

MUSCAT DAILY

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H M marks 2025 as year of continued growth



Muscat - His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq presided over a meeting of the Council of Ministers at Al Barakah Palace on Wednesday.

At the outset of the meeting, His Majesty the Sultan gave thanks and praise to the Almighty Allah for the bounties He bestowed on Oman of Oman. He prayed to the Almighty Allah that 2025 be a year of successive accomplishments. He hoped that the new year would see the realisation of the aspirations that he drew out over the past five years of Oman's Renewed Renaissance that ushered in a brighter future for the loyal people of Oman. He prayed to the Almighty to endow all with full health, wellbeing and further bounties.

H M the Sultan commended the efforts being exerted by the

Council of Ministers, its committees and different government units as they shoulder their respective responsibilities and undertake their roles. He also expressed appreciation for the achievements and contributions which, he said, gave impetus to the march of growth and upgraded the tracks of comprehensive development witnessed by the sultanate at all levels.

H M the Sultan reviewed the local conditions. The Council of Ministers listened to the assessment of economic and social conditions in the country over 2024. It took note of the positive outcomes achieved in this respect, thanks to the efforts made by all departments in the areas of economic diversification, consolidation of non-oil revenues and the expansion of the productive

base of the economy.

This, the Council of Ministers observed, reflected positively on the national economy and helped achieve a number of economic and social priorities, provide the requirements of expansion in government services offered to the community and consolidate spending on projects of various sectors, including education, health and social welfare.

In this context, and, with reference to the growth of the actual contribution of promising economic activities to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), a tangible rise in the added value of non-economic activities and, with the aim of doubling efforts and reinforcing the non-oil trade balance, His Majesty the Sultan gave directives to the Council of Ministers to continue focusing on

positive factors that enhance economic growth, back the role of the private sector in its drive to benefit from opportunities of partnerships made available through programmes and projects implemented by the government - while at the same time engaging in strategic economic and commercial partnership agreements that the sultanate concluded recently with other countries of the world.

H M the Sultan also laid emphasis on the significance of implementing the National Local Content Policy with the aim of enhancing industries, encouraging the establishment of local projects, minimising dependence on imports, augmenting the volume of exports and supporting related productive industries.

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OMAN OUTPLAYED BY BAHRAIN IN GULF CUP

Oman secured the second place in the 26th Gulf Cup in Kuwait after a 2-1 defeat in the final match against Bahrain on Saturday. Despite a commendable performance, Oman fell short in its pursuit of a third Gulf Cup title. H H Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham bin Tariq, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth, attended the final match to support the Red Warriors

Oman's budget focuses on social welfare and economic growth

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The sultanate's Ministry of Finance on Thursday unveiled the General Budget for the 2025 fiscal year, projecting total public spending at RO11.8bn, a 1.3% increase compared to the 2024 estimate.

The 2025 budget reflects the government's commitment to achieving the economic and social objectives outlined in the

10th Five-Year Plan and Oman Vision 2040.

Of the total public spending, current expenditures are expected to amount to RO8.555bn, accounting for 72% of the total. Development and investment spending is projected at RO4.440bn.

Total government revenues are forecast to reach RO11.180bn, a 1.5% rise from 2024. These estimates are based on an assumed oil price of US\$60 per barrel and

average daily production of 1mn barrels per day. Oil and gas revenues are anticipated to contribute RO7.607bn, while non-hydrocarbon revenues are expected to total RO3.573bn.

H E Sultan bin Salim al Habsi, Minister of Finance, said at a press conference that the budget aims to consolidate financial sustainability measures while targeting real GDP growth of at least 3% in 2025.

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30-day Jewel of Arabia expedition launched

Our Correspondent
Sur

Ministry of Heritage and Tourism concluded a programme celebrating Sur as Arab Tourism Capital 2024 with a ceremony held on Friday.

The event also marked the announcement of the launch of the much-anticipated exploratory voyage 'Sultanate of Oman: Jewel of Arabia' expedition.

The ceremony, which took place under the patronage of H E Salim bin Mohammed al Mahrouqi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism, was attended by several dignitaries, including public and private sector officials from South Sharqiyah.

The year-long programme, executed in collaboration with relevant authorities and Arab Tourism Organization, was a success attracting both local and international visitors to Sur. The programme featured a wide array of events throughout the year showcasing Sur's rich heritage and unique attractions.

Among the standout events was a meteorite exhibition held in Sur displaying a collection of rare and significant meteorites



(Supplied photo)

providing an educational and awe-inspiring experience.

Celebrating Oman's heritage and natural beauty

In addition to the meteorite exhibition, a programme celebrating World Heritage Day, held annually on April 18, featured an exhibition highlighting the historical landmarks and archaeological sites of Sur. Educational workshops on the basics of archaeological excavation were also organised to deepen visitors' understanding of Oman's rich cultural heritage.

The lively 'Sur Marine Sports Festival' brought together local

and international participants for a series of marine sports events, including races and sailing experiences, further showcasing Sur's coastal charm.

The highlight of the concluding ceremony was the launch of 'Sultanate of Oman: Jewel of Arabia' expedition aimed to further elevate Oman's tourism profile and attract more visitors by offering an immersive experience of the country's natural and cultural wealth. The voyage is designed to underscore Oman's unique position as a sustainable and biodiverse destination, drawing attention to its pristine landscapes, rich heritage and thriving tourism industry.

The successful conclusion of the programme marking Sur and Arab Tourism Capital 2025 celebrated not only tourism milestones of the year but also set the stage for future endeavours to position Oman as a key global tourist destination. The Jewel of Arabia expedition represents an exciting new chapter in Oman's tourism narrative, promoting the country's natural beauty, culture and sustainability efforts.

The 30-day expedition will begin at Al Suwaih beach in Jalan Bani Bu Ali, South Sharqiyah and sail through North Sharqiyah and Al Wusta before ending in Dhofar. It will see the participation of Omani youth

Jewel of Arabia expedition to focus on Oman's biodiversity, sustainability

Our Correspondent
Sur

In a momentous event, William, Prince of Wales delivered a powerful speech to mark the launch of 'Sultanate of Oman: Jewel of Arabia' expedition, underscoring the deep historical and cultural bonds between the UK and Oman.

While reflecting on the longstanding relations between the two nations, Prince William praised Oman's unparalleled natural beauty, particularly its stunning coastline and diverse landscapes.

The prince also addressed the growing environmental challenges facing Oman, particularly the impact of climate change and human activity. He acknowledged that both Oman and the UK are increasingly af-

ected by extreme weather events and climate change, stressing the importance of finding sustainable solutions for the future. "As stewards of our planet, it is crucial to find a sustainable and balanced path forward for the future wellbeing of all."

The Jewel of Arabia expedition is designed to promote scientific research and innovation, with special focus on Oman's biodiversity and its environmental sustainability efforts.

The initiative aims to spotlight the vital role of young Omanis in preserving their natural heritage, with the prince emphasising the transformative power of youth in combating climate challenges.

He drew attention to his work with the Earthshot Prize and his belief that today's young

people possess the passion, persistence and technological tools necessary to make a meaningful difference. "Today's young people can make a real difference," Prince William said.

He expressed hoped that the expedition would inspire future generations in Oman to build a sustainable and biodiverse future. The expedition also seeks to further strengthen ties between Oman and the UK, while aligning with global environmental goals to combat climate change and promote biodiversity.

Sharing his optimism, the Prince of Wales said the expedition would not only contribute to scientific discovery but also foster stronger connections, driving collective action for a greener, more sustainable future for all.

alongside stakeholders from the United Kingdom.

The primary goal of the expe-

dition is to put the spotlight on Oman's rich cultural and natural heritage, while raising global

awareness about the critical importance of environmental sustainability.



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H M marks 2025 as year of continued growth

Continued from Page 01

After listening to a briefing on the State's General Budget for fiscal year 2025 - the last budget in the current Five-Year Plan (2021-2025) - as well as the general framework for preparation of the 11th Five-Year Plan (2026-2030), the Council of Ministers gave directives to the authorities concerned to follow up the implementation of the current plan, assess the extent to which they met their target goals, state the challenges posed to its programmes and to complete the remaining projects of the current Five-Year Plan.

