



Oman Food Bank to combat food waste, support 6,000 families

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman Food Bank (Daima) has launched several initiatives aimed at assisting over 6,000 families across the sultanate in an effort to reduce food waste and support needy families during Ramadan.

Ahood bint Abdullah al Habishiya, Director of Marketing and Projects at Oman Food Bank, told *Muscat Daily* that these initiatives include distribution of iftar meals, food baskets, and fruits and vegetables.

"These initiatives are not just about providing food during Ramadan but also about promoting a culture of preserving blessings and minimising food waste," Ahood said.

Since its establishment in 2021, the food bank has been dedicated to preserving surplus food and distributing it among those in need. To date, the organisation has distributed over 300,000 meals, equivalent to around 180 tonnes of food.

However, the bank's vision extends beyond food distribution. It actively works on recycling surplus food and transforming it into



(Supplied photos)

locally beneficial resources. This approach aligns with Oman's broader sustainability goals under Vision 2040, focusing on economic and environmental sustainability.

"Our mission is to reduce food waste, promote sustainability and enhance food security by ensuring that surplus food reaches those who need it most," Ahood

said.

Highlighting the scale of the issue, Ahood cited data from be'ah, which revealed that Oman generates approximately 560,000 tonnes of food waste annually, incurring costs of around RO60mn. Additionally, the country imports food worth about RO1bn each year, while managing household waste costs

an additional RO100mn.

She stressed the importance of adopting smarter consumption habits to reduce waste. "We should rationalise our spending, purchase only essential items and adopt more mindful consumption practices."

Ahood suggested practical steps such as preparing shopping lists, cooking in smaller



Oman generates approximately 560,000 tonnes of food waste annually, incurring costs of around RO60mn

AHOOD BINT ABDULLAH AL HABISHIYA



However, the mission is not without challenges. Identifying and reaching eligible families, ensuring safety in surplus food distribution, and raising awareness about the food bank's role in food security remain key obstacles. She also underscored the need for stronger legal frameworks to manage food waste and encourage collaboration among charitable organisations.

Highlighting the global context, she noted, "Over a billion people worldwide suffer from poverty and hunger, while nearly a third of all food is lost or wasted before it reaches consumers."

To address this, Oman Food Bank collaborates with specialised institutions and leverages social media platforms to raise awareness about responsible consumption and the negative impacts of food waste.

"Our goal is to emphasise the value of food, highlight the consequences of waste and raise awareness about its impact on food security," she said.

Ahood concluded by calling for unified efforts to address these challenges and build a more sustainable and food-secure society in Oman.

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Fak Kurbah secures release of 511 insolvent individuals

Muscat - The 12th edition of Omani Lawyers Association's Fak Kurbah initiative, aimed at securing the release of individuals imprisoned due to financial insolvency, has helped free 511 people across the sultanate since its launch at the beginning of Ramadan. The initiative has restored hope to families and provided beneficiaries with a fresh start. The released individuals are from various governorates, with North Batinah recording the highest number at 169, followed by South Batinah (85), Dakhliyah (73) and South Sharqiyah (57). Additionally, 49 cases are from Dhahirah, 29 from Muscat, 18 from North Sharqiyah, 14 from Al Wusta and three from Buraimi. Dr Hamad bin Hamdan al Rubaie, Chairman of Omani Lawyers Association, gave credit for the effort to solidarity of the Omani community. "This would not have been possible without the generosity of individuals and institutions who contributed to the initiative," he said, while urging continued support. Since its inception in 2012, Fak Kurbah has facilitated the release of over 7,110 prisoners. Donations can be made through the official website (www.fakkrba.om), designated bank accounts or the Thawani app.

TIPS FOR FITNESS AND FAITH

Best push-pull workouts for muscle retention

Muscat - Balancing faith and fitness during Ramadan requires careful planning, as years of muscle building and high-intensity endurance training can be impacted by fasting. With limited eating and hydration windows, workouts must be adjusted to prevent muscle loss and maintain strength. Jaison M, gym instructor and fitness expert, shares essential guidelines to help you stay in shape while observing the holy month.

WEEK 3
Push-pull training is an effective method to maintain muscle power during Ramadan. Push exercises, such as bench press, shoulder press and dips, strengthen the chest, shoulders and triceps. Pull exercises, including pull-ups, rows and bicep curls, target the back, biceps and forearms. This balanced approach ensures your muscles are engaged without excessive strain. During fasting, keep workouts short but efficient - around 30-40 minutes - to prevent fatigue and muscle loss. In between, make sure to have some basic leg exercises for which simple squats are the best. One can also include deadlifts frequently.

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Sultan Qaboos Port to expand cruise, maritime services

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Transport, Communications, and Information Technology (MTCIT) has outlined plans to enhance services at Sultan Qaboos Port in Muttrah, aiming to attract more cruise liners and strengthen its role as a key tourism hub.

As part of their broader efforts to improve ports, maritime services, and road infrastructure, MTCIT signed three strategic agreements on Thursday.

A key agreement focuses on the development of ship services and crew change operations at Sultan Qaboos Port, aligning with plans to expand its commercial activities while maintaining its primary function as a cruise tourism destination.

The agreement, signed with the 'Omani Integrated Logistics Services Company', covers a two-year framework for managing and operating maritime services at the port.

The project will be implemented in four phases. Initially, a market analysis will be conducted to assess service gaps and explore opportunities to introduce new maritime services.



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This will be followed by an investment phase aimed at improving existing port facilities and ensuring that services align with international standards. A detailed marketing strategy will then be developed to position the port as a premier destination for cruise tourism and maritime trade. Finally, key performance indicators will be established to measure service quality and operational efficiency.

The initiative is expected to enhance the port's competitiveness, drive cruise tourism growth, and expand logistics and

maritime services for visiting ships.

H E Eng Said bin Hamoud al Maawali, Minister of Transport, Communications, and Information Technology, signed the agreements in the presence of H E Eng Khamis bin Mohammed al

Shammakhi, Undersecretary for Transport.

In addition to the Sultan Qaboos Port development, MTCIT signed an agreement for the dualisation of the Izki-Nizwa Road in Dakhliyah governorate. The 30km project, awarded to Galfar Engineering and Contracting, will improve traffic flow and road safety. It includes service roads, a vehicle underpass in Twai al Nisf, and a connection to the Sanaw Bridge on Sultan Thuwayni bin Said Road. It will also have a 877m access road leading to Jabal Akhdar, facilitat-

ing smoother travel to the popular tourist destination.

The expansion aims to improve traffic flow, enhance safety, and support economic activities in the region.

Another agreement was signed with 'Minji International Ports' for an investment framework in a quarry products port in Shaleem and Hallaniyat Islands. The port will provide a direct export route for extracted minerals, supporting the mining sector by reducing transportation costs and increasing competitiveness in global markets.

Omani films shine at Malda International Film Festival

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Two Omani films, *Beta Carotene* and *Ta*, have won top honours at the Malda International Film Festival in Kolkata, India, marking a significant achievement for Omani cinema on the global stage. Directed by Mohammed bin Ali al Darwaish, the films secured awards in two major categories, reflecting the growing recognition of Omani filmmakers internationally.

The two-minute silent short film *Ta* won Best Short Film, while *Beta Carotene* was awarded Best Documentary Film. The festival, which received over 4,000 submissions from 43 countries, selected only 300 films for screening, making the achievement particularly notable. "To win at such a competitive festival is a huge honour," Darwaish told *Muscat Daily*. "So far, the two films have collectively earned 12 awards from international festivals, and the recognition in India is another significant milestone."

Ta, produced during the COVID-19 pandemic, highlights the issue of child safety and kidnapping. Shot in Amerat and Muttrah, it presents a gripping narrative featuring five characters in emotionally charged situations.



The film's production posed challenges, particularly as Darwaish experimented with animation for the first time. "It took longer than expected because I ventured into animation. My background is in documentaries, so this was a new challenge. I shot the scenes, hand-painted elements, and then brought them to life with animation. I wanted to create something distinct."

Beta Carotene explores Oman's unique natural landscapes, focusing on its mysterious lakes and the marine bacteria that contribute to their formation. The 12-minute documentary, produced by Oman Film Society, was made with assistant director and editor Hussain al Balushi and scriptwriter Mohammed bin Khalifa al Rasbi.

OCCI focuses on labour market reforms to drive economic growth

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) has stepped up efforts to reshape the labour market, aiming to attract investment, diversify the economy, and enhance the business environment.

These priorities were highlighted during OCCI's second Ramadan Evening last week, held under the theme 'Labour Market and Employment Regulation' and chaired by Faisal bin Abdullah al Rawas, Chairman of OCCI. The event brought together key representatives from the public and private sectors to discuss policies to balance workforce supply and demand, improve productivity, and empower Omani talent.

Rawas emphasised OCCI's role in shaping labour policies aligned with Oman's economic objectives. "Regulating the labour market is essential for sustainable growth and attracting investments. A balanced workforce fosters productivity and encourages entrepreneurship, key pillars of our diversifica-

tion strategy," he said.

He also reiterated the chamber's commitment to enhancing private sector participation in job creation. "By aligning skills development with market demands, we not only strengthen the local workforce but also pave the way for innovation and competitiveness," he added.

Mohamed Hassan al Ansi, Chairman of OCCI's Labour Market Regulation Committee, stressed the importance of vocational education in bridging the gap between academic qualifications and practical skills.

"Vocational education is a gateway to opportunity, especially in high-demand sectors like technology, design, healthcare, and trade," he said. Ansi further noted that skill-based training is essential in preparing youth for the job market and supporting entrepreneurship.

"Vocational graduates are crucial for industries facing a shortage of skilled workers, and their expertise supports the growth of SMEs and entrepreneurship in Oman," he stated.

DRIVEWISE

JEREMY FOX IS A BRITISH DRIVING AND ROAD SAFETY EXPERT. SINCE 2009, HE HAS MANAGED THE DRIVER-TRAINING OPERATIONS OF TECHNICAL & ADMINISTRATIVE TRAINING INSTITUTE. HE CONSIDERS IT HIS PRIVILEGE TO HAVE CONTRIBUTED TO OMAN'S IMPROVED ROAD SAFETY.

Did you know your seating position could be the difference between safe driving and a dangerous accident? Proper seating doesn't just enhance comfort - it directly affects your steering, use of pedals, and overall vision, giving you greater control and reducing risk.

In Oman, I've noticed many drivers adopt seating positions that compromise all these factors. A common habit involves positioning the seat as low and far back as possible, with the seatback reclined so severely that drivers must pull themselves upright by holding onto the steering wheel. This creates a gap between their back and the seat, making it impossible to maintain proper control. Worse still, some drivers sit so low that their shoulders barely rise above the door line.

This poor posture not only reduces control and visibility but also leads to discomfort, which can be distracting.

Achieving the Best Seating Position

- Seatback Angle:** Sit slightly reclined with your shoulders comfortably resting against the seatback. Your back should be fully supported, with no gaps between it and the seat.
- Seat Distance:** Adjust the seat so your legs can easily reach the pedals without stretching. When pressing the brake



SEATING & STEERING

pedal fully, your knees should remain slightly bent.

- 3. Steering Wheel Position:** Position the wheel so it's comfortably within reach. You should be able to rest your wrists on the top of the wheel without lifting your shoulders from the seatback.
- 4. Hand Placement:** Picture the steering wheel as a clock. Place your left hand between '9' and '10' and your right hand between '2' and '3.' This gives you maximum control and reduces fatigue.

The Danger of Poor Techniques

Several common habits among drivers can compromise safety:

- 1. Single-Handed Steering:** Many drivers rest one hand at the '12 o'

clock' position or on their lap. This drastically limits your ability to respond to emergencies. Worse, if a collision occurs, this position increases the risk of injury.

2. Sitting Too Close

Some drivers sit with their arms almost fully bent and their chest too close to the steering wheel. This restricts smooth steering movements and places the upper body dangerously close to the airbag. Remember, airbags are designed to deploy with maximum safety when there's an adequate distance between them and your chest. Always check your vehicle handbook for guidance.

3. Crossing Hands

Avoid crossing your hands while turning the wheel. In the event of an airbag deployment, your arms could be pushed into your face at high speed, causing unnecessary injury. Instead, use a push-pull steering method, which keeps your hands on either side of the wheel.

4 Flat-Palm Steering

Another common error is using a flat palm to rotate the wheel, allowing the wheel to slip under your hand. This technique reduces control and increases the likelihood of losing grip during critical manoeuvres.

The Problem with Over-Relaxation

A proper seating position doesn't just

improve control - it also keeps your mind sharp. Drivers who slouch behind the wheel often appear disengaged, as if lounging in front of the TV rather than piloting a potentially lethal machine. This relaxed posture can lead to mental complacency, reducing reaction times and increasing risks.

The link between physical and mental engagement is clear: "Slouched body = slouched mind." Sitting upright in a controlled position not only gives you better visibility and control but also reinforces an alert and focused mind set.

The Benefits of Best Practice

Adopting the correct seating position has several advantages:

- **Enhanced Vision:** A higher seating position improves your ability to see the road ahead and check your surroundings.
- **Improved Control:** Proper posture ensures that you can steer and operate the pedals smoothly and effectively.
- **Reduced Risk of Injury:** In the event of a collision, a correct seating position minimises the chance of injury from airbags, or even your seat belt.

By following these guidelines, you'll create a safer driving environment for yourself and others on the road.

Safe driving!

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

Sultanate's trade surplus reaches RO7.5bn in 2024

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman's trade balance recorded a surplus of RO7.517bn for the full year 2024, driven by an increase in refined oil product exports, according to statistics issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

NCSI data showed that the total value of Oman's merchandise exports reached RO24.23bn in 2024, a 6.8% increase compared to 2023, when it amounted to RO22.69bn. Meanwhile, the value of commodity imports rose by 12.1% in 2024 to RO16.713bn, up from RO14.910bn the previous year.

The increase in exports was primarily due to a rise in Oman's oil and gas exports, which reached RO16.290bn, marking an 18.4% increase from RO13.760bn in 2023. Among oil and gas exports, the value of Oman's crude oil exports stood at RO9.9bn in 2024, reflecting a modest 0.8% increase year-on-year.

Refined oil exports surged by 185% to RO3.85bn, while liquefied natural gas (LNG) exports declined by 1.9% to RO2.528bn compared to December 2023.

Non-oil exports decline

Statistics revealed a 16.3% decline in non-oil exports, which fell to RO6.232bn in 2024 from RO7.442bn in 2023.

Mineral products accounted for the highest value of non-oil commodity exports, reaching RO1.781bn, a decline of 36.8% compared to 2023. This was followed by common metal products, which recorded exports worth RO1.32bn, a marginal increase of 0.1%. Exports of plas-



Total value of Oman's merchandise exports reached RO24.23bn in 2024, a 6.8% increase compared to 2023, when it amounted to RO22.69bn. Total value of commodity imports rose by 12.1% in 2024 to RO16.713bn, up from RO14.910bn the previous year

tics and rubber products totalled RO996mn, marking a 13.3% rise.

