands - Feyenoord interim boss Pascal Bosschaert was full of praise for his team's character, after recent upheaval at the club, when they came back from conceding an early goal to draw at AC Milan on Tuesday and reach the Champions League last 16.

The Dutch club's preparations for last week's first leg were far from ideal when Feyenoord sacked Brian Priske two days before the playoff game, but Bosschaert led them to a 1-0 win at home and they finished off the job at the San Siro.

"This says about the team that they have character. I think that's what I'm most proud of," Bosschaert told Ziggo Sport.

"You have to remember that they come from a very difficult phase, have received a lot of criticism, a change of coach, and then an unknown person comes in front of the group who occasionally throws in some empty slogans.

"That is a very difficult phase for them but I do think we are very clear, very transparent and very honest and this group responds very well to it, so I am proud of it."



Feyenoord's Julian Carranza celebrates with teammates after scoring against AC Milan

Hernandez sees red as Feyenoord knock out Milan to progress

Milan, Italy - Feyenoord knocked AC Milan out of the Champions League as they recovered to draw 1-1 with a goal by Julian Carranza on Tuesday for a 2-1 aggregate playoff win to earn a place in the Champions League last 16, with the hosts having Theo Hernandez sent off.

Milan took less than a minute to level the tie on aggregate when Santiago Gimenez scored against his former club but the red card for Hernandez changed the game and Carranza netted a superb header in the 73rd to take the Dutch side through.

Feyenoord will meet either Inter Milan or Arsenal in the last 16, with their opponents to be decided in Friday's draw.

Milan went on the attack from the start. Gimenez won a corner in the opening seconds, gesturing to the home fans behind the goal to make more noise, and shortly afterwards the Mexican gave them plenty of reason to do

Milan took less than a minute to level the tie on aggregate when Santiago Gimenez scored against his former club but the red card for Hernandez changed the game

just that.

From a short corner move, Christian Pulisic floated a pass towards the far post where Malick Thiaw placed a header back across goal and Gimenez nodded the ball over the line.

Gimenez, who only joined Milan from Feyenoord two weeks ago, looked almost apologetic but the San Siro crowd more than made up for his lack of celebration.

Milan looked the more likely

to take the overall lead before the break, with Gimenez playing in Joao Felix who put his effort over the bar.

Feyenoord goalkeeper Timon Wellenreuther parried away another Felix shot and Hernandez could only hit the rebound into the side netting, while the visitors failed to get a shot on target in the opening half.

Kyle Walker tried his luck from just inside the area after the break but Wellenreuther got down to save as Milan continued to press for a second goal.

Feyenoord's chances received a massive boost six minutes into the second half, however, when Hernandez picked up a second booking for simulation, but the visitors continued to struggle to create any real opportunities.

Antoni Milambo sent a shot and then a header over the bar, but Feyenoord finally found the net with their first effort on target.

One of the worst penalty takers: Gasperini slams Lookman after miss

Bergamo, Italy - Atalanta coach Gian Piero Gasperini said his striker Ademola Lookman is "one of the worst penalty takers he has ever seen" after his miss from the spot hindered a comeback in their home 3-1 defeat to Club Brugge.

Lookman pulled back one goal early in the second half after Brugge took a 3-0 halftime lead, but then had a penalty saved by goalkeeper Simon Mignolet, as the Serie A side were knocked out with a 5-2 aggregate defeat.

Gasperini singled out the Nigeria international for criticism, adding offensive midfielder Charles De Ketelaere or striker Mateo Retegui should have taken the penalty instead.

"Lookman was not supposed to take that penalty, he is one of the worst penalty takers I've ever seen," the Italian manager told a



Atalanta's Ademola Lookman looks dejected after his penalty miss against Club Brugge

post-match press conference.

"He has a frankly terrible record even in training, he converts very few of them. Retegui and De Ketelaere were there, but

Lookman in a moment of enthusiasm after scoring decided to take the ball and that was a gesture I did not appreciate at all."

Gasperini also criticised Ata-

lanta captain Rafael Toloi, who was shown a straight red card for a shove on Maxim De Cuyper after an argument over a throw-in.