The Council of Ministers also stressed the fact that the 11th Five-Year Plan should include specific programmes and projects for implementing the priorities and indices of Oman Vision as planned, while at the same time bearing in mind the need to boost the growth of projects that are expected to provide added value to the national economy and generate jobs for Omani citizens.

After studying the most outstanding efforts made by different government departments during 2024 and the objectives of 2025 and, after the Council of Ministers listened to a briefing about the efforts exerted by the Central Bank of Oman, the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones, Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up Unit, the Tax Authority, Oman Investment Authority, the State Audit Institution, His

Majesty the Sultan stressed the importance of pressing ahead with cooperation and coordination among the departments concerned in a manner that consolidates economic growth, generates employment opportunities for Omani citizens and reflects positively on the improvement of the sultanate's indices at all levels.

On the other hand, and, following a briefing on accomplishments made in the health sector - deemed one of the top national priorities - His Majesty the Sultan expressed his satisfaction over the positive outcomes in this regard. He lauded the role of the Ministry of Health and its achievements and thanked all personnel of the health sector for their valuable efforts in offering the best healthcare services.

In this context, and, in further consolidation of specialised health services, the Council of Ministers approved the establishment of the National Genome and Human Data Centre (Genome Oman) in the Ministry of Health with the aim of establishing a genetic database of Omani society and expanding areas of research in this domain that would improve early diagnosis and treatment targeting hereditary diseases.

The Council of Ministers also gave directives to set up a National Centre for Ophthalmology and Eye Surgery that accommodates all related services and keeps pace with the growing demand of society for this service.

The centre is envisaged to introduce the latest technologies in diagnosis and treatment and to conduct related research.

The Council of Ministers also gave directives to launch a national programme for early detection of the most common cancer cases among women by establishing seven early detection units covering all governorates of the sultanate, in addition to expanding nuclear medicine services by establishing a radioisotope production facility and a nuclear pharmacy to cover the rising demand for radiopharmaceutical isotopes to diagnose and treat patients with cancer.

After the Council of Ministers listened to a briefing about the Social Protection Scheme that was established with the aim of providing social care and support, enhancing social solidarity, protecting entitled segments and achieving social and economic stability in society, His Majesty the Sultan stressed the importance of the competent authorities' optimum follow-up over the performance of the scheme and all its programmes, while at the same time assessing them on an ongoing basis.

Following a briefing about the progress made within the National Employment Programme - and the efforts and initiatives made by the competent authorities to address the challenges posed to the programme - the Council of Ministers laid emphasis on the integration of efforts among the departments super-

vising the economic sectors that generate employment opportunities. The cabinet advised those departments to devise appropriate plans and mechanisms for 'replacement and localisation' in those sectors in a manner that accelerates the employment of the national workforce, notably jobseekers.

After reviewing a number of social phenomena, the challenges facing the population structure and their social, economic and cultural impacts, and related demographic developments that may affect some aspects of life, His Majesty instructed the Council of Ministers to conduct necessary studies and develop specific programmes and policies tailored to find appropriate solutions to all challenges in this regard.

As part of His Majesty the Sultan's review of relations with Arab and friendly countries, he spoke about the good outcome of visits and meetings that took place over the past period. His Majesty stressed the significance of the sultanate maintaining co-operation with all countries and in all fields to help achieve common interests in a manner that is consistent with Oman's steadfast principles.

At the conclusion of the meeting, His Majesty the Sultan spoke about various aspects of interest to Oman and its citizens. He gave his noble directives in this regard, wishing all further success and prosperity for the nation and its loyal offspring.

PLATFORM FOR ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Omani youth showcase their business ventures at Muscat Nights Festival in Naseem Garden

Our Correspondent
Muscat

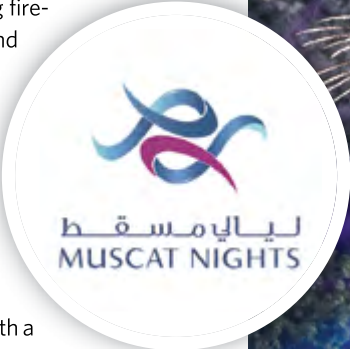
Muscat Nights Festival at Naseem Garden is not just a celebration of culture, but also provides a platform for young entrepreneurs to showcase their businesses and supports growth of small and medium-sized enterprises. The festival, which features a wide range of exciting activities including fireworks, local and international music performances, children's games and open-air theatre, has become a great opportunity for up-and-coming entrepreneurs to promote their businesses.

Muscat Daily spoke with a few young entrepreneurs who are taking advantage of the festival's platform to build their businesses and contribute to a vibrant SME sector.

Al Munjid Hassan al Bajali, a student of Modern College, and his friend Abdullah Muhammad al Badari, a student of Muscat College, are two such entrepreneurs who are promoting their business at the festival. Muscat Municipality has provided the two place to set up a mobile truck.

"Abdullah and I have been friends since childhood. We always dreamt of starting our own business. In May 2024, we launched our mobile truck - TFG - serving a variety of coffee, tea and juices," Bajali said.

Since launching their business, the two have served customers at open days organised by private companies and colleges. They consider participation in Muscat Festival Nights a mile-



stone with their servings being well received by visitors.

"We faced several challenges, particularly in financing. Balancing studies and the business also present a challenge. However, we have the support of our families and lots of determination, besides willingness to work hard. That's how we've come so far," Bajali added.

Prior to launching TFG, he worked for a year in a café, where he learnt how to prepare hot

beverages and juices and serving customers. "The hands-on experience was invaluable."

"We hope to open a café under the same brand and expand our presence across other governorates," Bajali said, expressing optimism for the future of their business.

Another young entrepreneur wooing visitors at Naseem Garden is Mahmoud Khamis al Fadhili, 19. His entrepreneurship journey began in 2021 while studying for his general



(Muscat Daily)



Abdullah al Badari and Al Munjid al Bajali



Mahmoud al Fadhili

diploma. He runs Easkarim, a mobile ice cream business offering a wide range of flavours made with Omani ingredients.

"Besides Omani-flavoured ice cream, I also bake chocolate cookies and serve fruit cocktails, such as mango and strawberry," Fadhili said. "Muscat Nights Festival is a fantastic opportunity for me to promote my business. I dream of one day opening a store and expanding my presence in other places."

Fadhili advised other young Omani entrepreneurs to believe in their abilities and work hard to achieve dreams. "Success doesn't come without effort, and with determination and passion, anything is possible."

Both Bajali and Fadhili embody the spirit of young Omani entrepreneurs, proving that with hard work, creativity and perseverance, they can turn their dreams into successful businesses.

Nizwa Wastewater Treatment Plant partial collapse causes flooding in souq

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Nama Water Services (NWS) has confirmed that partial collapse of a wastewater treatment collection basin at Nizwa Wastewater Treatment Plant, which led to significant flooding in Nizwa Souq on Friday, has been contained.

The collapse resulted from a rupture in the pipe feeding the treatment basin, causing overflow of treated sewage water into the lake of Wadi Kalbu and surrounding areas, including Nizwa Souq. NWS assured residents that treatment operations continued without interruption while the site was secured.

Abdullah bin Mohammed al Nuaimi, CEO of Operations and Maintenance at NWS, reassured the public that the water released was triple-treated and free of any harmful contaminants and odour.



The water released was triple-treated and free of any harmful contaminants and odour. There was no environmental damage from the water flow posing no threat to the local ecosystem

ABDULLAH AL NUAIMI



(Supplied photo)

He emphasised the fact that there was no environmental damage from the water flow posing no threat to the local ecosystem.

In response to the incident, a committee has been formed to assess the damage caused by the collapse, which is working in co-ordination with Dakhliyah Governor's Office, Nizwa Municipality, Nizwa Market Administration, and Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

Nuaimi informed that the team is working diligently to assess losses and damages, and that affected parties will be compensated based on the assessment report.

Established in 2008, Nizwa Wastewater Treatment Plant processes around 11,000m³ of water daily and uses advanced technologies to ensure high-purity water treatment in line with international standards.

Guide for children in care of foster families launched

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Ministry of Social Development (MoSD) has officially launched 'National Guide for the Care of Children in Foster Families', a comprehensive resource designed to support foster families, social and psychological specialists, and institutions dedicated to child and family welfare. The guide aims to enhance the care and support provided to children who lack family care and are often placed in foster homes or care institutions.