Oman's exports of chemical and related products dropped by 19.6% to RO804mn, while live animal and animal product exports declined by 11% to RO350mn. Other exports stood at RO981mn, reflecting a 5% decrease.

The value of re-exports from Oman rose by 14.9% to RO1.708bn compared to 2023. Re-exports of transport equipment products totalled RO401mn, a slight 0.6% decline, while machinery, electrical appliances, equipment and parts

thereof, as well as sound recording and broadcasting equipment, amounted to RO376mn, a 5.4% decrease.

Among commodity imports, mineral products accounted for the highest value, reaching RO4.674bn by the end of 2024, an 11.3% increase. This was followed by machinery, electrical appliances, equipment and parts, as well as sound recording and broadcasting equipment, which totalled RO2.934bn, up 28.9% year-on-year.

Imports of common metals and their products stood at RO1.605bn, rising by 1%, while

chemical and related industries recorded total imports of RO1.516bn, a 3.1% increase. Transportation equipment imports reached RO1.516bn, up 13.5%, while imports of other products totalled RO4.469bn.

The UAE topped the list of non-oil export destinations by the end of 2024, with exports valued at RO1.046bn, an 11% increase compared to 2023. The UAE was also the top destination for Oman's re-exports, which amounted to RO569mn. Additionally, Oman's re-exports to the UAE totalled RO3.941bn.

Saudi Arabia ranked second for Omani non-oil exports at RO849mn, followed by India with RO659mn. Iran was the second-largest destination for re-exports at RO359mn, followed by Kuwait at RO117mn. China ranked as the second-largest exporter to Oman, with shipments worth RO1.83bn, followed by Kuwait with RO1.692bn.



ahlibank's Global Equity Fund delivers 10.6% return for 2024

Muscat - ahlibank announced a 10.6% return for its flagship ahli Global Equity Fund in 2024. The ahli Global Equity Fund, regulated by the Financial Services Authority (FSA), continues to provide exposure to both GCC and global markets, reinforcing its position as a trusted platform for long-term capital growth.

The fund's strength lies in its strategic diversification across key sectors, including financial services, technology, energy, real estate, and industrials. This approach is complemented by a focus on long-term capital appreciation, driven by investments in high-quality stocks with sustainable competitive advantages. Over the past three years, the fund has delivered consistent positive returns, sustaining double-digit compounded growth, making it a preferred choice for investors in Oman.

ahlibank remains steadfast in its focus on GCC markets - particularly Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Qatar, and Oman - while selectively capitalising on opportunities in the US, China, and other emerging markets. The fund's outlook is bolstered by strategic

investments in energy, renewables, and tourism across key markets.

Meanwhile, the ahli Global Equity Fund team remains vigilant about potential volatility driven by geopolitical tensions, monetary policy shifts, and macroeconomic uncertainties, emphasising a balanced approach and selectivity in high-quality names with strong fundamentals.

In a press release, Hanaa al Kharusi, Chairperson of ahli Global Equity Fund, said, "Our disciplined, bottom-up investment process allows the fund to navigate volatility and seize emerging opportunities. At ahlibank, our commitment to delivering exceptional value drives all that we do. The ahli Global Equity Fund reflects this by generating superior returns through strategic investments. We extend our gratitude to our investors and stakeholders for their continued support and encourage them to harness the Fund's potential for long-term growth and financial prosperity."

Building on this strong foundation, ahli Global Equity Fund

offers accessible entry points for investors, allowing participation with a minimum investment of around RO1,000. Incremental investments of 100 units through the Systematic Investment Plan (SIP) further enhance its flexibility, catering to both seasoned investors and newcomers alike.

Beyond accessibility, the fund's appeal is strengthened by its investments in emerging markets and initial public offerings (IPOs). This alignment with global growth trends broadens its market reach and positions it as a forward-looking investment vehicle. With an actively managed approach, the fund leverages the expertise of a professional management team that skillfully adapts to changing market dynamics.

Poised to capitalise on global economic growth, the ahli Global Equity Fund employs proven strategy to delivering superior risk-adjusted returns for our investors. As a trusted partner in wealth and asset management, ahlibank remains committed to redefining the investment landscape and driving economic progress within the sultanate.

S&P upgrades Saudi Arabia's rating to A+ with stable outlook



Riyadh, Saudi Arabia - S&P Global Ratings upgraded Saudi Arabia's local and foreign currency credit rating to A+ with a stable outlook.

In its report, the agency stated that the upgrade with a stable outlook reflects the kingdom's continued progress in economic diversification, sustained growth of the non-oil sector, and development of the local capital market.

"These factors help offset the risks associated with rising external sovereign debt, which is being strategically invested to achieve the objectives of Saudi Vision 2030 while managing debt servicing costs," S&P Global said.

The agency highlights Saudi Arabia's measures to spur investments that will support non-oil growth prospects and economic resiliency over the medium term. As a result, S&P forecasts real gross domestic product (GDP) growth to average 4% over 2025-2028.

The agency expects the kingdom's fiscal deficit to average 4.2% of GDP during the same period, driven by transformational spending aimed at accelerating economic diversification. Furthermore, it is expected that Saudi Arabia will maintain its comfortable net asset position.

Saudi Arabia has seen multiple credit rating upgrades from global rating agencies over the past few years. These advancements reflect the kingdom's improved institutional strength and ongoing implementation of structural reforms.

They are enabling a successful economic transformation and unprecedented economic diversification in the context of fiscal sustainability and enhanced financial planning efficiency that will continue to support its strong and resilient fiscal position.

SPA

Global oil demand to accelerate in 2025 despite economic uncertainty, IEA says

Paris, France - Global oil demand is expected to grow by over 1mn barrels per day (bpd) in 2025, up from 830,000 bpd in 2024, reaching a total of 103.9mn bpd, according to the latest Monthly Oil Market Report released by the International Energy Agency (IEA).

Asia is set to drive nearly 60% of this increase in demand, led by China, where demand for petrochemical feedstocks is expected to account for the entirety of the country's growth as demand for refined fuels reaches a plateau.

However, the outlook remains clouded by economic uncertainty, the IEA said. Recent delivery data have fallen short of expectations, leading to downward adjustments for oil demand growth in fourth-quarter 2024 and first-quarter 2025, leading to slightly lower estimates for fourth-quarter 2024 and first-quarter 2025 growth at 1.2mn bpd year-over-year.

"The macroeconomic conditions that underpin our oil demand projections deteriorated over the past month as trade tensions escalated between the US and several other countries. New US tariffs, combined with escalating retaliatory measures, tilted macro risks to the downside," IEA said.

World oil supply rose by 240,000 bpd in February, reaching 103.3mn bpd. The increase was driven by higher output from OPEC+ members, particularly Kazakhstan, which produced at record levels as output from Ten-



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giz field ramped up. Iran and Venezuela also increased production ahead of anticipated tighter sanctions.

Non-OPEC+ production is forecast to rise by 1.5mn bpd in 2025, led by producers in the Americas. OPEC+ output, which declined by 770,000 bpd last year, could hold steady in 2025 if voluntary production cuts are maintained beyond April, according to IEA.

"The US is currently producing at record highs and is forecast to be the largest source of supply growth in 2025, followed by Canada, Brazil, and Guyana. Proposed US tariffs on Canada and Mexico, set to take effect on April 1, may impact flows and prices from the two countries that accounted for roughly 70% of US crude oil imports last year. Meanwhile, the latest round of sanctions on Russia and Iran has

yet to significantly disrupt loadings, even as some buyers have scaled back purchases," IEA said.

Global crude refining activity fell by 570,000 bpd month-on-month in February to 82.8mn bpd, continuing a decline from December's five-year high of 84.3mn bpd. The drop was attributed to both planned and unplanned outages. Refining throughputs are projected to average 83.3mn bpd in 2025, up

570,000 bpd from 2024, with lower OECD refining activity partially offset by a 930,000 bpd increase in non-OECD regions.

Refining margins rebounded in February as falling crude prices improved profitability across all regions.

Oil prices dropped by about \$7 per barrel in February and early March as weakening macroeconomic sentiment and escalating trade tensions weighed on the market outlook. Plans by OPEC+ to begin easing voluntary production cuts in April have reinforced expectations of a well-supplied market in 2025.

(Source: Oil & Gas Journal)

Gold breaks \$3,000 amid Trump's trade wars

Dirk Kaufmann

Gold has surpassed another historic milestone on Friday, breaking through the psychologically significant barrier of \$3,000 per troy ounce (31.1 grams) for the first time in history. Since the beginning of the year, gold prices have climbed more than 13%.

The underlying reason for gold's all-time high is a general uncertainty about economic outlooks, causing many people to fear for their money and seek crisis-proof investments. Gold retains its value regardless of inflation levels, remains secure during currency reforms, and is immune to exchange rate fluctuations.

London is the most influential market for spot gold trading, as it is home to the London Bullion Market Association (LBMA), which has been setting the global benchmark price for gold trading since 1919. Other, slightly less significant trading hubs include China, India, the Middle East, and the United States.

Trump's tariffs weigh on sentiment

For Frank Schallenger, a commodities analyst at Germany's Landesbank Baden-Württemberg (LBBW), the primary reason for the current rally in gold is the tariff policy pursued by US President Donald Trump.

"It is causing uncertainty in financial markets, making gold, once again, a safe-haven asset," he told DW.

Another commodities analyst, Carsten Fritsch from German lender Commerzbank, shares the same view in a statement to DW. "The biggest driver of the strong rise in gold prices is the uncertainty surrounding US President Donald Trump's tariff policies," he said, adding that the usual factors influencing the price of gold, such as the US dollar and interest rate expectations, are "not playing a significant role in the current price surge."

Fears of a global economic downturn are also fueled by speculative claims — some less credible than others. On various online platforms, predictions by American businessman and bestselling author Robert Kiyosaki are circulating. He predicted already a decade ago that a "massive economic crisis" is expected in 2025. He advises people to focus on "self-sufficiency and entrepreneurship" and to invest primarily in "gold, silver, and bitcoin."

Social media spawning crisis fears

Meanwhile, economists at US investment bank Goldman Sachs have taken a more sober look at the situation, pointing to the role of central banks around the world in pushing up the gold price. Gold trading typically follows



interest rates, and in times of low rates, investing in precious metals becomes particularly attractive, they said in a note to investors.

Central banks on a gold buying spree

Gold has many buyers — private individuals seeking to safeguard their wealth, institutional investors looking for alternatives amid dwindling returns, and even national economies.

According to Commerzbank analyst Fritsch, central banks

may also have contributed to the price surge "through large-scale gold purchases."

One common reason central banks buy gold is to hedge against the risk of financial sanctions — something particularly relevant for emerging economies. These countries worry about being disproportionately affected by disruptions in global trade or getting caught in conflicts between major economic powers.

Goldman Sachs Research has reported that gold purchases in

these nations have increased significantly since Western nations imposed sanctions on Russia in the wake of Moscow's full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

When will the gold rally end?

The World Gold Council (WGC), an industry group rep-

resents gold mining companies, remains cautiously optimistic about the gold price in the near term.

"We expect central banks to continue playing a key role in 2025, with more investors entering exchange-traded gold funds," WGC expert Louise Street told Manager Magazin. However, she also noted that "weakness in the jewelry sector

is likely to persist, as high gold prices and slow economic growth reduce consumer purchasing power."

For LBBW's Frank Schallenger, an end to the gold rally may already be in sight, as he predicts investors will sell and take profits anytime soon. "Later in the year, weak jewelry de-

mand, a slight decline in coin and bullion sales, and reduced gold purchases by central banks are likely to push prices down again."

Carsten Fritsch at Commerzbank also sees signs of a slowdown coming. "Gold demand in China and India will likely weaken due to the recent surge in prices and record-high price levels," he said.

DW

Global trade hits \$33tn in 2024

Geneva, Switzerland – Global trade reached an all-time high of \$33tn, posting a 3.7% annual growth in 2024, according to the Global Trade Update by the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) released on Friday.

The significant growth in services trade, which surged by 9% last year, was a key driver, contributing \$700bn, or 60% of the total annual increase.

Meanwhile, goods trade grew by 2%, contributing \$500bn to the overall growth.

Developing economies outpaced developed nations, with imports and exports rising 4% for the year and 2% in the fourth quarter, primarily driven by East and South Asia.

On the other hand, developed economies saw their trade stagnate for the year and drop by 2% in the last quarter.

South Korea led the way with an 8% annual increase in goods



The significant growth in services trade, which surged by 9% in 2024, was a key driver, contributing \$700bn, or 60% of the total annual increase. Meanwhile, goods trade grew by 2%, contributing \$500bn to the overall growth

exports and 11% in services exports.

The US saw merchandise imports climb 6% annually and 1% quarterly, with exports increasing 2% year-on-year but de-

creasing 1% in the quarter.

China's goods trade strengthened, with a 1% rise in imports and a 5% increase in exports in 2024.

Services trade from China saw

even more significant growth, as exports grew 9% annually, while imports rose 14% year-on-year.

The report noted that China's strong exports pushed the country's trade surplus to its highest level since 2022, while the EU, aided by high energy prices, reversed its previous deficits and posted a trade surplus this year.

"Trade remained stable in early 2025, but mounting geopolitical tensions, protectionist policies, and trade disputes signal likely disruptions ahead," it said.

Falling freight indices indicate weakness in demand for manufactured products, inputs, and commodities, the report said, reflecting the efforts of businesses to adapt to increasing uncertainties.

"Tariff escalation discourages developing economies from exporting value-added goods, hindering industrialisation," it added.

UAE bank employees surpass 39,000 for first time since 2015

Abu Dhabi, UAE – The number of employees in UAE banks has exceeded 39,000 for the first time since 2015, according to data from the Central Bank of the United Arab Emirates (CBUAE).

The Monthly Statistical Bulletin showed that as of the end of 2024 the total number of bank employees reached 39,046.

The sector saw a net increase of 878 new employees in 2024, reflecting a 2.3% rise from 38,168 employees at the end of 2023. Of the total workforce, 32,590 employees work in national banks, while 6,456 are employed by foreign banks operating in the UAE as of December 2024.

Meanwhile, the CBUAE's gold bullion surged by 26.63% in



2024, reaching AED22.981bn by year-end, up from AED18.147bn in 2023.

The bank's demand deposits grew to exceed AED1.109tn by the end of 2024, with AED822.42bn held in local currency.

Savings deposits amounted to AED317.486bn, of which nearly AED265bn was in local

currency, while time deposits totalled AED945.75bn, with approximately AED553.4bn in local currency.