It is my fault, says 'disappointed and angry' Conceicao

Milan, Italy - AC Milan looked to be in control of their Champions League destiny at home to Feyenoord on Tuesday before the sending off of Theo Hernandez turned the playoff on its head although coach Sergio Conceicao refused to blame the defender for their exit.

Milan could have avoided a playoff altogether with a win at Dinamo Zagreb in their final league phase game but on that occasion they had Yunus Musah sent off and lost 2-1.

"It's definitely a failure, we wanted to get to the last 16. This match showed that we are stronger than the opponent and that it was the episodes that decided, like in Zagreb, sending off there, sending off here," Conceicao told reporters.



Theo Hernandez picked up his second booking and got sent off for diving

"You could say that the referee (Szymon Marciniak) was too harsh, but we had to be stronger mentally. I'm the one responsible, not Theo. Then inside the locker room we'll see.

"Theo has given so much to Milan, I have made many mistakes in my career. Until Theo's red card, Feyenoord didn't know how to get to the goal. We are disappointed and angry."

Santiago Gimenez, Milan's recent signing from Feyenoord, had put the hosts ahead but Conceicao took the Mexican forward off in the second half and the manager explained his decision. "We had one less player. Then there was Santiago to manage, he had an adductor problem and he needs to be managed," Conceicao said.

DAVIES RESCUES BAYERN MUNICH

Canada full-back scores late equaliser as Bavarians edge Celtic to reach Champions League last 16

Munich, Germany - Bayern Munich's Alphonso Davies snatched a last-gasp equaliser against Celtic for a 1-1 draw in their play-off on Tuesday as they reached the Champions League last-16 by 3-2 on aggregate.

They will next face either fellow Bundesliga side Bayer Leverkusen or Atletico Madrid depending on Friday's draw.

Davies scored in stoppage time after former Bayern reserve player Nicolas Kuehn had given the visitors a shock lead in the 63rd minute as they tried to overturn a first-leg deficit and win a first game in Germany in 16 attempts.

Having lost the first leg 2-1 in Glasgow, Celtic came agonisingly close to forcing extra time with a bold performance that had the hosts on the backfoot for much of the game.

"If you watched the first leg, I don't think it was surprising," said Bayern midfielder Leon Goretzka. "Of course, we could



Bayern Munich's Alphonso Davies celebrates after scoring against Celtic on Tuesday

have made it easier for ourselves by not conceding a goal."

"We have played three games in six days now and it was all about getting results, which we did and we're happy about that," he added after Bayern earned a 0-0 draw at reigning German champions Leverkusen on Saturday.

With the Bavarians made to sweat from the start, Celtic's Kuehn saw a shot cleared off the line by Raphael Guerreiro in the 16th minute before Daizen Maeda narrowly missed connecting with an Arne Engels cross in front of goal a little later.

Bayern had to wait until the stroke of halftime for their own opportunity, striker Harry Kane hitting the bar with a shot.

The England captain, who had little impact otherwise and was nursing a knock to the head from the Leverkusen game, was taken off at halftime.

Bayern came close again seconds after the restart with Goretzka failing to beat goalkeeper Kasper Schmeichel in a one-on-one.

It was Celtic, however, who broke the deadlock with a deserved goal when Kuehn slotted home following two defensive errors to put Brendan Rodgers' team in the driving seat.

Bayern upped the tempo and came close with Goretzka and Leroy Sane before Schmeichel pulled off another superb save to deny Joshua Kimmich.

Kompany blames busy schedule for Bayern's sluggish performance

Munich, Germany - Bayern Munich's busy match schedule affected their performance in the 1-1 draw against Celtic on Tuesday, coach Vincent Kompany said.

Bayern qualified 3-2 on aggregate in their playoff but only after struggling against the Scots, who had the better chances and took the lead in the 63rd minute through Nicolas Kuehn, a former Bayern reserve player.

The hosts needed a last-gasp goal from Alphonso Davies to seal their spot in the next round following last week's 2-1 victory in Glasgow.

Bundesliga leaders Bayern were in Celtic last week before travelling to reigning champions Bayer Leverkusen on Saturday for the Bundesliga's top-of-the-table clash where they played out a goalless draw.