The guide targets several key groups, including foster families, foster mothers and aunts at child care centres and youth hostels under MoSD, social and psychological specialists working in the field of alternative care, and institutions involved in child



(Supplied photo)

and family welfare. The guide seeks to build professional capacities for specialists engaged in social supervision to help them provide the necessary support to foster families. It also sets unified standards and guidelines for dealing with foster children, ensuring high-quality care and the optimal treatment of these children. The guide offers a practical reference for social and psychological specialists, improving their abil-

ity to supervise and support foster families effectively. Additionally, it addresses the behaviour of foster children, providing scientific and psychological solutions to help families manage these issues. Furthermore, the guide enables foster families to understand their rights and responsibilities, offering practical solutions to the challenges they may encounter while caring for children without families.

The guide includes a range of

valuable resources, such as information on the alternative care system in Oman, techniques and standards for interviewing families applying for adoption or fostering, stages of emotional development for children without families, and the impact of psychological trauma on these children.

A key focus of the guide is to protect the rights of children without families and ensure their best interests are always prioritised. The guide provides a structured and supportive framework aimed at improving the quality of care foster children receive. It also seeks to empower foster families, helping them to perform their roles effectively and strengthen the social protection system by linking foster families with specialists and support services.

Green Tech Mining & Services Redefines the Standards for Sustainable Mining Practices in Oman

Green Tech Mining & Services LLC, a joint venture between Oman Mining Company and Austria-based BPG Precious Metal Storage Plc (BPG), has achieved a significant milestone in its journey towards environmentally responsible mining practices. BPG, the parent company, has been awarded the prestigious Austrian Ecolabel by Austria's Federal Ministry for Climate Protection, Environment, Energy, Mobility, Infrastructure, and Technology (BMK). This recognition sets Green Tech Mining & Services position as a pioneer in aligning its mine tailings remediation project in Oman with global ecological and social sustainability standards.

The Austrian Ecolabel for Sustainable Financial Products validates the company's integration of ecological and social considerations in its operations, in line with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This certification guarantees adherence to rigorous standards for projects financed through Green Bonds, with independent audits reinforcing a commitment to transparency and accountability.

Adding to this momentum, BPG Precious Metal Storage Plc, a company with their focus in sustainable practices within the mining industry, has announced the issuance of a Green Bond aimed at fully financing their Oman project that aligns with its environmental and sustainability goals. Known for its innovative approaches to tailings remediation, sustainable resource recovery, and the rehabilitation



of legacy mining sites, BPG remains persistent in its commitment to responsible mining and adherence to global environmental standards.

The Green Bond, developed under the guidelines of the Green Bond Principles (GBP) by the International Capital

Chairman of Green Tech Mining & Services LLC. "This award highlights our dedication to responsible financial investment through Green Bonds, marking the world's first one-of-a-kind mining remediation project to leverage such funding while prioritizing social well-being and environmental preservation."

As a key player to support Oman's mining industry, Green Tech Mining & Services is setting new benchmarks in resource recovery with sustainability at its core. The company is set to launch the first phase of its remediation and copper cathode production in January 2025, using advanced technologies to recover valuable resources from historical mine tailings while minimizing environmental impact.

The Austrian Ecolabel certification not only highlights Green Tech Mining & Services' leadership in sustainable mining but also sets a benchmark for advancing sustainability in Oman's mining sector. By adhering to global best practices, the company along with its stakeholders fosters ecological responsibility while contributing to the nation's broader development goals.



Market Association (ICMA), reflects BPG's dedication to transparency, accountability, and ecological stewardship. The bond aligns with the EU Taxonomy's environmental objectives and Paris Climate Agreement goals, targeting key impact areas such as pollution prevention, sustainable water management, climate change adaptation, and environmentally sound resource management.

"We are honoured to lead the way in sustainability as the first Company in the GCC to achieve this prestigious recognition," said Ernst Grisseemann,

OMAN'S RO11.8BN BUDGET FOCUSES ON SOCIAL WELFARE, ECONOMIC GROWTH

CURRENT EXPENDITURES	DEVELOPMENT EXPENDITURES	TOTAL PUBLIC REVENUES	SOCIAL & BASIC SECTORS SPENDING	ESTIMATED DEFICIT FOR 2025
RO8.555BN	RO900MN	RO11.180BN	RO5BN	RO620MN

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman's Ministry of Finance on Thursday unveiled the State's General Budget for the 2025 fiscal year, projecting total public spending at RO11.8bn, a 1.3% increase compared to the 2024 estimate.

The 2025 budget reflects the government's commitment to achieving the economic and social objectives outlined in the 10th Five-Year Development Plan and Oman Vision 2040.

Of the total public spending, current expenditures are expected to amount to RO8.555bn, accounting for 72% of the total. Development and investment spending is projected at RO4.440bn.

Total government revenues are forecast to reach RO11.180bn, a 1.5% rise from 2024. These estimates are based on an assumed oil price of \$60 per barrel and average daily production of 1mn barrels per day. Oil and gas revenues are anticipated to contribute RO7.607bn, while non-hydrocarbon revenues are expected to total RO3.573bn.

H E Sultan bin Salim al Habsi, Minister of Finance, said at a press conference that the budget aims to solidify financial sustainability measures while targeting real GDP growth of at least 3% in 2025.

He added that approximately RO5bn, or 42% of total public spending, has been allocated to social and basic sectors, with 39% earmarked for education, 28% for social security, and 24%



H E Sultan bin Salim al Habsi, Minister of Finance, announced Oman's 2025 budget at a press conference on Thursday (ONA)

Approximately RO5bn, or 42% of total public spending, has been allocated to social and basic sectors, with 39% earmarked for education, 28% for social security, and 24% for healthcare.

The minister also highlighted that RO557mn is set aside for social protection programmes, while RO1.14bn will be allocated to development projects with significant economic impact.

The 'contribution and other expenses' category of the budget, which includes government subsidies, has been allocated an estimated RO2.345bn. This includes RO577mn for social protection, RO520mn for electricity subsidies, RO194mn for water and sanitation, RO35mn for fuel

subsidies, RO15mn for essential food item subsidies, and RO73mn for housing and development loan interest subsidies.

H E Habsi further emphasised that funding would support governorates in implementing development programmes and help government entities create employment opportunities in both the public and private sectors.

Deficit forecast for 2025

The 2025 budget forecasts a deficit of RO620mn, equivalent

to 5.5% of estimated revenue. Oman's total financing requirements for the year are estimated at RO2.454bn, covering the deficit as well as scheduled loan repayments.

The RO620mn deficit will be financed through a combination of local and external borrowing (RO220mn) and a withdrawal of RO400mn from reserves.

It is anticipated that public debt repayments will total RO1.834bn during the year 2025.

RO540mn surplus for 2024

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The government's efforts towards fiscal consolidation, reducing public debt, increasing non-hydrocarbon revenue, and enhancing spending efficiency, alongside an increase in oil prices, have favourably impacted Oman's general budget for the fiscal year 2024.

Preliminary results for the 2024 budget indicate a surplus of RO540mn, reversing the previously projected deficit of RO640mn. This positive outcome is attributed to higher oil prices, and the government's ongoing efforts to increase non-hydrocarbon revenue, fiscal consolidation measures, and lower public debt service.

The Ministry of Finance noted that the additional revenue generated in 2024 has been redirected towards enhancing social spending and reducing public debt.

Oman's general revenues in 2024 increased by 15.1% to RO12.674bn compared with the approved budget for the year, while public spending amounted to RO12.134bn.

The preliminary financial performance for 2024 also revealed a reduction in public debt from RO15.2bn at the start of 2024 to RO14.4bn by year-end, saving RO110mn in debt servicing costs.

The debt-to-GDP ratio decreased from 36.5% at the start of 2024 to 34% by the close of the year.

Development projects

Among the most notable developmental projects for 2025 are the completion of 20 new government schools, the issuance of tenders for 22 additional schools, and the completion of nine government hospitals.

The government has also planned the construction of several new ports and dams, including the construction of Wadi Al-Zuhaimi, Wadi Al Khoud, and Wadi Al-Ansab dams, the development of the fishing port in Dibba, the beginning of the construction of Mahut port, the completion of Wadi Adai and Wadi Sal dams, and the beginning of the construction of Masirah port.