The report also highlighted an increase in net international reserves of the UAE banking sector, surpassing AED1.446tn by the end of 2024, compared to AED1.145tn at the end of 2023.

Global offshore wind industry poised for landmark 19GW of additions in 2025

Muscat – The global offshore wind industry is poised for a rebound in 2025, with capacity additions expected to reach 19 gigawatts (GW) and sector-wide expenditure projected to hit \$80bn, according to research from global research and energy intelligence firm Rystad Energy.

This recovery follows a slowdown at the end of last year, when new installations dropped to approximately 8GW – 2 GW lower than the year prior. A record wave of lease auctions is driving the resurgence, with the world's largest offshore wind market, Mainland China, accounting for 65% of new capacity. With this increase, total additions will exceed the previous peak in 2021 by about 1GW, surpassing the 7.7GW added in 2024, 10.2GW in 2023 and 9.3GW in 2022.

While new capacity additions demonstrate progress, uncertainty lingers regarding lease agreements – the long-term contracts between landowners and wind-energy companies. A record 55GW of offshore wind capacity was offered in lease auctions globally (excluding



Mainland China) in 2024, according to Rystad Energy.

However, not all this capacity has yet been awarded, as offered capacity does not always translate into awarded capacity. For instance, the US saw no bids for its 3GW floating wind auction in Oregon last year, while the Gulf of Maine auction awarded roughly 7GW of the approximately 13GW offered. Despite 2024's record offerings, lease auction openings are projected to decline in 2025, with an expected 30-40GW available. While significantly lower than 2024, this projected offered capacity is still significant, aligned

with levels seen in 2021 and 2022.

"Global offshore wind is set for a robust year in 2025; however, certain signals could affect its smooth upward trajectory. US federal policy is creating significant global ripple effects, hindering offshore wind development, especially where a large portion of auctioned capacity lies. President Donald Trump's January memorandum halting new leasing and approvals on the Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) could last throughout his term, pausing new developments and creating continued uncertainty for ongoing projects," Petra Manuel, Senior Offshore Wind Analyst at Rystad Energy, said in a statement. Project delays significantly impacted final investment decisions (FID) for new offshore wind projects in 2024, leading to a decline in project approvals.

The UK, Poland and Germany are set to lead a surge in European FIDs in 2025, reaching 9.5GW, with several projects in these countries on track for final approval. Poland in particular is expected to see multiple major wind farms reach FID, including Polen-ergia and Equinor's Baltyk II and III, following the recent FID for Orsted and PGE's Baltica 2 in late January 2025.



FINCORP AL AMAL FUND

Invitation for attending The Ordinary General Meeting

The Management of Fincorp Al Amal Fund has the pleasure to invite the shareholders to attend the Ordinary general meeting of the Fund, which is scheduled to be held at 5:00 pm on Tuesday, March 25, 2025, through the electronic platform of the General meetings, which can be accessed through Muscat Clearing and Depository website (www.mcd.gov.om). If the quorum not satisfied, a second annual general assembly will be held at 5:00 pm on Monday, March 27, 2025, to discuss the following agenda:

- To consider and approve the fund's management body report for the financial year ended December 31, 2024.
- To consider the Auditors' Report and to approve the Financial Statements, Balance Sheet and Profit & Loss Account, for the financial year ended on December 31, 2024
- To consider and approve the proposal to distribute cash dividends of 55 baizas for each unit to unitholders on the date of the general meeting.
- To approve the sitting fees of the fund's management body meetings paid to them for previous financial year, and to determine the sitting fees for the next fiscal year.
- To consider and approve the proposal for the annual remuneration for the Fund Management amounting to RO 10,000 for the fiscal year ended on 31 December 2024
- To consider and approve the transactions entered into by the fund with related parties during the financial year ended 31 December 2024.
- To consider and approve the transactions that will be entered into by the fund with related parties during the financial year ended 31 December 2025.
- To appoint the fund's auditors for the financial year ending on 31 December 2025 and to approve their fees.

In accordance with the fund's statute and the regulations for holding general meetings using modern technology means issued by the authority, we would like to draw your attention to the following:

(A) Only a legal person has the right to authorize a natural person to attend the general assembly meeting and vote on his behalf through technology, provided that this natural person has an investor number in the Muscat Clearing and Depository Company.

(B) Voting on any of the items on the agenda begins no more than three days before the date of the assembly and until the end of the voting process on the day of the meeting. On the day of the assembly meeting.

In case of any inquiries, please contact Mr. Redha al Lawati on the phone number: 24822353.

Chairman	Auditor	Legal Advisor
Investment Manager & Administrator		
 FINCORP شركة النورح The Financial Corporation Co. s.a.o.c Brokerage Asset Management Corporate Finance and Advisory Research		

P.O. Box 782, P.C 131, Sultanate of Oman,
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MHD hosts Fleet Iftar 2025 for Jeep, Dodge, RAM clients

MHD Automobiles, the exclusive distributor of Jeep, Dodge, RAM, and Alfa Romeo in Oman, successfully hosted its Fleet Iftar 2025, an evening dedicated to strengthening partnerships, sharing industry insights, and unveiling exclusive fleet offers.

Held at Crowne Plaza Muscat - OCEC, the event received an overwhelming response from fleet customers across key sectors, including leasing and car rental companies, oil & gas, tourism, manufacturing, and distribution. This engagement reaffirmed MHD Automobiles' commitment to supporting its business partners with tailored mobility solutions that drive operational success.

The event was attended by Ashwin, Stellantis Middle East Head of Fleet, who engaged directly with industry leaders to discuss fleet efficiency, performance, and cost-effective solutions. The MHD Automobiles team showcased an impressive lineup of high-performance Jeep and RAM vehicles, complemented by Mopar's comprehensive after-sales support, designed to optimize fleet operations and minimize downtime.

Fleet customers were introduced to Mopar FlexCare Products, which provide tailored maintenance and warranty solutions. Beyond maintenance and warranty solutions, Mopar's fleet utility accessories and customization options enable businesses to configure their vehicles to meet specific operational requirements.

Fleet clients also benefit from genuine Mopar parts, certified technicians, and advanced diagnostic tools, ensuring top-tier service for maximum efficiency and longevity.

The Fleet Iftar event reinforced MHD Automobiles' commitment to delivering a complete fleet solution, combining high-performance vehicles with Mopar's industry-leading after-sales support.

This seamless integration of power, durability, and reliability makes MHD Automobiles the ideal fleet partner, empowering businesses across Oman with efficient, cost-effective, and dependable mobility solutions.

Mohsin Hani al Bahrani, CEO of MHD ACERE, commented, "At MHD Automobiles, we deeply value the trust and collaboration of our fleet customers. The Fleet Iftar was a fantastic opportunity to express our appreciation and reinforce our commitment to their success. Jeep, Dodge, and RAM are engineered to deliver exceptional performance, reliability, and efficiency -qualities that are essential for businesses to thrive."

"With the strong support of our Fleet Sales and Mopar After-Sales teams, we remain dedicated to providing tailored mobility solutions that drive growth and efficiency for our clients across Oman."

MHD Automobiles is the authorised distributor of Stellantis brands in Oman.

Omani research on innovation management

The 11th National Research Award (NRA), organised by the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, celebrated some of the brightest and innovative minds in the Sultanate of Oman.

Among the 13 winning NRA projects, 'Challenges Facing Innovation Management in Omani Higher Education Institutions from the Point of View of Innovative Students' by principal investigator Marhouna Hamed al Maqbali, a teacher at the Ministry of Education and a PhD student in Educational Administration at the Department of Foundations and Educational Administration, College of Education, Sultan Qaboos University, was awarded in the Education and Human Resources field in the Young Researcher's category.

Discussing her research project, Marhouna stated that managing innovations effectively is one of the main challenges facing countries worldwide. Hence, this study aimed to identify the major challenges confronting innovation management in higher education institutions in Oman, as perceived by innovative students; before, during, and after the innovation process.

The study adopted a qualitative research approach using a phenomenological design to delve deeper into the challenges.

Marhouna and her research team conducted interviews with 30 students who had previously participated in competitions or received research funding from the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation.

To ensure a comprehensive perspective, the study considered diversity in terms of years of participation and the stages achieved by the student teams or company. As for the main findings of the study, results revealed several intertwined challenges facing innovation management, and issues emerging in one stage often extend to the subsequent stages highlighting the importance of planning from the outset.

The research paper was published in the *Educational Studies* journal of the University of Jordan.



Dhofar Islamic offers 3.99% profit rates on auto financing

Dhofar Islamic, the sharia'a-compliant banking window of BankDhofar, has announced a special offer on its Auto Finance product, making it easier than ever for customers to purchase their desired vehicles without financial strain.

With a highly competitive profit rate starting at just 3.99%, flexible repayment options extending from 12 to 120 months and a simple application process, Dhofar Islamic's auto financing solution is tailored to suit the needs of anyone looking to finance their next car purchase.

The campaign aims to attract both new and existing customers with an easy, secure, and affordable financing solution for their vehicle needs. Towards this end, the bank has set tiered profit rates: 3.99% for financing term up to three years, 4.25% for four to seven years, and 4.50% for eight to ten years.

To make the process even smoother, Dhofar Islamic has streamlined the application process allowing customers to apply quickly and easily at any of its branches as well as through direct sales representatives for financing amounts ranging.

Amor Said Mohamed al Amri, DGM and Head of Retail Banking Dhofar Islamic, said that the bank understands the importance of providing its customers with financial solutions that align with their needs and aspirations.

"Our enhanced Auto Finance campaign is designed to offer accessible and affordable financing options, enabling our customers to drive away in their dream vehicles with ease."

The bank upholds rigorous standards in sharia'a compliance and customer service.



Kia pays VAT on Sportage L for Ramadan

Kia has announced an exciting opportunity to own one of the top-selling premium SUVs at absolutely No VAT (VAT on Kia).

This was informed by the company through a press release, while calling upon its prospective customers to "add Kia's new Sportage L to Ramadan wish list" and make their wishes come true at Kia.

Enjoy incredible savings with stress-free service plans up to five years or 50000km, first year registration and insurance. Customers also get a Nano Carbon Technology based 3M colour stable film tint on Windows of the Sportage L. 'Head over to your nearest Kia showroom to learn about Kia's exciting deals and win big from the grand raffle draw, where the winner drives away in a Kia EV6 Crossover. The offer under stated terms and conditions expires on April 23,' the company stated.

Introducing new advances in design, technology and space, Kia offers the new Sportage L at two trim levels; the 2.0T MPI 4-cylinder AWD churning 233 HP and the 1.5T 4-cylinder producing 197 hp, both mated to a powerful 8-speed transmission delivering high-performance, increased fuel efficiency and reduced carbon emissions.

Exuding to the brand's 'Opposites United' design philosophy, the five-seater Sportage takes on a more confident look with front and rear designs with star-mapped LED DRL. The extended wheelbase of 2,755mm and 543 Litres space in the luggage compartment guarantees excellent luggage storage space along with height adjustment options for front/rear seats, a sporty D-shaped steering wheel, and a panoramic sunroof that adds to the overall Sportage L experience.

Whether you take up your next adventure on the beaches of Muscat or explore the majestic interiors of Oman, the Sportage continues to provide unprecedented space and roominess for your journeys. Load your camping essentials with ease and travel stress-free with technology upgrades such as the dual 12.3" integrated cluster & infotainment system with a wireless charging pad for compatible smartphones.



Takaful Oman Insurance recognised among Best Workplaces in Oman



Takaful Insurance is proud to announce its recognition as one of the Best Workplaces in Oman for 2025, awarded by Great Place to Work. This prestigious acknowledgment is a testament to our commitment to fostering a workplace culture that empowers, inspires and nurtures talent.

Takaful Insurance is the only insurance company in Oman to achieve this feat, marking its second major milestone after being the certified as Great Place to Work in February 2024.

"At Takaful Insurance, we believe that our employees are the cornerstone of our success. Our sincere effort in creating a positive and inclusive work environment is reflected in our commitment to enhance employee engagement, well-being and career growth opportunities," said CEO Neelmani Bhardwaj. "We strive to provide an atmosphere that encourages collaboration, innovation and professional development, ensuring that our team members feel valued and supported at every stage of their careers."

As part of its ongoing efforts to develop and empower talent, Takaful Insurance has implemented a range of initiatives focusing on learning and development and digital transformation of HR processes, designed to enhance skills and support career progression. 'Takaful Insurance is committed to fostering a progressive and employee-centric workplace through employee-friendly HR practices with a strong focus on having competency development framework for effective succession planning,' the insurance company stated.

To support continuous learning, the company offers classroom training programmes for comprehensive skill enhancement and actively participate in regulator (FSA) initiated training programmes to align with industry compliance standards. 'Our digital learning platform, TALEM (Takaful Academy of Learning Management), provides on-demand eLearning opportunities, enabling employees to upskill at their convenience' Takaful added.

Al Samood members applaud Bank Muscat's 'Green Sports' initiative

Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman, proudly continues its commitment to nurturing youth and enhancing sports infrastructure through its 'Green Sports' programme.

Recently, the bank celebrated the inauguration of the Al Samood sports team stadium lighting project in Bidiya, North Sharqiyah governorate. The event was patronised by Sheikh Hilal Saeed al Hajri, Governor of Dakhliyah, alongside Abdullah Juma al Araiimi, Senior Regional Manager of Bank Muscat's Sharqiyah and Dakhliyah branches, Mohammed Saeed al Hajri, head of the Al Samood sports team, and other distinguished guests and team members.

During the ceremony, Abdullah Juma al Araiimi, Senior Regional Manager of Bank Muscat's Sharqiyah and Dakhliyah branches, delivered a speech expressing his pleasure in supporting the Al Samood sports team through the bank's 'Green Sports' initiative.

He emphasised the critical role of sports in sustainable development and community cohesion, affirming the bank's belief in creating safe and supportive environments for youth athletic activities. He extended heartfelt thanks to the Al Samood sports, reaffirming the bank's ongoing dedication to community service and sustainable development.

Mohammed Saeed al Hajri,



head of Al Samood sports team, expressed gratitude to Bank Muscat for its unique initiative that supports youth talent by providing robust infrastructure for sports teams. He highlighted the opportunities such projects create for youth to hone their skills and showcase their abilities. Team members shared their excitement about the project's

impact.

A number of Al Samood sports team members also expressed their happiness over the project's inauguration. Wael Abdullah al Saqri, a team player, said, "This project is anticipated to make a big difference in the way of training and playing, as good lighting will allow us to practice in the evening, which

gives us more flexibility in the timings. Thus, we will give our best and achieve our goals. I would like to thank Bank Muscat for its commitment to sports development."