"We always talked about how many matches we have in six days," Kompany told a press conference. "It is simple. The first half could have been better, the second half was good. We had chances and could have scored more goals.

"It is not easy to get through such a programme. You have to see it in this context. Our goal is for performance and results to match, starting Sunday."

Bayern, who have an eight-point lead over second-placed Leverkusen in the Bundesliga, could be without Harry Kane on Sunday at home to Eintracht Frankfurt, who are five points further back in third, with the striker taken off at halftime.

"We were in Glasgow on Wednesday. Then Leverkusen. Big energy output. It is normal after the second game to take an extra day to recover," Kompany said, adding that Kane's knock to the face in the game at Leverkusen had not been serious.

"He (Kane) gave the thumbs up this morning," Kompany said.



Vincent Kompany

Kokcu goal helps Benfica edge Monaco

Lisbon, Portugal - Benfica held determined AS Monaco to a 3-3 draw in a thrilling second leg of their Champions League knock-out phase playoff on Tuesday for a 4-3 aggregate win that earned the hosts a place in the competition's last 16.

Benfica, who had a one-goal advantage from the first leg, opened the scoring in the 22nd minute with winger Kerem Akturkoglu's close-range strike after a fine pass from Vangelis Pavlidis.

But Monaco had the hosts on the ropes for much of the match and midfielder Takumi Minamino equalised with a simple finish 10 minutes later before Eliesse Ben

Seghir put them in front after the break with a stunning first-time shot inside the right post.

Benfica were then awarded a penalty and Pavlidis coolly converted from the spot to make it 2-2 before Monaco substitute George Ilenikhena and Benfica's Orkun Kokcu added a goal each late on.

"It was a hard game with lots of running, but in the end I am really happy that I could score and help us go through to the next stage," said player of the match Kokcu.

Benfica will be up against either Liverpool or Barcelona in the last 16, depending on Friday's

draw. The Portuguese side, who had already beaten Monaco twice this season with a 3-2 away win also in the tournament's league phase, have never lost at home to a French club.

Monaco gave their travelling fans reasons to believe in a turnaround but an early golden chance by Krepin Diatta to level the tie on aggregate was denied by Benfica keeper Anatoliy Trubin.

The hosts grew into the game and Akturkoglu opened the scoring after Pavlidis recovered the ball just outside the box before squaring it across the face of the goal to the Turkey forward, who

scored into an empty net.

Monaco were rewarded for their strong start and seconds after Breel Embolo hit the post, Minamino equalised in the 32nd minute.

Embolo then misfired an excellent chance in first-half stoppage time as Monaco were on the front foot before and after the restart.

Trubin kept out a powerful attempt by Eliesse Ben Seghir two minutes into the second half. But there was little the Ukrainian goalkeeper could do when the 20-year-old eventually gave Monaco the lead in the 51st minute.



Benfica's Orkun Kokcu scores against AS Monaco on Tuesday

Giroud loses \$500k worth of jewellery in burglary

Los Angeles, US - Los Angeles FC forward Olivier Giroud had \$500,000 worth of jewellery taken from his home in a burglary earlier this month, ESPN reported Tuesday night.

TMZ Sports originally reported the news on Monday afternoon.

Giroud and his family were not home when the incident occurred. Burglars entered the residence by breaking a window, and when Giroud's wife came home to find items - such as 10 luxury watches - missing, she called police, per the reports.

The burglary was reported to authorities on Feb. 5.

Giroud, 38, had zero goals and three assists in 10 matches (seven starts) for LAFC last season. The Frenchman was a long-time star overseas and helped his home country win the 2018 World Cup.

Break-ins at professional athletes' homes has been common



Olivier Giroud

Break-ins at professional athletes' homes has been common as of late, as NFL's Joe Burrow, Patrick Mahomes and Travis Kelce have been victims

as of late, as NFL stars Joe Burrow, Patrick Mahomes and Travis Kelce have all been victims of burglary over the past few months.

Koushki takes Esteghlal into Asian Champions League knockout rounds

Doha, Qatar - Iran's Esteghlal qualified for the last 16 of the Asian Champions League Elite when a 2-0 win over Al-Rayyan of Qatar on Tuesday ensured the Tehran-based side advanced at the expense of compatriots and bitter rivals Persepolis.