Road sector projects in 2025 include the expansion of the Muscat Expressway, the completion of the Khasab-Dibba-Lima road, the completion of the Al Sharqiyah Expressway, the completion of the Al Ansab-Al Jifnain road dualisation, the completion of the Adam-Thumrait road dualisation, and the enhancement of internal road networks in various governorates.

OQ launches Oman's largest private cloud ERP deployment

Muscat - OQ, Oman's global energy investment group, announced the official launch of e-Symphony, its large-scale project to implement RISE with SAP on a private cloud. This initiative marks a groundbreaking transition of OQ's One ERP platform into a cloud-based environment - opening doors to enhance operational efficiency, advanced analytics, and data-driven decision-making across OQ's operations.

Maryam al Shaibani, Vice President of OQ Corporate IDS, said, "This milestone signals more than a technological upgrade; it heralds a new era of innovation, where collaboration, real-time analytics, and agility underpin every aspect of our operations. Moving our core business platform to the cloud reinforces our commitment to setting new benchmarks of excellence, both within OQ and across the region."

RISE with SAP on a private cloud gives OQ the flexibility to scale seamlessly, reduce infrastructure costs, and minimise system downtime. As an end-to-end cloud offering, it delivers faster implementation cycles, automated updates, and real-time data insights - critical for agile decision-making and resource optimisation. By integrating mission-critical functions into a single, secure platform, OQ can respond swiftly to evolving mar-



Maryam al Shaibani

ket demands at an unprecedented scale.

OQ's longstanding partnership with SAP spans multiple implementations, including SAP SuccessFactors, SAP Concur, and SAP Integrated Business Planning, demonstrating the organisation's commitment to comprehensive digital transformation.

Sergio Maccotta, Senior Vice President, SAP Middle East and Africa - South, said, "OQ's successful deployment of RISE with SAP in a private cloud stands as a testament to its leadership in digital transformation and the company's critical role in advancing Oman's economic ambitions. By leveraging cutting-edge technology and actionable insights, OQ is not just enhancing its operational efficiency, it is actively shaping an innovation-led future for the country."

Fitch revises outlook on 5 Omani banks to positive; long-term ratings affirmed

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Fitch Ratings has revised its outlook on five Omani banks - Bank Muscat, National Bank of Oman (NBO), Bank Dhofar, Sohar International Bank, and Ahlibank - to positive. The rating agency has also affirmed the Long-Term Issuer Default Ratings (IDR) of all five banks.

The revision follows Fitch's similar action on Oman's sovereign rating on December 18 and reflects the agency's view of Oman's improving operating environment, which is expected to benefit the banks' intrinsic credit profiles. The revision also underscores the government's enhanced ability to support Omani banks.

In rating action reports, Fitch noted that business conditions for Omani banks are favorable, supported by high oil prices, which are forecast to average \$70 per barrel in 2025 - around Oman's fiscal break-even price. Additionally, the government's commitment to economic diversification under Vision 2040 is expected to further bolster economic activity and provide growth opportunities for the banking sector.

Bank Muscat

The outlook for Bank Muscat has been revised to positive from stable, with its Long-Term IDR affirmed at 'BB+' and its Viability



Business conditions for Omani banks are favorable. The government's commitment to economic diversification under Vision 2040 is expected to further bolster economic activity and provide growth opportunities for banks

FITCH RATINGS

Rating (VR) at 'bb+'. Additionally, the bank's Government Support Rating (GSR) remains at 'bb+'.

Fitch attributes Bank Muscat's IDR to its solid VR and the potential for support from Omani authorities.

'The positive outlook mirrors that of the sovereign rating and reflects the bank's dominant position in the domestic market. As the flagship financial institution in Oman, Bank Muscat benefits from access to high-quality borrowers and significant funding from government-linked entities', Fitch said. The agency highlighted Bank Muscat's stable

asset quality, stronger-than-peer profitability, and solid capital buffers.

NBO

NBO's outlook has also been revised to positive from stable, while its Long-Term IDR is affirmed at 'BB'. The bank's VR and GSR are both affirmed at 'bb'.

Fitch points to NBO's strong domestic franchise and well-balanced business model as key factors supporting its rating.

It said, 'With improving profitability and stable funding and liquidity, NBO's IDR benefits from both its solid business foundation and potential government

support. However, challenges remain, including moderate profitability and a high concentration of single obligors and industry exposure. Despite these risks, the positive outlook reflects broader economic improvements and a stable operating environment.'

Bank Dhofar

The outlook for Bank Dhofar has also been revised to positive from stable, with its Long-Term IDR affirmed at 'BB'. The bank's VR and GSR remain at 'bb'.

Fitch emphasised that the bank's IDR is supported by potential government backing, as reflected in its GSR.

'While Bank Dhofar holds a strong domestic position, its VR is tempered by pressures on asset quality and weaker-than-average profitability. Additionally, high concentration risks remain a concern. Nevertheless, the positive outlook reflects the favorable macroeconomic environment and the bank's ongoing efforts to strengthen its capitalisation and liquidity,' Fitch said.

Sohar International

Sohar International Bank has seen its outlook revised to positive from stable, with its Long-Term IDR affirmed at 'BB'. Both the VR and GSR are maintained at 'bb'. The bank's outlook is driven by its improved business profile following its 2023 merger

with HSBC Bank Oman, according to Fitch.

Fitch noted that the merger has significantly expanded Sohar International's deposit base, enhanced its capital position, and stabilised asset quality.

'As Oman's second-largest bank by total assets (19% market share as of Q3 2024), Sohar International has strengthened its pricing power, reduced funding costs, and expanded its footprint in lower-risk segments. This enhanced market position should support further growth in the coming years,' the agency said.

Ahlibank

Ahlibank's outlook has been revised to positive from stable, with its Long-Term IDR affirmed at 'BB' and its GSR at 'bb'. The bank's VR is also maintained at 'bb-'.

Fitch attributes Ahlibank's IDR to potential government support, as indicated by its GSR. While the bank's franchise remains moderate, its VR benefits from reasonable asset quality and profitability. The bank's slightly higher risk appetite compared to its peers and its adequate capitalisation are noted as important factors by Fitch.

The positive outlook reflects broader economic improvements and the bank's stable funding profile, which should support its ongoing performance, Fitch added.

As Russia-Ukraine gas transit deal ends, worries mount in Europe

Dirk Kaufmann

The gas kept flowing despite nearly three years of war between Russia and Ukraine, but Russia's main gas firm Gazprom has now said it stopped at 0500 GMT on January 1 after Ukraine refused to renew a transit agreement.

Writing on the Telegram messaging app, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said the end of gas transit through his country to Europe was "one of Moscow's biggest defeats," and urged the United States to supply more gas to Europe.

"The more there is on the market from Europe's real partners, the faster we will overcome the last negative consequences of European energy dependence on Russia," he wrote, adding that Europe's "joint task" now was to support ex-Soviet state Moldova "in this period of energy transformation."

Russia and the former Soviet Union spent half a century building up a major share of the European gas market, which at its peak stood at around 35%. In 2020, when the last five-year transit agreement began, Russia shipped about 65bn cubic meters (bcm) of gas via Ukraine. Supplies have since fallen to 15bcm, accounting for less than 10% of the EU's pipeline gas imports in 2023.



With the cancellation of the contract, Russian energy giant Gazprom will lose an estimated \$5bn in gas sales

Russian gas exports via Ukraine came to a halt on January 1 after Kyiv refused to renew a transit deal, hailing this as 'Russia's biggest defeat'. But some EU countries are scrambling to meet their energy needs

With the cancellation of the contract, Russian energy giant Gazprom will lose an estimated \$5bn in gas sales, while Ukraine will lose up to \$1bn a year in transit fees from Russia.

The end of the agreement, however, raises questions about gas supply in landlocked eastern EU countries, which cannot import liquefied natural gas (LNG) by sea. Austria, Hungary and Slo-

vakia still rely on Russian gas, which is why the governments there are eager to continue purchasing the fossil fuel from Moscow.

Price spikes

Following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, gas prices surged dramatically — at times by more than 20 times — forcing some European factories to cut pro-

duction and many small businesses to close. Prices have since dropped but remain above pre-crisis levels, making energy-intensive industries, particularly in Germany, less competitive.

European consumers are also suffering from high energy prices, prompting many to reduce consumption amid a severe cost of living crisis. The additional expenses are a significant

burden: nearly 11% of EU citizens struggled to adequately heat their homes in 2023, according to the European Commission.