Abdullah Sadood al Hajri, another player, emphasised that the project not only boosts performance but also enriches the playing environment for players

and fans alike. "Thank you, Bank Muscat, for 'Green Sports' programme, as this type of support contributes to the development of sports infrastructure and enhances team spirit and competition between local teams," he said. The 'Green Sports' programme by Bank Muscat aims to bolster Oman's sports infrastructure by funding national teams'

projects, promoting green spaces, and fostering community engagement. The programme has continued to achieve success since its launch in 2012, and this is evident through the intense competition by the national teams to benefit from the funding provided annually.

The programme has been a model of success, with numerous

teams competing annually for funding. To date, the programme has supported 203 teams, benefiting over 70,000 members across various governorates.

The initiative serves as a benchmark for supporting local communities in sports and cultural fields, ensuring the sustainability of projects and providing venues for diverse activities.

Khimji Ramdas' staff in blood donation effort

Reaffirming its commitment to community well-being, Khimji Ramdas (KR) partnered with the Department of Blood Bank Services, Ministry of Health (MoH), for its annual blood donation drive. Through this initiative, Khimji Ramdas staff, their families, and friends came forward to voluntarily donate blood, helping to maintain vital reserves for hospitals and patients in need.

A long-standing supporter of the MoH Blood Drive, Khimji Ramdas has actively contributed to this life-saving cause since the 1970s. The initiative aligns with the company's corporate social responsibility, ensuring that hospitals across the country have access to a consistent supply of blood, particularly during Ramadan, when the demand is at its highest.

"A consistent supply of blood



is the need of the hour, especially during Ramadan," said Anil Khimji, Director of Khimji Ramdas. "We are proud to have consistently backed MoH blood drives for decades, reinforcing our unwavering support for public health. We extend our gratitude to the dedicated doctors and their support staff for their invaluable contributions to community care."

Dr Zainab Salem al Araiimi, Director of the Blood Bank Services Department at MoH, acknowledged the commitment of Khimji Ramdas in fostering a culture of voluntary blood donation. "We appreciate the diligent efforts of the Khimji Ramdas staff and management for their ongoing support for a united and compassionate society, driven by steadfast volunteerism."

BYD Qin Plus Classic hybrid bold, futuristic

This Ramadan, drive the future of automotive technology with BYD's exciting Ramadan offer. Embark on a lifetime of experiences with unbeatable prices and incredible benefits on the Qin Plus Classic, starting at just RO6,790.

To further enhance your BYD experience this month, enjoy stress-free service perks for up to five years and 50,000km when you buy a Qin Plus Classic. Additionally, get extra perks like PHEV chargers, and first-year free insurance. All customers are also entitled to participate in the Raffle Draw for a chance to win a BYD Qin Plus Classic. Unlock endless possibilities and enjoy more value for money before the offer ends on April 24.

Designed on BYD's groundbreaking DM-i Super Hybrid technology, the Qin Plus Classic allows you to save on fuel and cover more range. Experience an unmatched fuel economy of 3.8



litre per 100km and an impressive performance output, going from 0-100km per hour in just 7.3 seconds with 194 hp. The 1.5L engine, combined with an EHS electric motor, provides swift acceleration and seamless power delivery.

Designed to impress, the visually stunning exterior of the Qin Plus Classic speaks the Dragon Face language, blending strength, power, and elegance. It

features 17-inch alloy wheels and LED taillights on the dynamic waistline.

Inside, the driver-focused cockpit seamlessly combines aesthetics and functionality. The car is equipped with an 8.8-inch LCD driver dashboard, an advanced infotainment system on the 10.1-inch 8-core rotatable screen, providing seamless smartphone integration, navigation, and entertainment - all at

the driver's fingertips.

BYD prioritises safety, and the Qin Plus Classic is no exception. The sedan is equipped with a suite of intelligent safety features, including Automatic Emergency Braking (AEB), Lane Departure Warning (LDW), and Adaptive Cruise Control (ACC). Reinforced with a high-strength body structure, the Qin Plus ensures maximum protection for all passengers.

NBO hosts iftar for customers

The National Bank of Oman (NBO) hosted an exclusive iftar gathering at Crowne Plaza Hotel Muscat, bringing together its Private Banking and Sadara Priority Banking customers.

The exclusive gathering served as a platform for NBO's leadership to engage directly with its top-tier customers, fostering meaningful connections and strengthening relationships.

Commenting on the gathering, Ali Mustafa al Lawati, Assistant General Manager & Head of Private Banking and Segments, said, "This iftar

gathering confirms our deep appreciation for our clients who have chosen NBO's Private Banking and Sadara Priority Banking as their trusted banking partner. We are continually striving to strengthen our ties with our customers by enhancing our services and providing exceptional solutions designed to meet their evolving needs."

Through its exclusive Private Banking and Sadara Priority Banking services, NBO provides customers with a range of personalised services, including wealth management advice.

AGAE promises 'elevated driving experience' with Changan

Changan Oman is pleased to introduce an exclusive Ramadan offer for its prestigious UNI Series, delivering unparalleled benefits to customers looking for a premium driving experience.

The offer - which began on February 20, will continue till April 20, during which buyers of the UNI-K, UNI-T, UNI-Sport, and UNI-V models can enjoy a host of complimentary perks, making this the ideal time to upgrade to a premium Changan vehicle.

During the promotional period, all UNI Series buyers will receive free first-year registration for private use and complimentary first-year insurance, valid in Oman and the UAE. Customers selecting commercial registration or insurance can pay the dif-



ference to benefit from this offer.

In addition, Changan Oman is offering a free five-year or 105,000km periodic maintenance package for UNI Series buyers, covering only routine maintenance as per the manu-

facturer's guidelines. This service package, available exclusively at Changan's authorized service centers, ensures optimal vehicle performance and long-term reliability.

Adding to the appeal, every UNI Series buyer will receive

complimentary window tinting and ceramic coating, applied at Changan's service centres, ensuring both enhanced aesthetics and lasting protection.

Furthermore, all UNI Series models come with an extended six-year manufacturer's warranty with unlimited mileage, offering unparalleled peace of mind and confidence in every journey.

Changan Oman is also offering exclusive financing solutions to help customers upgrade to a UNI Series model effortlessly. With a 20% down payment, salaried individuals can avail of financing options for up to six years, subject to bank approvals.

With monthly installments starting at just RO192 for the UNI-K 2.0 Turbo 8AT 4WD Royal, this offer makes it easier

than ever to step into a premium driving experience.

Changan Oman invites customers to visit its showrooms and take advantage of this remarkable Ramadan offer before it concludes on April 20. With exceptional benefits, attractive financing options, and an extensive lineup of vehicles, this is the perfect opportunity for customers to drive home their dream Changan model.

Arabian Gulf Automobiles and Equipment (AGAE) offers state-of-the-art showrooms located in Qurm, Mawaleh, Suhar, Ibri and Salalah, along with additional new showrooms in Nizwa, Barka and Sur.

In addition, AGAE has established 4 service centres across Oman.

Greenland parties unite to reject Trump’s annexation plans

Nuuk, Greenland - All five parties in Greenland’s parliament have united to reject US President Donald Trump’s calls to take over the strategically important Arctic island.

“We, all party leaders, cannot accept the repeated statements on annexation and control of Greenland,” the parties said in a joint statement posted on Facebook. “We ... find this conduct unacceptable to friends and al-

lies in a defence alliance.”

The party leaders released their statement on Friday after Trump repeated his desire to take control of Greenland during a meeting with NATO chief Mark Rutte.

The autonomous island of nearly 57,000 people, who are mostly indigenous Inuit, belongs to Denmark, a NATO ally of the United States.

Greenland’s outgoing prime



Coloured houses covered by snow are seen from the sea in Nuuk

minister, Mute Egede, was even more outspoken than his parliamentary colleagues in rejecting Trump’s comments.

“Our country will never be the USA, and we Greenlanders will never be Americans,” he wrote on Facebook. “Greenland is one country. We are united.”

Egede continues to lead Greenland while awaiting the formation of a new government after his party’s defeat in elec-

tions on Tuesday.

Danish Foreign Minister Lars Lokke Rasmussen also pushed back on Friday on Trump’s latest remarks, saying Greenland could not be taken over by another country.

“If you look at the NATO treaty, the UN charter or international law, Greenland is not open to annexation,” Rasmussen said.

Greenland is a self-governing

territory of Denmark, but remains financially heavily dependent on Denmark, and foreign affairs and defence are run by the government in Copenhagen.

Despite four-fifths of Greenland being covered in snow, its vast natural resources, which include 25 of 34 minerals classified by the European Union as critical, make it particularly attractive economically.

DW

US expels SA's ambassador, saying he hates Donald Trump

Washington, D.C., US - US Secretary of State Marco Rubio said South Africa’s ambassador to Washington is ‘no longer welcome’ in the United States.

Rubio, in a post to X, also accused diplomat Ebrahim Rasool of being a ‘race-baiting politician’ who hated US President Donald Trump.

In his post, Rubio linked to an article from the conservative US media outlet Breitbart, which commented on remarks Rasool made on Friday during a South African think tank’s webinar.

According to Breitbart, Rasool said that white supremacism was motivating Trump’s ‘disrespect’ for the ‘current hegemonic order’ of the world.

Breitbart also said that Rasool noted that Trump’s MAGA (Make America Great Again) movement ‘was a white supremacist response to growing demographic diversity in the United States’.



A person walks past the statue of Nelson Mandela outside the South African Embassy in Washington, D.C.

Expulsion is ‘regrettable’: SA

Meanwhile the South African Presidency called the move to expel Rasool a ‘regrettable’ one and urged all stakeholders to maintain diplomatic decorum.

“The Presidency urges all relevant and impacted stakeholders to maintain the established diplomatic decorum in their engagement with the matter,” it said in a statement on social media, adding that the country

The US has said South Africa’s ambassador Ebrahim Rasool is no longer welcome in the country and accused him of hating both the United States and Donald Trump

remains committed to its relationship with America.

Who is Ebrahim Rasool?

Rasool is a veteran diplomat who previously served as his country’s ambassador to the US from

2010 to 2015 during the Obama administration.

Rasool’s return to Washington in January was already controversial because of his anti-Israel advocacy.

A Muslim, Rasool has been a vocal critic of Israel, calling its

treatment of Palestinians in Gaza a ‘genocide’ and accusing it of apartheid. He was a prominent advocate for South Africa’s case against Israel at the International Court of Justice.

Before Rubio’s post on X, news site Semafor Africa had already reported that Ebrahim-Rasool was ‘struggling to secure crucial meetings in Washington’ with officials at the State Department and key Republican figures.

A victim of South Africa’s apartheid system, Rasool be-

came an active anti-apartheid campaigner, serving time in prison and identifying as a comrade of the country’s first post-apartheid president, Nelson Mandela.

He later became a politician in Mandela’s African National Congress political party.

The expulsion of the ambassador, a highly unusual move by the United States, is the latest development in rising tensions between the Trump administration and South Africa.

DW



US Senate averts government shutdown, passes spending bill

Washington, D.C., US - The United States Senate passed a bill on Friday to fund the government through September 30, narrowly avoiding a shutdown just hours before the deadline, CNN reported.

The bill received bipartisan support, with 10 Democrats, including Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, crossing party lines in a key procedural vote.

The bill now heads to the desk of President Donald Trump, who is expected to sign it into law.

Schumer defended his decision, arguing that Democrats had only ‘bad options’ when it came to shutting down Trump’s government or accepting the Republican bill that would cut spending to programmes like veterans’ health care or Washington, D.C. firefighters and police, CNN reported.

“I believe it is the best way to

minimise the harm that the Trump administration will do to the American people,” Schumer argued in defence of his decision during remarks on the Senate floor. “Clearly, this is a Hobson’s choice. The CR is a bad bill, but as bad as the CR is, I believe allowing Donald Trump to take even much more power via a government shutdown is a far worse option.”

The bill passed by a vote of 54 to 46.

Schumer faced backlash from his party members over crossing party lines to vote for the bill. The New York lawmaker defended himself by saying: “My caucus and I are in sync.”

Schumer told CNN that he ‘always knew there would be disagreements’, but maintained that a ‘government shutdown would be far worse’ than voting for the GOP-led measure.

ANI

DR Congo’s army struggles against the smaller M23 rebel movement

Kinshasa, DR Congo - Since January, the M23 rebel movement has seized Goma and Bukavu - two key cities in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) - and since set up to govern for the long term in the regions under its control.

The Congolese armed forces (FARDC) comprised around 135,000 soldiers in 2022, according to the International Institute for Strategic Studies, although experts believe this figure has since risen.

The United Nations estimates that M23 has only a few thousand fighters, supported by around 4,000 Rwandan soldiers.

FARDC’s internal struggles

In 2023, Congolese President Felix Tshisekedi more than doubled military spending to US\$794mn - which raises questions about how M23 fighters have managed to gain control of such significant regions of eastern DRC.

“One of the main factors explaining the weakness of the FARDC lies in systemic corruption,” suggested Alain De Neve, a researcher at the Royal Higher Institute for Defence (RHID) in Brussels, a Belgian think tank.

“Numerous reports have

highlighted the disappearance of funds intended for soldiers’ salaries and military logistics,” De Neve added. “This practice explains why troop morale is particularly low and why desertions are recurrent. In some cases, soldiers stationed in the eastern part of the country even resort to looting or extorting local populations in order to survive.”

Ciaran Wrons-Passmann, director of the German Ecumenical Network for Central Africa (ÖNZ), said the FARDC had developed a ‘life of its own’ - becoming a ‘self-service shop’, and providing an ‘opportunity for leaders to enrich themselves’.

What’s more, senior FARDC military officers in eastern DRC have reported commanding significantly more soldiers than they actually do, as Jakob Kerstan, head of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation’s office in Kinshasa, noted.

“Because they then also receive more funding from Kinshasa,” Kerstan said. “The money is mostly distributed via the generals.”

Lack of training, equipment

Citing soldiers’ testimonies, interviews with military officers and a confidential UN memo, the



Rwandan security officers escort members of the FARDC who surrendered in Goma after fighting with M23 rebels

news agency Reuters has described FARDC as ‘a fighting force hobbled by entrenched problems such as poor pay and corruption that reform efforts have failed to resolve’.

Although Tshisekedi announced improved pay for soldiers as part of military reforms, Kerstan pointed out that these wages paled in comparison to those of Eastern European mercenaries, who ‘were paid tens of thousands of euros per month’.

So, ‘you work with other players who you think are better suited. That undermines the esprit de corps’, explained Wrons-Passmann.

According to De Neve, an-

other major issue for the FARDC is the ‘chronic deficit in training and equipment - unlike M23, which benefits from structured training and combat tactics well-adapted to the mountainous terrain of North Kivu’.

In contrast, the FARDC is highly outdated and inefficient in terms of technology and logistics, Kerstan pointed out.