Substitute Alireza Koushki set up Mohammad Azadi's 46th-minute opener and scored Esteghlal's second 23 minutes later to take his side up to sixth in the 12-team west Asian standings, forcing Persepolis out of the eight qualification places.

Saudi Arabia's Al Hilal ensured they finished top of the standings with a 2-0 win over Al Wasl from the United Arab Emirates and Jorge Jesus' side will take on eighth-placed Pakhtakor in the next round over two legs in March.

The completion of the league phase means the lineup for the knockout rounds for the west Asian half of the draw is set, with



Esteghlal's Alireza Koushki celebrates his goal against Al Rayyan

Saudi Pro League clubs in the first three spots in the table.

Second-placed Al Ahli will take on Al Rayyan, while Cristiano Ronaldo's Al Nassr face Es-

teghlal. Qatar's Al Sadd will meet Al Wasl, with games to be played on March 3 or 4 and the return matches held one week later. The quarterfinals, semis and final will

be played in a centralised format featuring clubs from west and east Asia in Saudi Arabia in late April and early May.

Esteghlal went into their meeting with already-qualified hosts Al Rayyan knowing a draw would be enough to climb into the top eight and Sohrab Bakhtiarzadeh's side went in front soon after halftime.

Koushki drove towards the byline as the Al Rayyan defence hesitated and Azadi forced his team mate's cross over the line with his chest.

The Iranians doubled the lead in the 69th minute when they launched a counter-attack, Koushki taking advantage of inept attempts to dispossess him by Andre Amaro and Julien De Sart to score past Paulo Victor.

Al Hilal secured top spot with victory over Al Wasl, their seventh win in eight matches as Jesus' side finished with an unbeaten record in the group phase.



14

SE ASIAN DELIGHTS
Thai Chicken Green Curry or Singapore Chilli Crab - what's your choice?