The termination of the Ukraine-Russia agreement is already factored into European gas market forecasts, according to an EU Commission analysis reported about by Bloomberg in mid-December.

However, the EU is confident in its ability to secure alternative supplies.

"With more than 500bn cubic meters of LNG produced each year globally, the replacement of around 14 billion cubic meters of Russian gas transiting via Ukraine should have a marginal impact on EU natural gas prices," Bloomberg cited from the Commission's document, which is not yet public. "It can be considered that the end of the transit agreement has been internalized in the winter gas prices."

According to the Commission, member states have been able to reduce their gas consumption by 18% since August 2022 compared to the five-year average. Moreover, the United States is expected to create new LNG capacities over the next two years, and these supplies could help the EU address potential disruptions.

"The most realistic scenario is that no Russian gas will flow through Ukraine anymore," the

EU Commission said, adding the bloc was "well-prepared" for this outcome.

Despite EU assurances, Hungary and Slovakia remain anxious about their gas supplies and their ongoing close ties to Russia. Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban, for example, is seeking ways to maintain gas deliveries through Ukraine, even though the country's current imports largely rely on the TurkStream pipeline.

Orban has floated unconventional ideas, such as purchasing Russian gas before it crosses into Ukraine. "We are now trying the trick [...] that what if the gas, by the time it enters the territory of Ukraine, would no longer be Russian but would be already in the ownership of the buyers," Orban told a briefing, according to the Reuters news agency. "So the gas that enters Ukraine would no longer be Russian gas but it would be Hungarian gas."

Slovakia has taken a more confrontational approach, threatening countermeasures against Ukraine. Prime Minister Robert Fico has suggested halting emergency electricity supplies to Ukraine after January 1 if no agreement is reached.

"If necessary, we will stop the electricity shipments that Ukraine needs during outages," Fico said in a Facebook video. DW

Oil prices rise amid US, China demand hopes

London, UK - Oil prices continued the upward trend on Friday, fueled by optimism about increased economic activity in China and the US.

The international benchmark Brent crude rose by 0.06% to \$75.82 per barrel, up from \$75.77 at the close of the previous session. The US benchmark West Texas Intermediate (WTI) increased by 0.04% to \$72.78 per barrel, compared to its prior session close of \$72.75.

Possible changes in the economic growth of the US after US President-elect Donald Trump takes over from the White House on January 20 are expected to impact oil prices by leading demand in the world's largest crude oil consuming country.

The expectation of oil and natural gas consumption in the US will increase following the policies implemented after Trump takes office easing market players' demand concerns and drives prices upwards.

The US Federal Reserve is expected to cut interest rates twice throughout the year, with the first rate cut expected towards the end of the first half of the year. These anticipated rate cuts are believed to boost economic activity in the USA and subsequently increase oil demand.

In addition, data indicating that US crude oil stocks decreased more than expected, supporting the perception that demand is strengthening here, affecting prices upwards.

Agencies

Biden blocks \$14bn US Steel takeover by Japan's Nippon

Nik Martin

After months of opposition, US President Joe Biden on Friday blocked the proposed buyout of the United States Steel Corporation, or US Steel, by Japan's Nippon Steel.

The second-largest US steel-maker had previously approved the \$14.9bn takeover bid, saying it would help protect the ailing firm from intense competition from abroad, including China.

Nippon Steel had hoped the acquisition would help hike its global steel output by nearly a third, to 85mn tonnes.

However, the merger became a significant issue for Democrats and Republicans in November's US presidential election, as Pennsylvania, where US Steel is headquartered, was a critical swing state.

In an attempt to protect American jobs, the United Steelworkers union fiercely opposed the transaction.

Why Biden has blocked the deal

Biden has cited national security concerns and risks to key supply chains as his main reasons for vetoing the purchase.

"This acquisition would place one of America's largest steel producers under foreign control and create risk for our national security and our critical supply chains," Biden said in a statement. "That is why I am taking action to block this deal."

The president previously said that critical industries, like the steel sector, must remain under the control of domestic players.

In December, the Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States (CFIUS) — which reviews mergers and acquisitions



Nippon Steel, headquartered in Chiyoda, Tokyo, is Japan's largest steelmaker



This acquisition would place one of America's largest steel producers under foreign control and create risk for our national security and our critical supply chains

JOE BIDEN

of US firms by foreign entities — failed to reach a consensus on whether to approve the deal and referred the decision to Biden, who leaves office on January 20.

The panel, led by Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen, warned the buyout could lead to a cut in US steel output, which would cause supply shortages, affecting the transport and energy sectors the most.

CFIUS warned the deal could scupper Washington's attempt to quash the dumping of cheap steel from China, where heavy industries receive massive subsi-

dies from the Beijing government. According to US newspaper The Washington Post, the committee was also concerned Nippon Steel could shift production to its sites in Brazil, Mexico and India after gaining control of US Steel.

Senior White House advisers had reportedly tried to persuade Biden to proceed with the purchase, as it would represent a sizable investment in an ailing US company. They also thought a veto could hurt ties with Japan, one of Washington's closest allies in the Indo-Pacific.

Both Biden and former President Donald Trump implemented protectionist policies in recent years to safeguard the US steel sector against a global oversupply, which has driven down prices. The measures included 25% tariffs on imported steel, while China was singled out for unfair trade practices.

Biden's veto is unlikely to be overturned by President-elect Trump, who campaigned on reviving US heavy industry, and last month wrote on his Truth Social social messaging platform that he was "totally against the once great and powerful US Steel being bought by a foreign company."

DW

Microsoft to invest \$80bn in AI data centers

Sarina Trangle

Microsoft expects to spend about \$80bn on data centers that fuel artificial intelligence in the current fiscal year, president Brad Smith wrote in a blog post that also urged incoming President Donald Trump to invest in "a golden opportunity" for the domestic economy.

Smith said the US is at the helm of a "world-changing" technology boom thanks to tech companies, chip suppliers and software developers collaborating on AI.

Microsoft will keep the momentum going by investing more than half of the \$80bn set aside for data centers within the U., Smith said.

The announcement comes as American tech companies pour trillions into the data centers that AI relies on, and seek out nuclear energy to power them.

"Today, the United States leads the global AI race thanks to the investment of private



capital and innovations by American companies of all sizes, from dynamic start-ups to well-established enterprises," Smith said.

But the country can best capitalise on the nascent technology if the government, education system and non-profit sector also help usher in the AI era, Smith said.

He urged the Trump Administration to increase the amount of AI research funding available, and to develop a national "talent strategy" to train Americans on the technology.

Smith also asked the administration to consider how AI regulations could affect American companies' prospects abroad as competition with rival compa-

nies in China ratchets up.

"The most important US public policy priority should be to ensure that the U.S. private sector can continue to advance with the wind at its back," Smith said.

"The United States cannot afford to slow its own private sector with heavy-handed regulations."

(Source: Investopedia.com)

Tesla posts sales drop for first time in 9 years

New York, US - Electric vehicles giant Tesla's global annual sales fell for the first time in at least nine years, new company data shows.

The company delivered 1.79mn vehicles for 2024, a drop of 1.1% from its sales in 2023 as demand for electric vehicles in the US and elsewhere slowed.

The final part of the year saw the company increase sales by 2.3%, but it wasn't enough to overcome the overall loss in 2024.

The boost at the end of the year came at a cost, with US analysts expecting Tesla's average sales price to fall to just over \$41,000 in the quarter, the lowest in at least four years.

Falling sales early in the year led to once-unheard-of discounts for the automaker, cutting into its



industry-leading profit margins.

Most of Tesla's 2024 sales came from the smaller and less-expensive Models 3 and Y, with the company selling only 23,640

of its more expensive models that include X and S, as well as the new Cybertruck.

One way to explain the slow Tesla sales is that buyers have

concerns about the range, price and ability to find charging stations for the company's electric vehicles (EVs), analysts say.

Another is competition from legacy and startup automakers, who are nibbling away at Tesla's market share.

Back in 2022, Tesla predicted that its sales would grow by 50% most years, but the prediction ran into an ageing model lineup and increased competition in China, Europe and the US.

Now, Tesla has to contend with the likes of China's BYD, which announced on Thursday that total soared 41% last year including 1.77mn EVs. While Tesla's sales still edged BYD out last year, the company is still vying with Tesla to become the world's top-selling EV maker.