“Kinshasa sometimes doesn’t know where parts of the army are traveling in eastern Congo,” he said. “The army is sometimes coordinated via Whatsapp, which makes it extremely difficult for Kinshasa to give clear instructions that are then implemented on the ground.”

Cronyism and fear of a coup

The government shows an ‘unwillingness to delegate real military power to competent officers’, said De Neve, who pointed out that cronyism is widespread.

“Military commanders are not always selected based on their competence, but rather according to their loyalty to the regime. This leads to poor tactical and operational decisions.”

The DR Congo appears to struggle with recruiting loyal military officers.

“There has been a lot of rotation in the chiefs of staff and also in the intelligence services,” said

Wrons-Passmann. “This shows that (Tshisekedi) has not found the right personnel to implement his ideas, if he has any.”

“Instead of being reformed into a professional force, the national army has absorbed former warlords, but also their own networks of loyalty,” De Neve added. “This phenomenon has led to the existence of parallel chains of command.”

Army’s legacy of division

Even the late former president Mobutu Sese Seko ‘did not want the army to become too strong, for fear of a coup d’état, and played generals off against each other’, Kerstan explained.

“In principle, the army was never there to take over national defence,” said Wrons-Passmann. “Even under Mobutu, priority was given to the presidential guard.”

Under Mobutu’s successors, Laurent and Joseph Kabila, the army was infiltrated by Rwanda, among other nations.

“That is also the reason why the government is now so reluctant to negotiate with M23,” said Jakob Kerstan. “Because they are afraid that they will be infiltrated.”

“Don’t forget that this army was led at the beginning, after the fall of Mobutu, by James

Kabarebe, a Rwandan military officer who is now under sanctions from the United States,” Congolese government spokesman Patrick Muyaya told DW. “After the Sun City Agreement (a pact signed by the combatants in the region in 2002) ...we mixed all those (from the) military coming from the Rwandan side. When you mix all this, it becomes something very complicated.”

Crucial influence of Rwanda’s army

The army had been ‘betrayed from within’, Tshisekedi told his supporters. “My predecessor spent 18 years in power without rebuilding the army,” the president told the US daily *The New York Times*. Some members of the armed forces lacked a ‘sense of duty’ to the nation, Tshisekedi’s office said.

“One of the key elements explaining the FARDC’s difficulty in defeating M23 lies in the military support from Rwanda,” said De Neve.

Additionally, Rwanda’s army is ‘extremely well organised’, as Wrons-Passmann noted.

The DRC is now working on reforming its armed forces, said Muyaya - but it’s not happening quickly.

DW

Displaced Palestinians struggle to find water during holy Ramadan

Gaza City, Palestine - Palestinians are fasting during the holy month of Ramadan with hopes of water coming to refugee camps in western Khan Younis in the Gaza Strip.

The already scarce water supply has worsened due to the Israeli destruction and blockade during the genocidal war in Gaza.

The crisis is particularly severe in the Baten al-Sameen area of Khan Younis, where thousands of displaced Palestinians live in tents under harsh weather conditions.

Daily struggle for water

Palestinians must walk for miles every day to access water, which often lasts just one day.

The water supply reaches the area every three to four days through a local pipeline, forcing residents to hike tens of kilometres to get water on a daily basis.

On Wednesday, the Union of Gaza Strip Municipalities warned of a severe health and environmental crisis in the enclave, citing Israel's continued denial of electricity and water supplies. It urged the international community to immediately intervene.

"Under the ongoing humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip as a result of 16 months of Israeli aggression, we stress the urgent need for a permanent water and electricity supply, especially after the disruption of the central desalination plant due to a power



The already scarce water supply has worsened due to the Israeli destruction and blockade

cut by the (Israeli) occupation," it said in a statement.

The union warned that the cutting off of electricity at the desalination plant has disrupted essential services, putting public health at risk by threatening the spread of contagious diseases.

Mohammad Thabet, a spokesman for the Gaza Electricity Distribution Company, said on Tuesday that Israel provided

the enclave with only 5 megawatts of electricity since November before it cut off power entirely.

He said the enclave's actual needs for electricity are estimated at around 500 megawatts per hour. Israel's Minister of Energy and Infrastructure, Eli Cohen, ordered the Israel Electric Corporation to stop transmitting electricity to Gaza 'immediately',

Israeli public broadcaster KAN said on Sunday.

Palestinian Khitai Abu Aiyyah, 51, mother of five, told Anadolu that the water does not reach them regularly, and she relies on a small line to meet her family's needs for water daily.

Although she is obliged to walk long distances during the fasting month of Ramadan and to carry buckets back to fulfil her

daily needs, her family is still suffering from a lack of drinking water.

Health crisis

The lack of clean water is also taking a toll on the health of patients. Samar Zourob, a 45-year-old Palestinian woman suffering from cancer, struggles with the water shortage, which complicates her treatment.

Zourob said there is not enough regular water for cleaning and drinking, which are essential for her health and treatment.

In addition to the shortage, displaced families in refugee camps are also facing shortages of food, medicine and health care while living in tents that offer little protection from severe weather conditions.

Crisis exacerbated by blockade

Israel has destroyed Gaza's infrastructure during its 16-month onslaught, turning access to clean water into a distant dream for Palestinians. As Israel continues a blockade of the enclave and prevents the supply of electricity and water, Palestinians face a human tragedy of thirst, hunger and poverty.

Israel stopped humanitarian aid from entering Gaza last week, prompting warnings from local and human rights groups of a return to widespread hunger for the population.

The first phase of a three-phase ceasefire deal, which lasted 42 days, ended in early March without Israel agreeing to move to the second phase or halt the war.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu seeks to extend the first phase of the prisoner exchange to secure the release of more Israeli captives without fulfilling military or humanitarian obligations outlined in the agreement, appeasing hardliners in his government.

The Palestinian resistance group Hamas, however, rejects that approach and insists that Israel abide by the ceasefire terms, urging mediators to push for immediate negotiations on the second phase, which includes a full Israeli withdrawal and an end to the war.

Anadolu Agency



Hamas takes 'positive step' to release captive

Gaza City, Palestine - Hamas announced late on Friday that it had taken a 'positive step' by expressing its intention to release Israeli soldier Edan Alexander, who also holds American citizenship.

In a statement, Hamas spokesperson Hazem Qassem told Anadolu: "We have taken a positive step by announcing our intention to release Israeli soldier Edan Alexander, who holds American citizenship."

"This is not about new or side agreements, but rather about proceeding with the implementation of the ceasefire agreement in its various phases," the spokesman said.

He accused Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of 'rejecting any framework that could lead to finalising the ceasefire deal due to fears of his government collapsing'.

Qassem called on the US administration to 'work on pressuring the occupation to abide by the terms of the ceasefire agreement in its various phases'.

He added: "Threats and at-

tempts to pressure the Palestinian negotiator will not yield positive results. We look forward to the release of all captives and to reaching a permanent ceasefire in Gaza."

US envoy for Middle East, Steve Witkoff said Trump has made it clear that Hamas will either release hostages immediately, or pay a severe price

Qassem also stated that Netanyahu is 'starving the people of Gaza along with the Israeli captives and exploiting the hopes of hostage families to keep his government in power'.

Earlier on Friday, a statement from the office of the US presidential envoy for the Middle East, Steve Witkoff, and the National Security Council, published by the White House, stated that

'President (Donald) Trump has made it clear that Hamas will either release hostages immediately, or pay a severe price'.

On Wednesday evening in Doha, Qatar, Witkoff and National Security Council Senior Director for the Middle East and North Africa Eric Trager presented a 'bridge' proposal which would 'allow time to negotiate a framework for a permanent ceasefire', it said.

Under the proposal, the statement said Hamas would release living hostages in exchange for prisoners in accordance with previous formulas.

The terms of the proposal suggest that it contradicts the core of the recent agreement and aligns with Israel's desire to extend the first phase of the agreement rather than moving on to negotiations for the second phase as originally agreed.

On Thursday, Hamas announced the resumption of negotiations with mediators in Doha regarding a ceasefire agreement in the Gaza Strip.

Anadolu Agency

European FMs reiterate support for Ukraine

Quebec, Canada - European foreign ministers reiterated support for Ukraine on Friday following a G7 meeting in Canada.

"We all agree we need a just and lasting peace. We all agree that the ball is now firmly in Russia's court. There is a ceasefire deal on the table. Russia must agree to end the fighting," British Foreign Secretary David Lammy wrote on X.

Antonio Tajani from Italy affirmed that he talked with his counterparts individually to achieve peace in Ukraine and mutual collaborations with G7 countries.

He described relations between the US and Italy as 'solid' and 'forward-looking', underlining they agreed that Europe also needs to invest more in defence.

"I reiterated the need for dialogue to avoid trade wars," he wrote on X.

Putin wants Trump to believe that Putin is interested in a deal," commented Anton Barbashin, a political scientist and editor-in-chief of the analysis website Riddle Russia. Putin does not want to irritate Trump, as Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky did. Instead, Barbashin explains, the Russian president 'wants to push all the necessary buttons to get Trump to talk to him and



He said, with his French counterpart, Jean-Noel Barrot, they reiterated the 'importance' of working on European 'competitiveness' and a 'peaceful future' by strengthening defence capabilities in conjunction with NATO.

"The EU must remain united to deal effectively with major international crises," he said.

Tajani stated they he had a

'great synergy' with his British counterpart 'on support for Ukraine, Middle East stability and combating irregular migration'.

German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock affirmed her solidarity with Canada. "We have got your back, Melanie Joly," she wrote about the Canadian foreign minister.

"The G7 was created by France 50 years ago. It is meet-

ing this year in Canada, where I have come to defend our interests and convey our vision of the World," French Foreign Minister Jean-Noel Barrot wrote on X.

The foreign ministers of Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the UK, the US, as well as EU foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas, met in Quebec's Charlevoix on March 12-14.

Anadolu Agency

Putin wants to expand peace negotiations

Berlin, Germany - Vladimir Putin was keen to get something off his chest right away. Before even responding to the proposal for a ceasefire in the war against Ukraine, the Russian president addressed 'words of gratitude' to US President Donald Trump - 'for paying so much attention to the Ukraine settlement', he said in Moscow on March 13.

This was not a coincidence. "Putin wants Trump to believe that Putin is interested in a deal," commented Anton Barbashin, a political scientist and editor-in-chief of the analysis website Riddle Russia. Putin does not want to irritate Trump, as Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky did. Instead, Barbashin explains, the Russian president 'wants to push all the necessary buttons to get Trump to talk to him and



Russian President Vladimir Putin

strike a deal'.

However, Putin's idea of what this deal should look like may be different to Trump's. The US president wants there to be an initial 30-day suspension of fighting between Ukraine and Russia. Putin indicated that he supported this, but added that there were 'questions we need to

discuss'. What questions does he mean, and what do they reveal about how Russia plans to proceed?

Putin's objections, which he described as 'questions', are in fact explicit demands. The Ukrainian soldiers still fighting on Russian territory in the Kursk region should surrender. Ukraine should not be allowed to mobilise any new soldiers during the ceasefire. And the West must stop delivering arms to Kyiv during this period.

According to Putin, the ceasefire should 'lead to a long-term peace and eliminate the causes of the conflict'. This vague phrasing is an attempt to steer the negotiations toward Moscow's long-term goals in Ukraine.

"Russia is aiming for a ceasefire that would lead directly to

peace talks," said Anton Barbashin. Consequently, Moscow wants to secure several concessions upfront, including confirmation that Ukraine will never become part of NATO - and Barbashin says it wants this confirmation 'from both NATO and Ukraine'.

Furthermore, Putin's publicly stated war aims include a demand for Ukraine's complete withdrawal from the regions of Luhansk, Donetsk, Zaporizhzhia, and Kherson, which are currently only partially occupied by Russian forces. Kremlin-aligned experts believe Putin's conditions might be acceptable to Trump. "The US may well agree to the demand for an arms embargo," political scientist Sergei Markov wrote on his Telegram channel.

DW

Carney unveils Canada's Cabinet

The new PM significantly reduced the number of ministers from 36 to 23

Hamilton, Canada - Prime Minister Mark Carney unveiled his 23-member Cabinet on Friday during a swearing-in ceremony in Ottawa, significantly reducing the number of ministers from the 36-member Cabinet under former Prime Minister Justin Trudeau.

The shake-up retains key figures while introducing new faces, signalling a focus on 'immediate action' and protecting Canadian workers.

The newly announced Cabinet primarily consists of returning ministers, while 18 ministers from Trudeau's government were not included in Carney's administration.

In a notable restructuring, Carney eliminated the position of deputy prime minister and merged several ministerial roles to streamline governance.

"This team reflects the ambition that makes Canada strong and it will work each day to protect workers, families, and businesses," the Prime Minister's Office said in a statement.

Carney emphasised his administration's commitment to efficiency, stating: "We are changing how things work, so our government can deliver to Canadians faster - and we have an experienced team that is made to meet the moment we



Canada's new prime minister Mark Carney seen on stage during election night, shortly before the results are announced, at Rogers Centre, in Ottawa, Ontario, Canada, on March 9

We are changing how things work, so our government can deliver to Canadians faster - and we have an experienced team that is made to meet the moment we are in.

MARK CARNEY

are in. Our government is united and strong, and we are getting right to work."

Among the key appointments, Dominic LeBlanc was named Minister of International Trade and Intergovernmental Affairs,

while also serving as President of the King's Privy Council for Canada.

Melanie Joly retained her role as Foreign Minister and additionally took over as Minister of International Development,

replacing Ahmed Hussen.

Former Innovation Minister Francois-Philippe Champagne was appointed Finance Minister, while Anita Anand assumed the role of Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry. Defence Minister Bill Blair was among those who retained their positions.

Jonathan Wilkinson, known for his experience in environmental policy, was named Minister of Energy and Natural Resources. Former Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland took on

the role of Minister of Transport and Internal Trade.

Kamal Khara replaced Mark Holland as Minister of Health, as Holland announced earlier that he would not seek re-election. Public Safety Minister David McGuinty remained in his position, while Rachel Bendayan was appointed Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship.

New additions to the Cabinet include Arielle Kayabaga, who was named Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of

Democratic Institutions, and Elisabeth Briere, who was appointed Minister of Veterans Affairs and Minister responsible for the Canada Revenue Agency.

Carney emphasised that his Cabinet is designed for swift action and responsiveness to the needs of Canadians.

"This team is built for immediate action and focused on protecting Canadian workers, supporting their families, and growing this great country," he said.

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India: Grenade lobbed at temple

Amritsar, India - A blast occurred at Thakurdwara Temple in Khandwala, Amritsar, late last night after two bike-borne men lobbed an object, suspected to be an explosive, at the temple.

According to eyewitnesses two young men riding a motorcycle were seen lobbing a suspicious object towards the temple. CCTV footage has captured the incident. No injuries were reported, and police personnel were immediately present at the scene to investigate the incident.