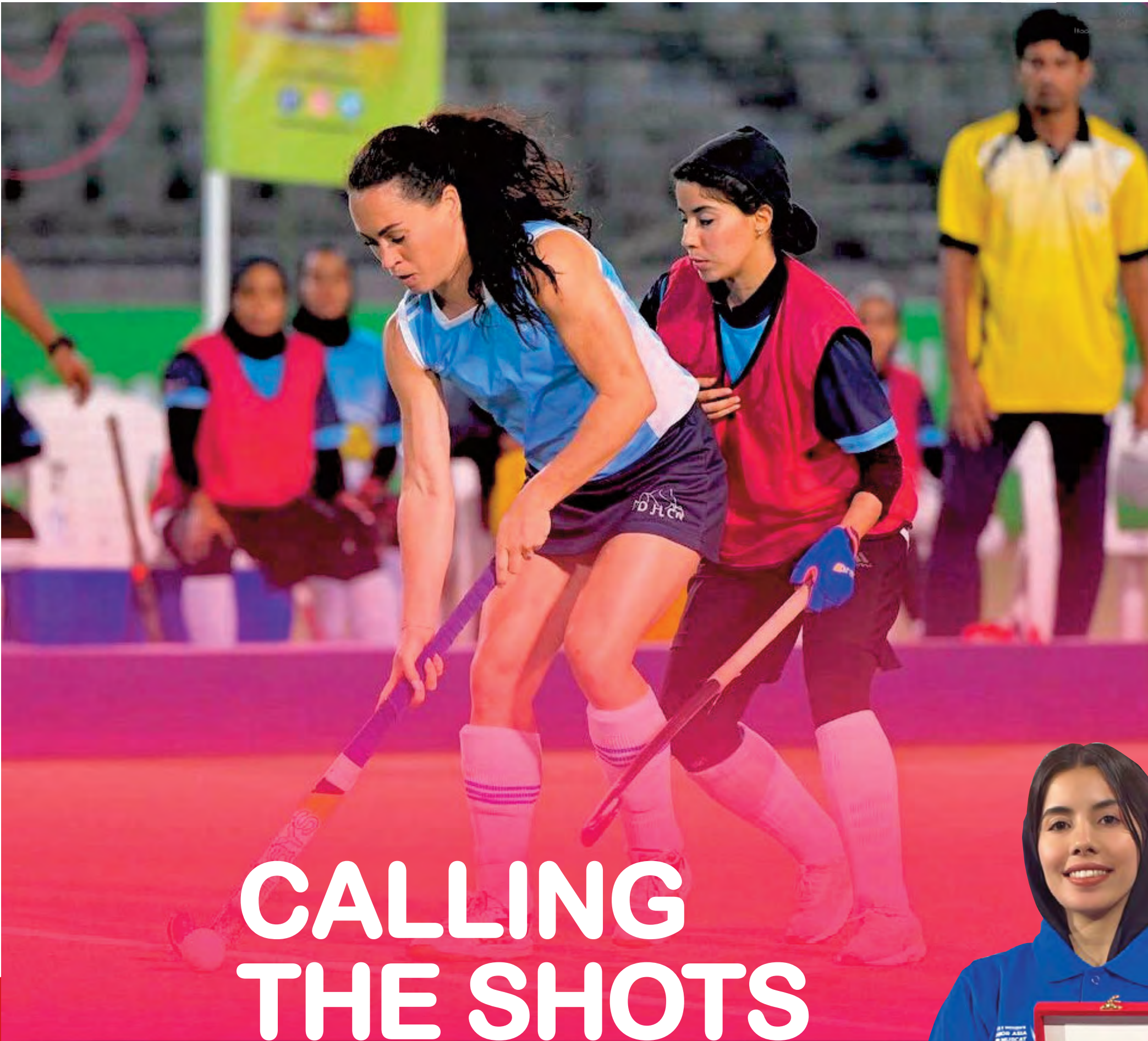


15

IN TOWN
Celebration to mark the birthday of the Emperor of Japan



HOPPING AROUND WITH HOPIBI
Have you been 'green-washed'?



CALLING THE SHOTS



WOMEN'S HOCKEY

OMAN'S FIRST FEMALE INTERNATIONAL HOCKEY REFEREE **MUHJA AL NAMANI** SAYS THERE'S MUCH SCOPE TO DEVELOP WOMEN'S HOCKEY IN OMAN

Mohammed Taha

As the first Omani woman to obtain an international licence to referee hockey matches both locally and internationally, Muhja al Namani has brought unparalleled prestige to Oman.

Mujha's journey in sports began at a young age, fuelled by a deep passion for hockey. However, in early 2023, she fulfilled her childhood dream by actively engaging in the sport.

Speaking to Muscat Daily, Muhja shared that she started playing hockey to gain an identity but had never played for any club in Oman before. She joined the women's national team in March 2023 and participated in all internal and external training camps, as well as international tournaments.

Mujha emphasises the need for greater media support to promote women's hockey in Oman, encouraging more girls to take up the sport. She believes that with increased awareness and participation, a strong national

team can be built, capable of competing internationally and achieving creditable results.

Muhja's dedication paid off in December 2024 when she obtained her international refereeing licence during the Women's Hockey Junior Asia Cup in Muscat. This achievement allows her to officiate local and international tournaments for both men and women.

This milestone not only marks a personal triumph for Muhja but also serves as an inspiration for aspiring female referees and players across the country. Her success highlights the growing opportunities for women in sports and the importance of perseverance in breaking barriers.

Talking about the challenges she faced, Muhja said that balancing personal work, national team trainings, and family responsibilities was her biggest challenge. However, with patience, determination, and unwavering support from her family, she overcame these obstacles.

Mujha advises aspiring female hockey players to join clubs, take inten-

sive courses, and familiarise themselves with the game's rules. She also stressed that Oman has talented female hockey players but a major awareness campaign is needed to encourage more participation in the sport. She urged sports authorities and educational institutions to integrate hockey programmes into school curricula to nurture talent from a young age.

She highlighted the many benefits of playing hockey for women, explaining that the fast-paced nature of hockey fosters collaboration, teamwork, and effective communication. Playing a male-dominated sport builds self-confidence, encouraging women to be competitive and assertive, she said.