(Source: Euronews.com)

At the foothills of Eastern Mountain: Curtain drawn on 11th Scientific Café

The Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, represented by the Oman Center for Animal and Plant Genetic Resources 'Mawared', concluded the activities of the eleventh season of the Scientific Café sessions. The final session discussed 'Genetic Resources in the Mountains of the Sultanate of Oman', attended by Sheikh Suleiman bin Said al Azri, wali of Al-Hamra.

The closing session featured Saif bin Amer al Hatami, a plant expert at the Omani Botanic Garden, and Husseina bint Obaid al Abri, a businesswoman and owner of herbal oil products project, along with Rashid bin Hamid al Hattali, one of the residents of the Eastern Mountain and owner of an animal resource project. The session was moderated by the media figure Khalid al Zadjali.

The session opened with a discussion on the importance of mountain plants and domesticated animal resources in the mountains and their role in maintaining environmental balance, along with their environmental, social, and economic benefits.

The discussions tackled the challenges facing mountain genetic resources, including climate change, overgrazing and its negative impact, habitat degradation, and the effects of human activities.

Following this, Khalid al Zadjali engaged with the speakers regarding mechanisms and methods for preserving mountain plants by establishing regulations for grazing and managing



natural resources.

Rashid al Hattali spoke about the role of local communities in protecting domestic animal resources and emphasised the importance of creating mechanisms and methods to preserve mountain plants through organised grazing and natural resource management.

Hasseina al Abri addressed the medical, social, and economic benefits of oils extracted from plants, such as shoua oil derived from the wild shoua plant and the cage plant used in some

medical treatments. She stressed the importance of passing down the craft of extracting medicinal oil extracts from Omani plants to future generations to prevent its extinction.

On another note, Saif al Hatami, the author of the book *The Natural Heritage of Musandam Governorate*, discussed the use of modern technology in preserving and managing mountain plants. He highlighted the importance of conserving and protecting these plants, noting that statistics indicated the presence

The session opened with a discussion on the importance of mountain plants and domesticated animal resources in the mountains and their role in maintaining environmental balance

of 260 species listed in the Red List (endangered) in 2016, which increased to 300 species by 2024.

Hatami pointed out that the environment in the Sultanate of Oman contains 1,450 wild plant

species, excluding cultivated plants, with 80 species globally found only in Oman, 23 species in the Samhan Mountains, and 21 species in the Eastern Mountain of Al-Hamra.

The session included engag-

ing discussions and valuable interventions regarding the components of the mountain ecosystem, the integration of plants with livestock and other living organisms, as well as the importance of genetic banks for plants and the necessity of managing residential plans.

The session attracted a number of interested individuals and enthusiasts from the region and beyond, who concluded it with enriching contributions about the social and economic value of genetic resources and the use of

mountain plants for generations in various purposes, inspiring many researchers and investors in local industries, alongside their suggestions for sustaining and caring for these resources amid existing challenges.

Regarding the conclusion of the Scientific Café sessions for this season, Dr. Mohammed bin Nasser al Yahyai, Director of the Oman Center for Animal and Plant Genetic Resources (Mawared), stated that the Scientific Café is an initiative presented by the centre for eleven years, aimed at simplifying the sciences in the field of genetic resources to the public, raising awareness about the social and economic importance of genetic resources, sharing the latest scientific developments, and spreading knowledge and awareness about the center's work. This, in turn, contributes to promoting sustainable development and protecting these resources from extinction while generating interest among a wide range of community segments in various natural and environmental fields.

The sessions of the eleventh season of the Scientific Café were unique, drawing inspiration from the sites of each session based on its themes.

The first session took place at Al-Bashaer Racetrack for Arabian camels, featuring an engaging discussion that bridged the past and present regarding camels as a national treasure and ways to preserve their breeds.

Royal Oman Police, Bank Muscat organise lecture on cyber fraud

Within the scope of the joint awareness initiative between Royal Oman Police (ROP) and Bank Muscat, an anti-fraud awareness lecture was organised recently at Bank Muscat Head Office. The lecture was attended by a group of employees, who were introduced to prominent methods used by fraudsters in committing financial crimes as well as different ways to prevent fraud and how to respond to such attacks.

During the lecture, Major Khalid Mohammed al Rawahi from the Directorate General of Inquiries and Criminal Search, Royal Oman Police, highlighted the prominent fraud methods such as fraudulent e-mail and bank data theft, and provided practical guidelines to help individuals avoid such attempts. He also emphasized the importance of promoting individual and community awareness and the role of



institutions in spreading a security culture.

The awareness lecture was organised as part of ongoing initiative aimed at promoting social responsibility and increasing individual awareness of cyber-crime, thereby contributing to the protection of the community. The public can easily contact the Royal Oman Police hotline at

80077444 to report fraud or for any fraud-related queries.

With cases of electronic fraud increasing globally and often causing tremendous financial and psychological harm to both individuals and businesses, Bank Muscat has further strengthened its efforts to combat this crime by partnering regularly with a number of institutions and authorities.

Giving top priority to its role as the Sultanate's flagship financial institution, Bank Muscat has been part of a number of anti-fraud awareness campaigns over the past few years whereby the bank has sought to sensitise and educate the general public with information that will enable them to easily recognise and avoid fraud.

MoE signs three agreements with telecommunications companies

As part of its efforts to enhance digital transformation and develop the education infrastructure, the Ministry of Education (MoE) has signed three cooperation agreements with telecommunications companies viz, OmanTel, Awasr, Ooredoo, to develop and upgrade internet and telephone services in government schools.

The agreement was signed on behalf of the ministry by Abdullah bin Khalifa al Saadi, Director-General of the Directorate-General of Financial Affairs, on behalf of the Undersecretary for Administrative and Financial Affairs in MoE, and on behalf of Awasr by Eng Talal bin Khalfan al Jabri, Vice Chief of Sales at the company, on behalf of OmanTel by Salim Abdul Latif, Executive Vice Chief of Procurement, and on behalf of Ooredoo by Abdulaziz bin Saud al Abri, Director General of Commercial Business.

These agreements stipulate



increasing the internet speed in schools by ten times, from 100 megabits per second to 1 gigabit per second, providing the necessary telephone services in schools, upgrading 550 schools with fibre technology, 550 schools with 5G technology, and 50 schools with other technologies to be implemented in stages.

The agreement also stipulated free browsing of educational

platforms during distance learning period due to weather conditions or emergency circumstances for all users; all with the aim of supporting the educational process, facilitating access to digital resources, enhancing the quality of education, and providing an advanced educational environment that is in line with the requirements of the digital age.

Saud Bahwan Automotive extends 'Festival of Joy' benefits through Toyota Hilux

The powerful and exhilarating Toyota Hilux is now available with exclusive Festival of Joy benefits - service from three years/30,000km up to six years/60,000km (whichever is earlier), insurance one year and a chance to win one out of 16 iPhone Pro Max phones.

The campaign is valid till January 23, Saud Bahwan Automotive stated, advising prospective buyers that the benefits vary between model variants, model year and manufacturing year.

For adventurers seeking excitement, the Hilux Adventure delivers exceptional performance with its powerful 4.0-litre V6 engine, producing 235 HP

and 38.3 Kg-m of torque. The Auto Disconnect Differential ensures uninterrupted momentum, making every drive exhilarating.

This robust yet thrilling machine is engineered by Toyota to set your heart racing. On the other hand, the Hilux 4X4 comes equipped with a 2.7-litre petrol engine, offering both 5-speed manual and 6-speed automatic transmission options, delivering an impressive 164HP.

The Hilux combines rugged capability with modern sophistication. Its bold design features a chunky front bumper sculpted like an SUV, front fog lamps, alloy wheels and striking side stripes that add to its command-



ing presence.

Whether navigating tough workdays or chasing weekend adventures, the Hilux surpasses expectations. It seamlessly transitions between being a reliable work truck during the week and a comfortable family vehicle on weekends, thanks to its advanced features, spacious cabin and robust safety systems.

The Hilux interior reflects its 'tough and emotional' design philosophy, mirroring the meticulous attention to detail seen in its exterior. The cabin offers SUV-inspired styling, elegant accents and premium ornamentation. Comfort is elevated with features like an auto air condi-

tioner with rear vents, an 8-inch navigation system and a multi-information display (MID).