Meanwhile, Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann stated that there were many attempts to disturb the peace in the state.

Mann also said that there are attempts to show Punjab as a disturbed state.

"There are always many attempts to disturb the peace in Punjab. Drugs, gangsters, and extortion are part of it, and there are attempts to show that Punjab has become a disturbed state... During the festival of Holi, in other states, the police had to use a lathi charge during processions. But such things do not happen in Punjab... The law-and-order situation in Punjab is good," the Punjab CM said.

Punjab Minister Kuldeep Singh Dhaliwal said that two suspects have been identified behind the explosion.

ANI

Mission launched to bring back astronauts Williams, Wilmore

Houston, US - SpaceX and NASA have launched a mission to bring back US astronauts Sunita Williams and Butch Wilmore from the International Space Station (ISS), where they have been stranded for nine months.

The lift-off took place at 7:03 ET on Friday, with a Falcon 9 rocket carrying a Dragon spacecraft on the Crew-10 mission.

The mission also launched four crew members to the ISS: NASA astronauts Anne McClain and Nichole Ayers, JAXA (Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency) astronaut Takuya Onishi, and Roscosmos cosmonaut Kirill Peskov to the International Space Station.

Crew-10 is the 10th crew rotation mission under SpaceX's human space transportation system and the 11th flight with a crew aboard to the ISS station through NASA's Commercial



Sunita Williams

Crew Program, including the Demo-2 test flight.

Sunita Williams and Butch Wilmore have been stranded on the ISS for nine months after reaching there in June last year. They were supposed to stay there for about a week.

Ahead of the launch, US Secretary of Defence Pete Hegseth shared a video message ex-



Butch Wilmore

pressing support for NASA's SpaceX Crew-10, as per Fox News.

In a video posted on X, Hegseth stated: "I just want to take a brief moment to say we are praying for you." He added, "We wish you Godspeed, and we look forward to welcoming you all home soon."

ANI

Indian scholar in US self-deports

Washington, D.C., US - Ranjani Srinivasan, an Indian national and a doctoral student at Columbia University, has voluntarily left the United States after her visa was revoked for allegedly 'advocating violence and terrorism'.

In a statement on Friday, US Secretary of Homeland Security Kristi Noem said that Srinivasan, a student in Urban Planning at Columbia University, self-deported using the CBP Home App.

"Today, Secretary of Homeland Security Kristi Noem announced that one of the Columbia students who had her student visa revoked for advocating for violence and terrorism self-deported using the CBP Home App and ICE arrested a Palestinian student for overstaying her expired F-1 visa," according to a release by the US Department of Homeland Security (DHS).

The US Department of State revoked Srinivasan's visa on March 5, alleging her involve-



US Secretary of Homeland Security Kristi Noem

ment in 'activities supporting Hamas'.

"Ranjani Srinivasan, a citizen and national of India, entered the United States on a F-1 student visa as a doctoral student in Urban Planning at Columbia University. Srinivasan was involved in activities supporting Hamas. On March 5, 2025, the Department of State revoked her visa. The Department of Homeland Security has obtained video

footage of her using the CBP Home App to self-deport on March 11," the release stated.

Additionally, Secretary Noem said that holding a US visa is a privilege. "It is a privilege to be granted a visa to live & study in the United States of America. When you advocate for violence and terrorism, that privilege should be revoked, and you should not be in this country. I'm glad to see one of the Columbia

University terrorist sympathisers use the CBP Home app to self-deport," she wrote in a post on X.

In a related case, another stu-

Ranjani Srinivasan's visa was revoked on March 5, alleging her involvement in 'activities supporting Hamas'

UN Secretary-General Guterres assures support for Bangladesh reforms

Dhaka, Bangladesh - UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres on Friday expressed his full support for reforms being initiated by Bangladesh's transitional government.

The UN chief, who arrived in Dhaka on a four-day visit on Thursday, met Bangladesh chief adviser Muhammad Yunus at his Tejgaon office in Dhaka.

Yunus assumed office after a popular uprising forced former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to flee to India last August.

His government has formed six reform commissions to implement necessary changes in the administration and electoral pro-

cess, demanded by the students and civilians who led the uprising.

"I want to express our total commitment to the reform process. We are here to support your reforms. We wish you all the best. Whatever we can do, let us know," the UN chief told Yunus during the hour-long meeting, according to a government statement. "As the country undergoes important reforms and transitions, you can count on the United Nations to help build a sustainable and equitable future for all," Guterres said in a separate post on X.

Before the meeting Yunus, Guterres held talks with



UN Secretary-General Guterres visits Rohingya refugee camps in Bangladesh

Bangladesh foreign adviser Md. Towhid Hossain and Khalilur Rahman, his adviser on Rohingya issues.

The two also addressed the situation in Myanmar's Rakhine state and preparations for the upcoming high-level conference on Rohingya and other minorities in Myanmar.

Guterres, accompanied by Yunus, later visited the border district of Cox's Bazar, in southern Bangladesh, to meet Rohingya refugees and their host communities. Bangladesh is hosting over 1.2mn Rohingya refugees who fled a Myanmar military crackdown in 2017.

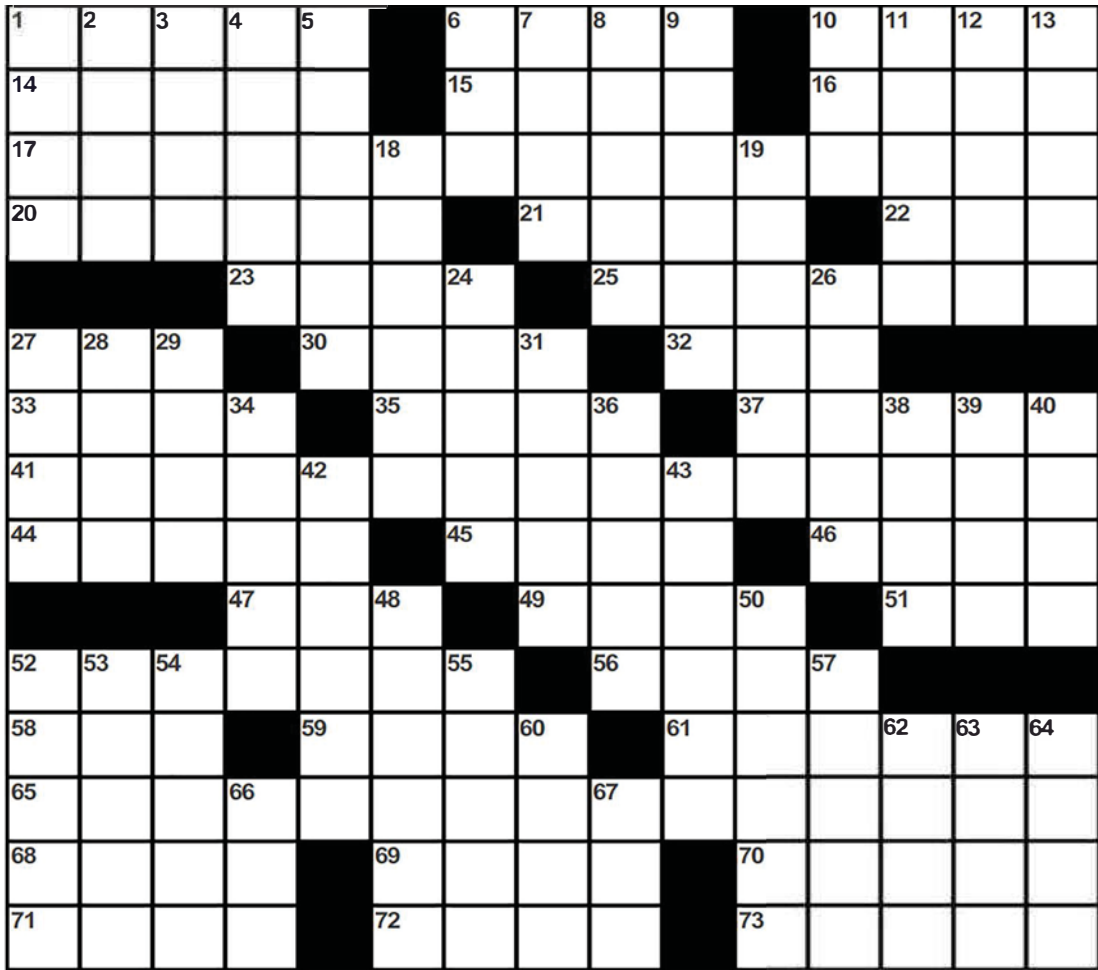
He shared an iftar, the fast-breaking meal, with the refugees and said the UN will do all it can to help prevent food rations being cut for Rohingya refugees in the Bangladesh camps.

The World Food Programme (WFP) recently announced it would halve food rations starting April 1, reducing the per capita allowance from US\$12.50 to US\$6 due to funding shortfalls.

Ahead of Guterres' visit, the Amnesty International called on the international community to urgently provide the necessary support to Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh.

Anadolu Agency

DAILY CROSSWORD



- ACROSS**
- 1) Alleviated
 - 6) Oscar presenter's take
 - 10) 100 centavos
 - 14) Sweet tropical fruit
 - 15) Sky box?
 - 16) Like a bug in a rug
 - 17) Where the Professor and Mary Ann were stranded?
 - 20) "A Streetcar Named Desire" role
 - 21) Berth place?
 - 22) Tropical instrument, briefly
 - 23) Obi, e.g.
 - 25) Generous monetary gift
 - 27) Weep
 - 30) Jab with a knife
 - 32) Deception
 - 33) Desirable quality
 - 35) Italian currency, once
 - 37) Noblemen
 - 41) Melodramatic one's comment
 - 44) Just not done
 - 45) Foot, to a poet
 - 46)_ lily
 - 47) Drama division
 - 49) Cold cuts shop
 - 51) Create seams
 - 52) Manhattan area
 - 56) Beach, essentially
 - 58) Wife of John Lennon
 - 59) Pigeon sounds
 - 61) Pummel
 - 65) Like one reluctant to get married?
 - 68) "Cogito, _ sum"
 - 69) PC maker
 - 70) Disclose
 - 71) Flower part
 - 72) Some evergreens
 - 73) Checks for typos
- DOWN**
- 1) They can be boosted or inflated
 - 2) Mom's sibling, to you
 - 3) Like Solomon
 - 4) Escapees from Pandora's box
 - 5) "Big D"
 - 6) Schuss, e.g.
 - 7) Elizabethan headpieces
 - 8) Ever
 - 9) Pleasantly cheerful
 - 10) Telepathy, e.g.
 - 11) Follow in sequence
 - 12) Makes a pouty face
 - 13) S-shaped curves
 - 18) "As my final point ..."
 - 19) Comparatively quick
 - 24) Aristide's land
 - 26) First and reverse, e.g.
 - 27) Roasting stick
 - 28) Earthenware pot
 - 29) Tulip or lily planting
 - 31) Like some humor
 - 34) Brown ermine
 - 36) High points
 - 38) Dark breads
 - 39) Balcony section
 - 40) Frosty's constitution
 - 42) Excessively embellished
 - 43) Erode
 - 48) Bilateral
 - 50) Draw a breath
 - 52) Double agents
 - 53) Dead to the world
 - 54) Artful move
 - 55) Present
 - 57) Like prunes
 - 60) Cold-weather meal
 - 62) _ Spumante
 - 63) Coin opening
 - 64) Cluckers
 - 66) Champagne title
 - 67) Mins. comprise them

NOTE PAD

S A I G A H E M E N J A B
A V O I D A D O R E U T E
T E N N I S C O U R T D O N
L E U P A I L S I N G L E
E A R L Y O L D S T A L E
E N C O R E P O U T V A R
H E E L L E S S S E M I
A P B S D A N U V U L A E
D R E S S E R E R I N
A Y N T R I A L P E R I O D
S E C A L A C K W A N N A
H R H B Y T E S S Y N O D

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE

ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

A dear one has been wandering around in a fog for weeks now, not quite knowing what to do and not sure of who to ask for advice about their dilemma. You understand the situation, so don't wait any longer for them to ask. Offer. It's time to pull out your legendary way with words and use it to comfort them. A bit of advice wouldn't hurt, and maybe that nice, solid shoulder of yours too.

LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

Your own personal magic is running on high today. You've been casting spells on one and all for the past 24 hours, and you haven't even done it deliberately. That certainly explains why your sweetheart has been simultaneously wonderful and insanely jealous, doesn't it? Take the night off from everyone else and give your sweetie some necessary reassurance.

SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

The past few weeks have been good. Tiring, but good. And the future looks to be even better. You certainly have earned this, and you're going to enjoy it to the max. So if a dear one has made some plans that are a bit different than what you usually do, don't argue with them. Variety is the spice of life, and when has this person ever let you down? Go ahead. Be brave and try it.

TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

Things are finally coming together just the way you'd planned and dreamed. Now, aren't you glad you didn't totally lose it and get someone angry, or angrier than they already were? You've also had time to perfect a battle plan to make a certain dream into reality. Turns out there really is something to be said for sitting back and waiting, and it seems you're the expert in that department.

VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

As nostalgic as you're feeling at the moment, it would be easy to let yourself get down in the dumps. But what purpose would that serve? We all think we'd do things differently if we had the chance, but why dwell on changing the past? Everything you've ever done has made you the person you are today. Be glad for everything that's happened, good and bad, and look to the future.

CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

Got sick days coming? Well, you might want to think about taking one, because anything that even remotely resembles work will be quite a challenge today. Daydreaming, sighing, and reminiscing about the past, however, will suit you just fine. If you do have to put in your time, be sure you're doing something you can perform on autopilot, because concentrating will certainly be a tall order.

GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

It's time to shift gears. Put down all the work-related or electronic devices. In fact, don't just put them down. Put them away. Far away. You need time now for nothing but recreation, and since you've been working so hard lately, you may also need help loosening up a bit. Of course, you haven't been out of the circuit for all that long, so it won't be tough to find a playmate.

LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

If you've been thinking lately about how to bring in a bit of extra cash on the side, an opportunity is about to come your way, and you really should take it. Your intuition will be especially keen for the next couple of days and will tell you what to do. All you have to do is listen. Forget what you've been told, and forget the rules. Follow your gut. When has it ever let you down?

AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

It's safe to come out now, and almost safe to make plans again. But you might want to give anything important, anything you really need to come out the way you've planned it, another day or two. Before you set your most important plans down in writing, spend some time dreaming them up. That's really what today is perfect for anyway. The good news is you might even come up with some that won't stay just a dream forever.

CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

Oh, my. You're a bit angry today, aren't you? Or are you just frustrated with trying to get things done and not being able to come even close? Well, back away from any sharp objects, and try not to take this out on the ones you love. They're probably quite frustrated too, especially if they've been trying to get together with you and have run into some roadblocks of their own.

SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

You don't do anything halfway, do you? That goes for love, in particular, and it goes double now. So when you realize you've been tearing up an awful lot today, and maybe even doing a fair amount of sniffing, don't worry. You won't be feeling like this for long. Call together the ones you love and tell them how you feel. If you have to be nostalgic, don't waste it on television.

PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

The spirit of compromise is alive and well with you as its representative right now. You realize that cooperating is both more efficient and more fun than competing at the moment, and you're building alliances that will prove useful down the road. Any kind of conflict seems to dissipate in your presence as you diplomatically create a completely different kind of atmosphere in which all points of view are valid.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

- 01. Which of these is primarily known as a scientist?**
- A. Léon Foucault
 - B. Guy Fawkes
 - C. Bob Fosse
 - D. Fouad Abiad
- 02. Freestyle swimming means...?**
- A. Front crawl
 - B. Any style for individuals, any style but breaststroke, butterfly, or backstroke for medley relays
 - C. Dog paddle
 - D. Backstroke
- 03. What does "safari" mean in its parent language?**
- A. Voyage
 - B. Overland journey or travel
 - C. Adventure
 - D. Hunt
- Answers: 1. A 2. B 3. B

KIDS COLOURING



BOGGLER

A	O	E	O
T	O	S	U
O	B	N	L
Y	R	B	S

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

SOLUTION

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

DO YOU SUDOKU?

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

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

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	9	8	6	2	4	1	8	7
2	1	8	7	5	9	6	4	3
4	6	7	3	1	8	9	5	2
6	7	1	4	9	2	5	8	3
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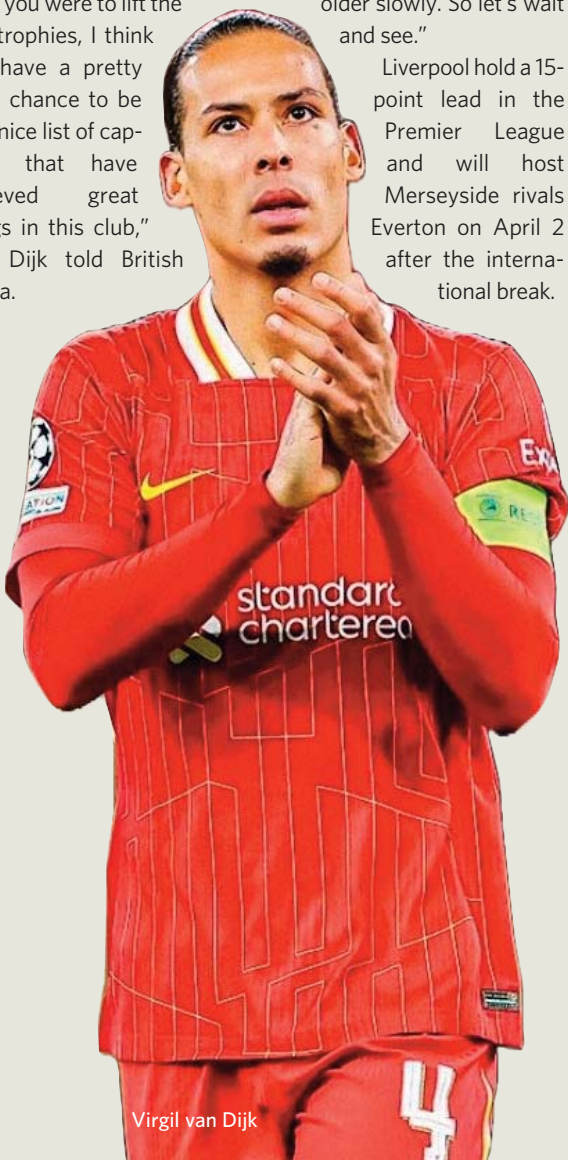
Van Dijk seeks place among great Liverpool captains

Liverpool, England - Liverpool's Virgil van Dijk said winning a second League Cup trophy on Sunday against Newcastle United would give him a place among the captains who had achieved great things at the Premier League club.

The Dutch defender scored the winner in the 118th minute against Chelsea at Wembley last year, securing his first trophy as skipper.

The 33-year-old replaced Jordan Henderson as captain in 2023 under Jurgen Klopp and has retained the armband under new manager Arne Slot.

"If you were to lift the two trophies, I think you have a pretty good chance to be on a nice list of captains that have achieved great things in this club," Van Dijk told British media.



Virgil van Dijk

"That's obviously a big dream of mine since I became the captain of the club. We're not there, we have a lot of hard work still to do.

Van Dijk's contract expires in June but he says he has not been fazed by the uncertainty over an extension.

"I feel I am in one of the best shapes in my career and you have been seeing that," he said.

"I enjoy playing, I enjoy leading the boys out, I enjoy being there for each and every one of them and I enjoy the responsibility more than ever, maybe because I am getting older slowly. So let's wait and see."

Liverpool hold a 15-point lead in the Premier League and will host Merseyside rivals Everton on April 2 after the international break.

EYEING A NEW DAWN

Newcastle seek to end trophy drought as they take on Liverpool in League Cup final

London, England - Long-suffering Newcastle United fans flock every day to pay homage to the statues outside St James' Park stadium, which looms like a cathedral over the city centre.

The bronze of Jackie Milburn is especially cherished by those with long enough memories while younger generations are more familiar with the one depicting record goalscorer Alan Shearer in his trademark arm aloft celebration.

Another one immortalises former manager Bobby Robson's memorable five-year reign at his boyhood club.

But it's the one of Milburn, affectionately known on Tyneside as 'Wor Jackie', which epitomises the connection the club has with the city's population and just how long ago it was that they actually had the chance to celebrate a major trophy.

Milburn, whose record total of goals Shearer surpassed in 2006, opened the scoring in the first minute of Newcastle's 3-1 victory over Manchester City in the 1955 FA Cup final.

It was the club's sixth FA Cup title and third in five years but since then the Magpies have endured decades of false dawns with the only addition to the trophy cabinet the long-defunct Inter-Cities Fairs Cup and layers of dust.

There have been some near

misses and gallant failures.

Former player Kevin Keegan returned like the prodigal son and led the team to consecutive runners-up spots in the Premier League in the mid-90s -- Newcastle famously blowing a 12-point lead in 1995-96 and being pipped by Manchester United.

There were consecutive tame FA Cup final defeats in 1998 and 1999 and two years ago, flushed with money after being bought by Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund, they lost to Manchester United in the League Cup final.

Runaway Premier League leaders and League Cup holders Liverpool represent a formidable hurdle on Sunday, but there is a feeling that underdogs Newcastle are better-prepared than against United and in Sweden's Alexander Isak, they have a striker capable of becoming a new Georgie legend.

Not that the 25-year-old, who has scored 22 goals in 32 appearances this season, is too versed in Newcastle folklore.

"I didn't have too much knowledge, but my football knowledge in general is pretty bad," Isak told reporters on Friday. "Alan Shearer, Papiss Cisse, Demba Ba, that's kind of where it stops.

"I think you find out quite quick about the greats and about the history of the club. And yeah, I'm trying to create my own his-



Liverpool will be wary of the firepower of Newcastle United's Alexander Isak

I always try to give everything that I have on the pitch, to play as a fan, because I know what it means for them. Hopefully everything is going to be good for us on the day

BRUNO GUIMARAES

tory. I'm happy with what I've done so far."

Cup final fever has broken out in Newcastle with school children given permission to ditch the uniform and wear black and white stripes. Thousands upon thou-

sands will board trains for London on Sunday morning hoping for the best.

Captain Bruno Guimaraes says he has dreamt about lifting the trophy since being left in tears two years ago.

"I want tears of happiness this time. Everyone knows how emotional I am," Guimaraes said. "I always try to give everything that I have on the pitch, to play as a fan, because I know what it means for them. Hopefully everything is going to be good for us on the day."

Newcastle have failed to score a goal in their last three finals and the last player to find the net for the club at Wembley was Rob Lee in an FA Cup semi-final against Chelsea almost 25 years ago.

Arsenal excited about Real but 'focused on Chelsea'

London, England - Arsenal are very excited to play reigning champions Real Madrid in the Champions League quarter-finals next month but they will not be distracted from their Premier League duties as they shift their focus to Chelsea, manager Mikel Arteta said on Friday.

Arsenal thrashed PSV Eindhoven 9-3 on aggregate to earn a quarter-final spot against 15-times winners Real Madrid, a team they have played only once before in the competition, knocking the Spanish side out over two legs in the last 16 en route to the 2006 final.

"Fascinating draw, we play the club with the biggest history in the competition," Arteta told reporters. "Very excited to play against them, but before that we have some big matches in the Premier League."

A three-match winless run has left second-placed Arsenal 15 points behind Liverpool as the title race slips away from them and the north London side are now looking over their shoulder with Nottingham Forest and Sunday's opponents Chelsea catching up.

Chelsea are fourth, six points behind Arsenal ahead of the London derby at Emirates Stadium, where the west London side lost 5-0 last season, but Arteta said this time they play a much changed squad under Enzo Maresca. The two sides played out a 1-1 draw at Stamford Bridge earlier this season.



Mikel Arteta

"It's two teams that want to be very dominant in their way of playing, very aggressive in the high press and the way we have to have the ball," Arteta said.

"There is a lot of individual quality on that pitch, so it's about imposing what you want in the direction you want to take the game and keep them very far from their strengths, that's going to be key."

Arteta also said he was "very proud" of 18-year-old Myles Lewis-Skelly earning his first England call-up as he becomes an integral part of an English core at

the club which the Spanish boss said was crucial to their success.

"Culturally, because of our history and we're an English club, to have that DNA that represents the club and having a lot of academy players is very, very positive. So I'm very proud," Arteta said.

Arsenal are still playing without a striker due to season-ending injuries to Gabriel Jesus and Kai Havertz but Arteta received a boost after Gabriel Martinelli returned after a month on the sidelines while Bukayo Saka is also close to full fitness.

Alexander-Arnold out of Reds squad for League Cup final

Liverpool, England - Liverpool boss Arne Slot will not have Trent Alexander-Arnold available when they defend their League Cup title against Newcastle United on Sunday at Wembley in a blow to a squad already missing two defenders through injury.

Alexander-Arnold hobbled off the pitch during Tuesday's Champions League last-16 loss to Paris St Germain with an ankle injury.

"Trent is indeed not available. He will not be there at the final," Slot told reporters on Friday. "But he's still to be assessed for how long it's going to take. We do expect him back before the end of the season."

Slot is hopeful that Ibrahima Konate will be fit to play on Sunday, when Liverpool, who defeated Chelsea in last year's League Cup final, look to hoist their first silverware of the season. Konate was substituted during extra time against PSG and Slot said the centre back would



Trent Alexander-Arnold suffered an ankle injury during during Liverpool's Champions League last-16 defeat to Paris St Germain

Trent is not available. But he's still to be assessed for how long it's going to take. We do expect him back before the end of the season

ARNE SLOT

be assessed after training.

"With Ibou, we expected only it to be that he was tired or he had some cramps so we are hoping and are expecting that he will be ready to play Sunday again," Slot said. "We didn't train yesterday - we had a day off - and the day before was recovery. I expect him to train with us today, but let's see how it is."

'We need to continue with this feeling that we can win games'

Manchester, England - Manchester United's ability to keep their cool after conceding goals in their past two games shows the club has made progress, coach Ruben Amorim said ahead of a Premier League meeting with Leicester City on Sunday.



Ruben Amorim

"I feel that in the last games that we can understand better the idea of what we want to do. We are better understanding the plan for the games," Amorim said. "We are giving the team more time to win and to draw the games."

"Everything is important and

we need to continue with this feeling that we can win games. It doesn't matter the time of rest or the time after to prepare for the next game," Amorim said. "We can do it. We showed against Arsenal that we have to be humble and we (often) forget that."

No place for Barca’s Gavi in Spain squad

Madrid, Spain - Real Madrid defender Raul Asencio has earned his first call-up from Spain manager Luis de la Fuente on Friday for their two-leg Nations League quarter-final against the Netherlands. The 22-year-old Real Madrid academy product has made 14 LaLiga and eight Champions League appearances this season. "Raul was having a fantas-

There are many good players who could be on this list. It's a reflection of the high level of Spanish football. Unfortunately, some are not included, but others are

LUIS DE LA FUENTE

tic season. He had been in lower divisions, but some players speed up their development," De La Fuente said. "I am always in favour of giving opportunities to young people." Barcelona defender Inigo Martinez was included after being left out of Spain's Euro 2024 winning squad. However, Barca midfielder Gavi, who helped Spain in their 2023 Nations League win, was missing from the squad. The 20-year-old Gavi was expected to return to the national team after a 14-month absence due to an ACL injury. De La Fuente said he regretted the absence of many talented players but added that this

are the reigning European and Nations League champions, and making this squad is not easy." Forward Marco Asensio, who has regained form scoring seven goals from eight appearances since joining Aston Villa on loan from Paris St Germain in the mid-season transfer window, was also left out. Spain face Ronald Koeman's Netherlands away on Thursday before returning home for the second-leg in Valencia on March 23. "Of all the games we've coached, this is the first time we've played a double-header, I love playing the second game at home," De La Fuente said.



Gavi was expected to return to the national team after a 14-month absence due to an ACL injury



Thibaut Courtois

COURTOIS RETURNS TO BELGIUM FOLD

Star goalkeeper back in the squad after a long absence

Brussels, Belgium - Goalkeeper Thibaut Courtois will make his return for Belgium in Nations League action later this month after being included on Friday in their 26-man squad to face Ukraine in the two-leg Nations League playoff. Courtois has been absent from the Belgian side for almost two years after a spat in June 2023 with previous coach Domenico Tedesco over the captaincy. It meant the 32-year-old, who has 102 caps for Belgium, sat out last year's European Championship but since Tedesco's sacking, and the appointment of Rudi

Garcia as new coach in January, the Real Madrid goalkeeper has had a change of heart. Friday's squad announcement marked the first for Garcia, who debuts in charge of the side when they meet Ukraine in the playoff tie. The first leg is in Murcia, Spain next Thursday with the return in Genk on March 23. Courtois' imminent return did not sit well with Koen Casteels, who has been first choice goalkeeper in his absence, leading Casteels last Sunday to quit the national team, criticising the decision to accept the former keeper's wish to return. Casteels suggested there

We're starting with a blank slate. I won't see the players until Monday, but we'll talk to the leaders again about what happened

RUDI GARCIA

were other players who were also unhappy with Courtois' behaviour in the spat with Tedesco. Questioned at a press conference about whether Courtois would be asked to apologise for his behaviour, Garcia said: "We're starting with a blank slate. I won't see the players until Monday, but we'll talk to the leaders again about what

happened. But after that, I'm not going to keep dwelling on what happened years ago. Otherwise we won't make any progress." As for the captaincy, which Kevin De Bruyne took over from Eden Hazard after the 2022 World Cup, Garcia said he was yet to make a decision. "I have an idea in my head about that. Kevin, Romelu (Lukaku) and Thibaut are definitely candidates. We will see next week who the leaders are," Garcia added. **Belgium squad:** Goalkeepers: Thibaut Courtois (Real Madrid), Senne Lammens (Royal Antwerp), Matz Sels (Nottingham Forest), Maarten Vandevoordt (RB Leipzig) Defenders: Timothy Castagne

(Fulham), Zeno Debast (Sporting Lisbon), De Cuyper (Club Brugge), Koni De Winter (Genoa), Wout Faes (Leicester City), Brandon Mechele (Club Brugge), Thomas Meunier (Lille), Arthur Theate (Eintracht Frankfurt) **Midfielders:** Kevin De Bruyne (Manchester City), Bryan Heynen (Racing Genk), Jorhy Mokio (Ajax Amsterdam), Nicolas Raskin (Rangers), Youri Tielemans (Aston Villa), Hans Vanaken (Club Brugge) **Forwards:** Charles De Ketelaere (Atalanta), Jeremy Doku (Manchester City), Malick Fofana (Olympique Lyonnais), Romelu Lukaku (Napoli), Dodi Lukebakio (Sevilla), Lois Openda (RB Leipzig), Alexis Saelemaekers (AS Roma), Leandro Trossard (Arsenal).