The sport demands dedication, discipline, and continuous improvement, traits that translate into success in other areas of life. Hockey enhances the ability to make quick decisions under pressure, strengthening leadership skills. The game promotes endurance, strength, agility, and overall fitness, empowering women physically. Women, excelling in hockey, challenge

societal norms and inspire younger generations to pursue sports fearlessly, she pointed out.

In addition to her accomplishments, Muhja has also been actively involved in mentoring young players and advocating for better training facilities for women in Oman. She believes that structured development programmes and international exposure will help elevate the level of women's hockey in the country. Her journey exemplifies the impact that a single individual's determination can have on an entire community.

Muhja concludes with a powerful message to young Omani women, encouraging them to believe in their abilities, pursue their dreams, and proudly represent Oman in international arenas. She emphasised that sports, especially hockey, can shape individuals into stronger, more confident people.

"The journey is never easy, but every challenge you overcome brings you closer to your dreams. If you are passionate about something, go for it fearlessly," she said.

“*Playing a male-dominated sport builds self-confidence, encouraging women to be competitive and assertive*”

Muhja al Namani

cook-up

Southeast Asian Delights

Countries in Southeast Asia share the same set of spices and ingredients, yet the magic each country churns out with their respective cuisines is phenomenal. Try some popular dishes:



Thai Green Curry (chicken)

- Ingredients**
- 1 packet (2tbsp) Thai Green Curry paste
 - 400ml can of coconut milk.
 - 500g Chicken breast or thighs - diced
 - 1 cup baby corn, green beans, red pepper - chopped.
 - Kaffir lime leaves for garnish
 - Juice of one lime
 - 2cm piece galangal – diced fine

Method

Cut the chicken into bite size chunks, the baby corn lengthwise and the green beans diagonally. Put pan on a medium heat, add paste and cook for 2 minutes. Add the

chicken to the pan and stir around in the paste for 3 minutes. Add half the can of coconut milk, preferably the thicker part from top of the can. Bring to a simmer and add the rest of the can, depending on how thick you like your curry sauce. Reduce the heat, cover the pan, and cook for around 10 minutes. Then, uncover the pan and reduce the sauce if required. Add the vegetables and galangal, and stir through until they have reached the state of tenderness you require, about 5 to 10 minutes. Adjust sweetness with a little fresh lime juice, if required. Serve with Thai Jasmine rice.

Singapore Chilli Crab

- Ingredients**
- 1tbsp cornstarch
 - 2tbsp water
 - 7tbsp peanut oil
 - 4-5 whole shallots - minced
 - 4cm piece ginger - grated
 - 6-8 medium garlic cloves - minced
 - 4 Thai chillies - minced
 - 2 whole live Mud or Dungeness crabs – cleaned and shelled
 - 2 cups chicken broth
 - 1/4 cup tomato paste
 - 1/2 cup hot-sweet chili sauce
 - Salt, to taste
 - Sugar, to taste
 - 1 large egg - beaten
 - 1/2 cup thinly sliced green onions
 - 1 cup fresh cilantro leaves
 - Steamed rice - to serve

Method

In small bowl, whisk cornstarch with 2tbsp water and set aside. In a large wok with lid, heat oil over medium heat until shimmering. Stir in shallots, ginger, garlic, and chillies. Cook and stir until fragrant, about 1 minute. Add crab pieces and broth. Increase heat to medium high and bring to a boil. Cover loosely and gently boil (decrease heat if necessary), until crab has turned red and is nearly cooked through, about 6 minutes. Remove cover and stir in tomato paste and chilli sauce. Simmer for one minute and season to taste with salt, sugar, or chilli sauce. Stir in cornstarch mixture and bring to a boil to thicken. Remove from heat and whisk in egg. Stir in green onions. Ladle into serving dish, sprinkle with cilantro and serve.

CLASSIFIEDS

SITUATION WANTED

Indian male having 20 years of experience in Oman & GCC in Project and Dealer Market Sales, Business Development etc., having valid D/L, looking for the post of Sales Manager/BDM/Sr. Sales Executive
Contact : 78099493

VACANCY AD

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

SEND YOUR REQUEST FOR

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

ASPHALT LAYING & CABC CREW WITH MACHINERY AVAILABLE

ON DAILY / LONG TERM RENTAL BASIS

Laying Crew consist of the below.
Asphalt Paving machine 6/12 meters - 1 No's each
PTR Roller - 3 No's
Tandem Roller - 2 No's
Bitumen Sprayer - 2 No's
Crew & Operator

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

To contact: 99660581

WJ Towell Group Company



Quality car rentals at competitive prices.