Toyota prioritises safety with the Hilux, equipping it with a comprehensive suite of active and passive features. These include anti-lock braking system (ABS), electronic brake-force distribution (EBD), brake assist (BA), vehicle stability control (VSC), hill assist control (HAC), trailer sway control, SRS airbags for both driver and front passenger. From conquering challenging terrains to ensuring safety and comfort for your family, the Toyota Hilux stands as a symbol of strength, versatility and innovation.

Bank Muscat introduces innovative e-mandate for direct debit services

As part of the bank's full suite of digital services and solutions, Bank Muscat, the leading financial service provider in the Sultanate of Oman, has announced the launch of the new e-mandate for direct debit transactions, implemented for the first time through its Internet banking platform for the bank's government and corporate customers.

The service operates on the basis of a one-time authorisation called 'Direct Debit Mandate' as a secure and seamless solution for processing recurring and periodic payments. Among other use cases, the e-mandate service is an innovative and technology driven alternative to handling post-dated cheques.

The launch of the service came in alignment with the bank's customer-centric vision 'To serve you better, every day' and it underscores its commitment to providing customers with innovative banking solutions backed with the recent technological developments, aiming to meet the evolving customer needs.

E-mandate for direct debit transactions operates on a one-time mandate basis replacing the physical direct debit mandate, where customers may authorise a direct debit order to the bank (beneficiary) to pay their dues, whether of fixed or variable

value, for a pre-specified period.

Customers can activate this service through the bank's Internet banking to access the e-mandates originated by beneficiaries, and then accept or reject the mandate based on their needs. Customers will be requested to electronically sign the e-mandate after confirming their request.

The digital e-mandate for direct debit offers several advantages and benefits, including streamlined automated payment processing, sending notifications to both the beneficiary and the payer during the process of establishing the e-mandate, eliminating the hassle of handling physical mandate forms, a simple and operationally efficient method for both the beneficiary and the payer to manage, periodic repetitive and future payments, flexibility to handle variable or fixed payments with revocable or irrevocable authorisation based on the arrangement between the parties, and enabling the beneficiary to easily initiate the e-mandate through digital channels for easy acceptance by the payer.

The e-mandate is also secured by a positive acceptance from both the beneficiary and the payer as well as confirmation acknowledgments from their respective banks.

On introducing the new digital



service, Wafa Ibrahim al Ajmi, assistant general manager, Transaction & Government Banking at Bank Muscat, expressed delight about the launch of the new digital service, which underscores

the bank's commitment to providing the latest and most innovative digital solutions with the aim to offer an exceptional banking experience to government and corporate customers. "The digital transformation revolution has positively impacted business operations and the electronic execution of various banking transactions. The e-mandate for direct debit will enable government and corporate customers to adopt a secure and seamless option for executing various payment transactions."

Wafa al Ajmi further explained that the launch of the e-

mandate service comes in conjunction with the Corporate Banking Brand Campaign which the bank has recently launched under 'Ambition Delivered' slogan, underscoring the bank's role as a trusted enabler of progress for its government and corporate customers.

The new campaign signifies the bank's unwavering commitment to understanding the unique aspirations of its customers and transforming them into tangible achievements. 'Ambition Delivered' reflects Bank Muscat's dedication to delivering tailored solutions, innovative

I would like to assure our customers that the bank will maintain its commitment to offering innovative banking solutions catering to their diverse needs

WAFA AL AJMI

technology and seamless services that empower businesses to thrive in a dynamic economic environment. "I would like to assure our customers that the bank will maintain its commitment to offering innovative banking solutions catering to their diverse needs."

The launch of this new service complements the bank's existing digital services and facilities designed to meet the needs of corporate customers, including corporate account opening, insurance products, remote check deposits, and direct debit services. The bank has also launched an integrated platform for conducting banking transactions, offering a wide range of services such as payment processing, a unified dashboard for bank accounts across all banks, direct debit solutions, liquidity services.



ahlibank installs solar energy systems at its headquarters

Reaffirming its commitment to sustainability and innovation, ahlibank has signed an agreement with Nafath Renewable Energy LLC to install solar energy systems at its premises. This initiative is a milestone in the bank's efforts to further its Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) objectives, solidifying its position as a responsible and visionary financial institution.

The initiative includes installation of state-of-the-art solar car park system on the rooftop of the head office car parking building, utilizing bifacial solar panels capable of capturing light from both sides, significantly increasing energy output.

Notably, ahlibank will be one of the first in the Sultanate of Oman to adopt the cutting-edge technology-based solar panels. The proposed solar panel project is fully aligned with Oman Vision 2040 and its commitment to achieving net-zero carbon emissions by 2050, as it demonstrates a clear path towards a more sustainable and environmentally friendly energy future.

The signing ceremony was attended by senior representatives from both organisations, with Taher Albaksh al Balushi, Senior General Manager of Strategy, Transformation, Technology, and Projects, at ahlibank, and Musab al Farsi, Co-Founder and

General Manager of Projects, at Nafath Renewable Energy, formalising the agreement.

This agreement underscores ahlibank's commitment to fostering impactful partnerships with industry leaders who share its vision for sustainable development.

ahlibank's collaboration with Nafath Renewable Energy reflects the bank's commitment to sustainability as an integral part of its business philosophy

ahlibank's collaboration with Nafath Renewable Energy, a pioneer in sustainable energy solutions, reflects the bank's commitment to sustainability as an integral part of its business philosophy and its strategic vision to adopt advanced technology enabling a positive change in the sultanate.

This collaboration aims to develop innovative and sustainable solutions that aim not only to address pressing environmental challenges, but also to set new standards for responsible corporate practices.

Qatar Airways to resume flights to Syria

Qatar Airways is pleased to announce the resumption of three weekly flights to Damascus, Syria, from Tuesday. This marks a significant step in reconnecting the region and providing passengers with seamless access to Qatar Airways' extensive global network of more than 170 destinations.

The decision to restart operations to Syria reflects the airline's commitment to fostering regional connectivity and supporting passenger demand. Qatar Airways is working closely with relevant authorities to ensure that all necessary safety, security, and operational standards are met ahead of the relaunch.

Qatar Airways Group Chief Executive Officer, Badr Mohammed al Meer, said, "We are pleased to resume flights to



Damascus, a destination of great historical and cultural importance. This announcement underscores our dedication to fostering connectivity and facilitating travel for our passengers."

Passengers travelling to and from Damascus will benefit from Qatar Airways' world-class service and access to Hamad International Airport, consistently ranked as one of the best airports in the world.

The airline's global network will offer travellers the opportunity to explore destinations around the world, via the airline's hub in Doha.

Qatar Airways lands in Abha airport

Qatar Airways landed its first resumption flight at Abha International Airport (AHB), on Thursday. The airline will operate two weekly flights to Abha, offering seamless connectivity on Qatar Airways' extensive

global network of over 170 destinations.

With the resumption of this route, Qatar Airways brings the total number of destinations it serves within the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to 11, including: Abha, AlUla, Dammam, Jeddah, Medina, NEOM, Qassim, Riyadh, Tabuk, Taif, and Yanbu.

Group CEO Meer, said: "We are delighted to resume flights to Abha, our 11th gateway in Saudi Arabia. With over 140 weekly flights, we connect more than 36,000 passengers weekly between Saudi Arabia and Doha."

Air Connectivity Program CEO Majid Khan said, "The co-operation between the Air Connectivity Program and Qatar Airways is a significant step in enhancing the kingdom's air connectivity."

Omantel honoured for 'trailblazing' CSR initiative

Omantel, the sultanate's leading provider of integrated telecommunications and ICT services, has been honoured with two prestigious awards at the Oman CSR Summit & Awards 2024.

The company was recognised under the categories of 'Trailblazing CSR Initiative of the Year' for its innovative initiative 'Maqroo' - the First Arabic Dyslexic-Friendly Font, and 'Best Use of Technology in CSR' for its efforts in leveraging advanced technologies for social impact.

For the 'Best Use of Technology in CSR' award, Omantel was recognised for its contributions to the healthcare sector, particularly its collaboration with the Oman Cancer Association. Omantel supported the deployment of a cutting-edge, AI-powered medical tool designed for the early detection of cancer. This state-of-the-art solution significantly enhances diagnostic accuracy, accelerates the detection process, and reduces treatment costs associated with



late-stage diagnoses, marking a substantial advancement in Oman's healthcare ecosystem.