Depay back in Netherlands squad for Nations League

Amsterdam, Netherlands - Striker Memphis Depay returned to the Netherlands squad for the first time since last year's European Championship when coach Ronald Koeman selected him on Friday for their Nations League quarter-final tie against Spain. Depay's recall comes after Koeman went to Brazil last month to watch Depay in action for Rio de Janeiro's Corinthians. The 31-year-old striker was without a club after his contract at Atletico Madrid ended last season and only resumed playing in October. While he has scored twice in 12 starts in Brazil, his 46 goals in 98 appearances for the Dutch have long made him a stalwart of the team.

Depay is only four goals shy of Robin van Persie's national team scoring record. Justin Kluivert, who made his return to the Dutch squad in November, keeps his place having netted 12 Premier League goals for Bournemouth this season. The 25-year-old played 66 minutes against Bosnia and Herzegovina in the Nations League group phase, winning a third cap more than six years after his first two international appearances in 2018 when he was still a teenage prodigy at Ajax Amsterdam. Koeman omitted the Manchester United defender Mathijs de Ligt when he named a prelimi-



Memphis Depay

nary selection two weeks ago, but has restored him to the final 24-man squad after injuries to Nathan Ake and Stefan de Vrij. Manchester City's Ake drops out after surgery last week on his fractured left foot while Inter Milan's De Vrij missed his side's Champions League win over Feyenoord on Tuesday after pulling out during the warm-up. De Ligt helped his club progress into the Europa League quarter-finals after a 4-1 win over Real Sociedad at Old Trafford on Thursday. The Dutch host Spain in the first leg of their last eight tie next Thursday at De Kuip in Rotterdam with the return three days later in Valencia.

Rashford, Henderson in Tuchel's first England squad

London, England - New England coach Thomas Tuchel recalled striker Marcus Rashford and midfielder Jordan Henderson as he raised eyebrows with his first squad announcement on Friday. Rashford, on loan at Aston Villa after being frozen out at Manchester United, last appeared for England in a friendly against Brazil in March last year. "Never stopped believing, cannot wait to get started,"

Rashford, who has scored 17 goals in 60 England appearances, said on Instagram. Henderson, 34, last played for England in November 2023 and is not even a regular starter for Ajax Amsterdam. German Tuchel, who was named as Gareth Southgate's successor in October, will take charge for the first time in this month's World qualifiers against Albania and Latvia.



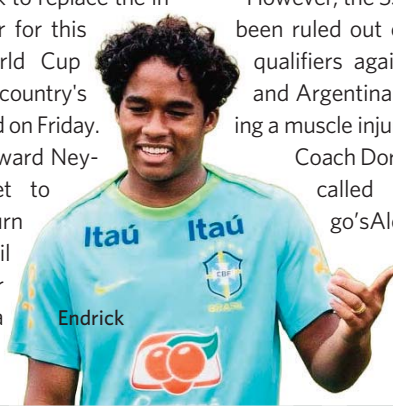
Marcus Rashford

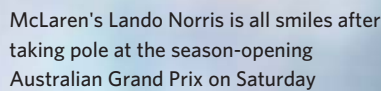
Newcastle United defender Dan Burn and Arsenal midfielder Myles Lewis-Skelly could win their first caps after receiving their first England call-ups. Aston Villa's Ollie Watkins, who picked up a knock in their Champions League win over Club Brugge, and Trent Alexander-Arnold, who will miss Liverpool's League Cup final against Newcastle United with injury, were not included in the squad.

Brazil call up Endrick to replace injured Neymar in WC qualifiers

Sao Paulo, Brazil - Brazil have called up teenage Real Madrid striker Endrick to replace the injured Neymar for this month's World Cup qualifiers, the country's FA announced on Friday. Santos forward Neymar was set to make his return to the Brazil team after more than a

year on the sidelines due to a knee injury suffered in late 2023. However, the 33-year-old has been ruled out of World Cup qualifiers against Colombia and Argentina after sustaining a muscle injury. Coach Dorival Jr has also called up Flamengo's Alex Sandro to replace teammate Danilo.





A collection of natural health products including a white mortar and pestle, fresh green herbs, a yellow flower, and several small bottles of supplements, one of which is labeled 'DHEA'.

CELLULOID MILESTONE

INTERVIEW: THIERRY FREMAUX



Euronews Culture sits down with Thierry Fremaux, Lumiere and Cannes head, to discuss the 130-year anniversary of the invention of cinema in 2025, his new film honouring the legacy of the Lumière brothers, and the threats cinema faces in its second centenary

It's not every year you get to get celebrate a major milestone in cinema history - 2025 is one of those years. Around 130 years ago, Louis and Auguste Lumière invented cinema. It's also not every year you get to sit down with Thierry Frémaux, the director of the Institut Lumière in Lyon and the general delegate of the Cannes Film Festival - who we met, rather fittingly, on the Rue du Premier Film. The street bears this name precisely because it is the birthplace of cinema. On 19 March 1895, Louis Lumière placed his camera opposite the hangar, in front of the factory's large gate, turned the crank on the cinématographe and filmed the workers leaving the workshops. *Sortie d'usine*, thus, became the first Lumière film and the Hangar became the first set in the history of cinema. No better time to speak to the main man himself about the legacy of the Lumière brothers, how the next century of cinema will look like, as well as the importance of protecting a precious heritage in the face of modern threats. Excerpts from a tete-a-tete: *The documentary Lumière, l'aventure continue! features the restoration of more than 120 previously unseen Lumière shots. What struck me was that everything was already there - there's comedy, drama, action... There are even cat videos. Comment.* Yes, it's something we specialists have known for a long time, and there are a lot of things in there too about Lumière's own position in history. He wasn't totally an inventor, because we have Edison. We have Marey. We have Muybridge. We have a lot of people before him. So, people used to say, 'Well, Lumière didn't re-



The documentary Lumière, l'aventure continue! features the restoration of more than 120 previously unseen Lumière shots. What struck me was that everything was already there - comedy, drama, action...



A scene from Lumière l'aventure continue!

ally invent cinema' and 'Lumière is not totally a director - because we have George Méliès, and a lot of people after him'. What we say and what I think the movie shows is that Lumière was, first, totally an inventor. There were a lot of people before him, but there is no more invention after him. Once he did that, it was done. And he is totally a director - I would say even an artist. He asked himself the same questions millions of filmmakers after him have asked themselves: What to do with the camera? What position? Where? To do what? To tell what? And at the end of his journey, he directed and produced 2000 movies, and yes, 80% of what cinema would be in the future was already there. One aspect I enjoyed about the film was how you presented the dichotomy between

Edison, who put moving images inside a box, and the Lumière brothers who took cinema outside of that box. Edison's creation was an individualistic experience, while Lumière understood the importance of the public. Yes, it's exactly that. Lumière invented cinema many times. He invented the technique, the art, the movie theaters and the audience to see the films. Right away, he knew that he had to make a lot of films in order for the audience to go and discover something new. But let's say, in order to pay a tribute to Thomas Edison - and especially to William Dixon, his colleague - that he could have in-

a very timely resonance because US protectionism predates Donald Trump. It's important to remember the GATT agreement (General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade) - all the fights and the battles done by the US government and Europe, and in Europe by the directors, by the auteurs in order to protect themselves, to talk about cultural exception. Right away, Edison said 'No, no, no, we have a law - we can't let an invention from abroad enter the American territory if we have the local equivalent.' After one year, everything was settled and the Lumière cinematographers came

Firstly, talking about AI is talking about the digital civilisation. We have had for many, many years special effects - artificial special effects. Not, argentique (analog photography) special effects, not natural special effects. Maybe the last natural film is Apocalypse Now. The number of helicopters Coppola had in the sky are all the helicopters he had. Now you have a film makers saying, 'Well, let's talk to the special effects guy - let's put more helicopters in the sky.' We know that. For example, for the restorations in the documentary, we didn't want to use artificial intelligence. Even when the film is in bad shape. The digital, the scan, the way you can do by yourself in order to correct the images and to get the film exactly at the same shape that it was at the time. But artificial intelligence is something different. Personally, I'm not afraid at all, because we are in favour of human intelligence. Let's talk about literature in this respect. Of course, even for writing, people say, 'No, it's easy now - you ask ChatGPT and it will write the first sentence of 'À la recherche du temps perdu' (In Search of Lost Time) by Marcel Proust. 'Longtemps, je me suis couché de bonne heure...' No, this is the invention of a human artist! I'm sure that we can use everything. But really, we must use it for good reasons. And you're right, it's a big danger - one to keep a close eye on. The role of cinema as an instrument of peace reminded me of a moment from last year's Cannes Film Festival, when Mohammad Rasoulof entered the Grand Palais to premiere *The Seed of the Sacred Fig*. There was this huge standing ovation before the film even began, and considering the background and the struggle he faced in order to bring this film to an audience, it shows that

back, but what I like in this story is that Thomas Edison sent the detectives of the Pinkerton Agency - who were the same that caught Butch Cassidy and the Kid! It shows that for Edison, cinema was something. It was a promising industry. And for Lumière too. But while Lumière sent those operators, those cinematographers all over the world in order to get the image, I'm not sure he was thinking about money... The film's title *Lumière, l'aventure continue! - 'the adventure continues'* - reflects that cinema is an art form that has constantly evolved and continues to do so. One major talking point at the moment is the role of artificial intelligence and the potential threat it poses to cinema. Do you think that AI is inevitable in the evolution of cinema?

cinema is also a tool for resistance. Yes. How do you get the reality of a country like Iran better than with a movie like that? He tells us that story about the corruption of souls inside a family, with the young generation asking the parents, 'What are you doing to this country?' And on top of that, it's a romantic, poetic film. Also a horror film, in many ways. Yes, yes - and a Western too. And that's why we love cinema. Even when I was student, it was easier to watch *Novecento* by Bernardo Bertolucci in order to understand the history of Italy in the 20th century than reading books! Now, I'm not saying that I don't like reading books, but when you are young, cinema is a gift. Courtesy: euronews.com



Sales from Sotheby's inaugural auction in Saudi Arabia totalled US\$17.28mn

ARAB ART

Origins

RECORDS SET FOR ARAB ARTISTS AT SOTHEBY'S DEBUT SAUDI ARABIA AUCTION WHERE SALES TOTALLED US\$17.28MN IN EARLY FEBRUARY



Louay Kayyali's 'Then What?' (1965) set a record for the Syrian artist's work

who attended the sale.

"While there were some beautiful pieces from the luxury segment, the sales were astonishingly few for a market that so prizes luxury."

While three works — by artists René Magritte, Fernando Botero and Banksy — sold for more than US\$1mn, they were within estimate. The strongest sales were of Arab art, with two artist records set: US\$900,000 for Then What? (1965) by the Syrian artist Louay Kayyali and US\$264,000 for the Saudi Arabian artist Abdulhalim Radwi's Untitled (1984).

All four works by Saudi Arabian artists in the auction sold for above estimate and Samia Halaby's Blue Trap (in a Railroad Station, 1977) realized US\$384,000 - almost double its high estimate.

Sotheby's auction in Saudi Arabia included 100 paintings, sculptures, jewels, handbags, watches and sports memorabilia, including Michael Jordan's jersey.

"The results that we have achieved here during our inaugural sale is a clear signal of the depth of appetite that exists for art, and the thirst that is ready to be unlocked, of which tonight was a successful next step," said Ashkan Baghestani, a Sotheby's head of sale for fine art, in a statement.

Courtesy: cnn.com

Sotheby's inaugural auction in Saudi Arabia — and the country's first major international art and luxury auction — took place in Diriyah on February 8 with works by regional artists selling particularly well.

Sotheby's reported a full house for the 'Origins' sale, which was held in a 250-seat outdoor amphitheater and featured participants from 45 countries. The sale totalled US\$17.28mn with a sell-through rate of 67% by lot and 74% by value. Almost a third of the buyers were from Saudi Arabia.

The auction offered an eclectic mix of around 120 objects. Approximately half were works of art and a quarter watches and jewellery, while there were also 17 designer handbags and several items of sports memorabilia.

"Prior to the evening, nearly everyone believed the luxury segment would outperform the art on offer. To everyone's surprise fine art achieved very solid results, indicating a strong appetite for Saudi and Arab art," says Rebecca Anne Proctor, the author of the book 'Art in Saudi Arabia: A New Creative Economy?'

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6 YEARS /
UNLIMITED MILEAGE****

Offer valid from 20th February to 20th April 2025 on all models purchased through the CHANGAN AUTO Showroom Retail Offer. #Whichever is earlier. Periodic Maintenance Service only. Offer includes only 10,000 kms service intervals. @For 1st year, Oman & UAE only. ^For 1st year only. ^^Window Tinting and Ceramic Coating warranty will be 3 years against manufacturing defects and will be fitted at our own Service Centres. **Whichever is earlier. *Easy Monthly Installment is calculated based on 20% down payment for 6 years loan tenure. Subject to credit approvals from Banks only. Applicable on vehicles purchased for personal use. Images shown are for illustrative purpose only. Specification may vary as per the model variant. To know more, please visit the CHANGAN Showroom.

**Arabian Gulf Automobiles
and Equipment LLC**

Showrooms:

**Qurum 94641010, Mawaleh 97888180, Nizwa 96628940
Sohar 95351200, Salalah 96629050, Ibri 96628930,
Barka 96629010, Sur 96628920**

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