Muscat 9014 6672, 9679 0684
Sohar 9731 6218 | Salalah 9429 9325
www.orbit-oman.com

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



عيادة فصول السنة للطب الهندي التقليدي ALL SEASON AYURVEDA CLINIC

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

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



CLASSIFIED LISTINGS

MUSCAT DAILY offers a variety of classified listings for individuals and establishments:

Situations Vacant/Wanted, Accommodation Wanted or Available, Sale of Household Items, Cars for Sale or Wanted, Matrimonial Alliances, etc

Please email your listing to dailyclassifieds@apexmedia.co.om or call: 99104346



take a break

HOPPING AROUND WITH HOPIBI



Have you been ‘greenwashed’?

January 20 has been designated by the GCC states as ‘Gulf Tourism Day’ – an annual observance to enhance collaboration and promote tourism within the Arabian Gulf. And, I’m sure there will be many initiatives to bring in tourists from around the globe to this part of the world.

Recently, I had hopped into a five-star hotel in the region for a short stay and was quite impressed with the hospitality, the facilities, the options of a luxurious stay, and above all, the room amenities. There was a well-stocked coffee station in the room, a safe, a mini refrigerator, a comfortable bed, immaculate linen and drapes, et al.

What, however took my



attention was a little note left on the writing desk suggesting that the guest do his/her bit to ‘Save the Planet’ and reduce the carbon footprint on the Earth. It had an instruction tagged along which said the guest should hang the used towels up, if they want to reuse it, or dump them on the floor, if they need them re-

placed on every day of stay.

I wondered, how much would this action matter in ‘saving’ the Earth. And, if the hotels are really serious about it, why not offer a suitable reduction in tariff to conscientious guests in a bid to encourage more people to join in curbing the carbon footprint?

According to the Ameri-

can Hotel and Lodging Association, asking guests to reuse towels reduces the number of laundry loads as well as water, energy and labour costs by 17%. And with over 5 million hotel rooms in the US, that works out to saving a lot of water and a lot of energy, you bet!

The bottom line, however, is the fact that guests need to be given an incentive for diligence – after all, they are made to pay in advance for all the water and energy they might use, in the exorbitant five-star room tariff.

This act by establishments to present themselves as environment-friendly is termed as ‘greenwashing’ and the tourism industry has taken the lead in this regard.

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE



ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

It’s been tougher than you thought it would be to get things taken care of, especially with recent surprises. Still, you need to finish up on a certain project. The problem is that you won’t be able to get it done when you want it done if you don’t ask for help. Go ahead. Asking for help falls neatly under the heading of delegating duties and that’s what authority figures do.



TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

Stop worrying about the neighbour’s reaction, or anyone else’s for that matter, to the people you’ve been associating with lately. If you enjoy them and the feeling is mutual, what’s the problem? At some point you’ll need to stop defending your choices, in favour of just letting everyone know that these are the friends you’ve chosen.



GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

As much as you really want to laugh off a recent conversation you had with a higher-up, you know you can’t. You’re taking this far more seriously than you ordinarily would, but you’re right. If you don’t pay attention to subtle signals, you’ll be wishing you had tomorrow or next week. The good news is that what you say will be the right thing.



CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

Just because your new buds are different doesn’t mean there’s anything wrong with them. You know that, but you’re already choosing jury members and rehearsing your closing statements. But think about this: is it possible you’re so ambivalent about them because you know they’re rebels and because you’re just now realizing you are too? Your true colours finally shine! Don’t be afraid



LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

Everyone’s emotions are running on high, and just this once yours aren’t any exception. Okay, so you’re usually calm, cool, and collected. And unbiased, unprejudiced, and eminently fair. That’s what you’re usually like. At the moment, however, you’ll back away from anything that doesn’t allow you to tell it like it is.



VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

It’s almost time to put your plans into action. Consider, for example, that new friend you’ve been dying to spend some time with. The one who’s been hinting around that they might be interested in more from you than just a platonic relationship. Why not give this a trial run? See if there’s something there.



LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

After days or maybe even weeks of rooting around trying to find someone you can truly get close to, you’ll be more than happy with today’s events. The Universe has seen fit to connect you with someone who’ll be able to let their hair down, become truly intimate and partner up. Ready? Because this is the real thing. Of course, you can’t win if you don’t play.



SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

Part of the burden of having strong opinions is knowing when and where to share them. Today, you might want to experiment with holding back and letting others work it out. Observe the group interaction and reflect on how these people are working together. You will make interesting connections that will inform other areas of your life.



SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

You’re smart enough to know that you don’t know everything, so if you find yourself having a difference of opinion with someone today, try to look at the situation as a learning opportunity. Having a healthy curiosity for another person’s point of view will earn you their respect, and it will turn a potentially prickly situation into a mutually enjoyable exchange.



CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

You usually don’t have time to mess around with long, involved explanations, detailed descriptions or drawn-out instant replays of who said what to whom. But at the moment you just can’t get enough of all of it. So if someone tries to blow you off with just a couple of quick quips, you won’t stand for it.



AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

Just because your companion is trying hard to keep things calm doesn’t mean you should deliberately stir the pot. You know that, but keeping quiet is still going to be difficult, especially if you have something on your mind that’s itching to come out. Does it need to be verbalized? That’s up to you. Whatever you decide, your loved ones will still adore you either way.



PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

Someone who’s introduced to you by either a family member or a coworker could end up being a part of your life for a very long time, but you two might not be able to take your show on the road just yet. If you can’t see each other publicly right now, it might be best to wait until you can. You know how you are about honesty and integrity. Why get this off to a bad start?

IN TOWN

Emperor of Japan’s birthday



The Ambassador of Japan hosted a reception to celebrate the birthday of the Emperor of Japan, on February 12



Photos: VK Shafeer

BOGGLER

Y	S	O	C
O	P	H	P
O	O	K	I
R	L	P	I

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

TRIVIA QUIZ - FOR TEENS

1. Which Ocean is bordered by landmasses and an archipelago on three sides?

- A. Indian Ocean
- B. Pacific Ocean
- C. Atlantic Ocean
- D. Arctic Ocean

2. What is the young one of an elephant called?



- A. Kid
- B. Pup
- C. Calf
- D. Foal

3. Which drink has the highest consumption in Oman?

- A. Coca Cola
- B. Mountain Dew
- C. Fanta
- D. Limca

Answers
3. B
2. C
1. A

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

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



Invest in one of the world's largest
diversified shipping and maritime companies.
Initial Public Offering of 1,041,748,856 Offer Shares

Category I
Institutional (Non-Individuals)
Subscription Price Range:
Bzs 117 to Bzs 123 per Offer Share

Offer opening date: 20 February 2025
Offer closing date: 27 February 2025

Category II
Retail (Individuals)
Subscription Price
Bzs 123 per Offer Share

Offer opening date: 20 February 2025
Offer closing date: 26 February 2025



89 Owned and Operated Vessels	12th Top VLCC Owner Globally	21 Years of Operations
9.5 m DWT Capacity	900+ Port Calls Annually	60+ Country Reach

For more information: asyadshipping.com/ipo
Connecting Oman to global trade

Issue Manager	Joint Global Coordinators	Collection Agents
	 Three International Banks	

This advertisement has not been reviewed or approved by the Oman Financial Services Authority or any regulatory authority elsewhere and the information contained in it does not constitute a public offering of securities or solicitation of any offer to buy securities for the purpose of Omani law, including Commercial Companies Law (Royal Decree 18/2019), Securities Law (Royal Decree 46/2022), Executive Regulations of Capital Market Law (CMA Decision 01/2009) or Regulations for Public Joint Stock Companies (Decision No. 27/2021) which can only be done through a prospectus approved by and registered with the Oman Financial Services Authority. This advertisement does not, therefore, constitute (and should not be considered) a prospectus for the public offering of securities in the Sultanate of Oman.