Under the 'Trailblazing CSR Initiative of the Year' category, Omantel's groundbreaking project 'Maqroo' has been celebrated as a first-of-its-kind innovation aimed at digital inclusivity. Designed to address the challenges faced by Arabic-

speaking individuals with dyslexia, Maqroo was developed after an in-depth analysis of over 650 Arabic fonts.

The result is a font that improves readability and accessibility, empowering dyslexic individuals by simplifying communication and enhancing their engagement with Arabic text.

The initiative has also garnered international recognition, including accolades at the Dubai Lynx Awards 2024, where it won a Silver Award in Healthcare and the Grand Prix in Industry Craft, as well as a Bronze in the Internet & Telecom category at the Effie Awards.

Speaking on this remarkable achievement, Qais Mohammed al Amri, Manager Corporate So-

cial Responsibility stated, "Winning two awards at the Oman CSR Summit & Awards 2024 is a testament to our commitment to leveraging innovation and technology to address real societal challenges. We take pride in our initiatives, from creating a dyslexic-friendly Arabic font to supporting healthcare advancements, as they reflect Omantel's vision of building an inclusive, sustainable future for all."

These accolades underscore Omantel's unwavering commitment to innovation and social responsibility, as well as its role in creating a lasting, positive impact on the Omani community.

Omantel remains dedicated to pioneering initiatives that improve quality of life, foster inclusivity, and support community well-being. These awards highlight the company's role as a leader in integrating innovation with social responsibility, reaffirming its mission to make a meaningful difference across Oman and beyond.

Blinken heads to South Korea, Japan, France one last time

Washington, D.C., US - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken will travel to South Korea, Japan and France between January 4-9, the State Department said on Friday, in what is expected to be his last overseas trip in office.

The US top diplomat will visit South Korea at a time of political turmoil in the country. In the latest development there, a stand-off between investigators and suspended President Yoon Suk Yeol's team prevented investi-

gators from arresting Yoon.

Blinken will meet with his counterpart Cho Tae-yul on Monday, Seoul's foreign ministry said in a statement, to discuss the 'South Korea-US alliance, South Korea-US-Japan cooperation, North Korea issues, and regional and global challenges'.

The State Department statement also makes no direct mention of the current political turmoil in Seoul, saying Blinken



US Secretary of State Antony Blinken

will speak about 'ways our two nations can build on our critical cooperation on challenges around the world based on our shared values'.

South Korea has been mired in a political crisis ever since Yoon briefly declared martial law on December 3 and sent soldiers to parliament. He has been under investigation on allegations of abuse of power and inciting an insurrection.

Investigators probing Yoon's

declaration of martial law attempted to enforce a warrant for his arrest on Friday but were thwarted by presidential security guards. That warrant expires on January 6, the same day Blinken plans to meet Cho.

Blinken in Japan, France

In Japan, Blinken will meet senior Japanese government officials to review the 'tremendous progress' between the two na-

tions. The US and Japan have forged closer defence ties over the years, as both countries share similar concerns including what they describe as countering Chinese aggression in the Indo-Pacific.

Blinken will wrap up his trip in Paris in meetings with French officials to discuss developments in the Middle East and European security, particularly in Ukraine.

DW

Colombia: 13 killed as bus plunges into ravine

Bogota, Colombia - At least 13 people are dead and 30 were injured when a bus plunged into a ravine on Friday on the Pan-American Highway in southwestern Colombia, authorities reported.

The accident occurred around 7am local time on a mountainous road in the Narino Department near the Ecuadorian border, as the bus plummeted into a 150-metre deep ravine. The fire department said 11 people died at the scene, while two were later pronounced dead because of their injuries. Twenty-nine victims were seriously injured and are recovering at eight hospitals. The driver of the bus is among the injured.

Authorities reported that the bus was transporting tourists visiting the Sanctuary of Las Lajas, a pilgrimage site located 2,900 metres (1.8 miles) above sea level and built within the Guaitara River canyon - 7km from the Ecuadorian border.

Narino Governor Luis Alfonso Escobar attributed the accident to the driver's decision to use an alternate route to avoid paying tolls.

"We regret this tragic event at the beginning of 2025 of visitors who came from Cali to the Sanctuary of Las Lajas by the alternate route," he said.

Germany: Scholz concerned over Musk's support for far-right AfD

Berlin, Germany - German Chancellor Olaf Scholz has expressed concern over Elon Musk's support for the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) party, weeks before the nation's snap election next month.

Scholz, in an interview with *Stern* magazine published on Saturday, said while he was not fazed by the US tech billionaire's attacks on him and other German politicians, Musk's endorsement of the far-right party was much more worrying.

"Far more concerning than such insults is the fact that Musk supports a partly far-right party like the AfD, which advocates rapprochement with Putin's Russia and seeks to weaken trans-Atlantic relations," the chancellor told the German magazine.

Musk endorsed the AfD in a lengthy opinion piece published recently in the *Welt am Sonntag* newspaper.

Germany's domestic intelligence agency is monitoring the national AfD party as a suspected right-wing extremist organisation. Some state-level branches of the AfD have already received that designation.

The party has made tremendous gains in eastern Germany in recent regional votes and has nearly doubled its popularity measured in opinion polls to around 20%, in the run-up to the snap election on February 23.

Musk is expected to hold a live talk with AfD leader Alice Weidel on X Spaces on January 9.



Scholz (left) has met Musk only once, at the opening of a Tesla factory in Germany in March 2022

As Social Democrats, we have been accustomed since the last century to wealthy media entrepreneurs who do not appreciate social democratic politics - and are not shy about expressing their opinions

OLAF SCHOLZ

'Stay cool'

Musk, a top adviser to US President-elect Donald Trump, has been commenting on German politics on his social media platform X for days now.

He has called Scholz a 'fool' and President Frank-Walter Steinmeier an 'undemocratic tyrant'.

Scholz said insults from rich media tycoons were par for the

course.

"As Social Democrats, we have been accustomed since the last century to wealthy media entrepreneurs who do not appreciate social democratic politics - and are not shy about expressing their opinions," Scholz told *Stern*, in reference to his centre-left Social Democratic Party (SPD).

While their voices have a larger reach as media evolves, the situation is not new, the chancellor said. "One must remain cool," he said as several German politicians expressed irritation over

the ordeal.

Musk, in 2022, had made a personal request to Scholz over a phone call regarding the federal government's plans to subsidise electric charging stations across the country. Tesla, owned by Musk, operates its own system of charging stations in Germany. "It is no secret that Tesla was against the government funding for electric charging stations in Germany," the chancellor said, suggesting Musk's comments stem from business dissatisfaction.

German Vice Chancellor Robert Habeck had sharper words for Musk.

"Hands off our democracy, Mr. Musk!" Habeck told German news magazine *Der Spiegel* when asked whether Musk was a threat to Germany. He criticised Musk's outspoken support for the far-right AfD.

Habeck said the billionaire, who is expected to have a prominent role in the upcoming US government, is doing whatever he can to push his own interests.

DW

US: Mike Johnson keeps role as Speaker

Washington, D.C., US - Mike Johnson overcame a razor-thin margin to keep his role as Speaker of US House of Representatives on Friday as the 119th United States Congress convened.

Johnson's election came despite earlier fears that some Republicans were dissatisfied with his performance and were looking to elect a new Speaker.

He got almost unanimous support from Republicans, who hold a razor-thin majority over Democrats in the lower chamber of Congress.

Three hard-right Republicans at first voted against him, leaving Johnson short of the majority he would need to remain in the job, but two of them changed their minds at the last minute.

He received 218 votes out of the 434 members that voted. Democrats nominated and voted for Hakeem Jeffries, who received 215 votes.

A test of Trump's influence

The House had to elect its speaker before the new Congress could do anything.



Without a House speaker, Monday's certification of President-elect Donald Trump's 2024 election victory would have been in trouble. Trump fully supported Johnson on Friday hailing his victory as a sign of the country's bright future.

"Mike will be a Great Speaker, and our Country will be the beneficiary. The People of America have waited four years for Common Sense, Strength, and Leadership," Trump, posted on social media.

Defeat for Johnson would have marked another embarrassment for Trump, who was

We're going to drastically cut back the size and scope of government... I don't do anything in exchange for a vote, other than commit to make this institution work effectively

MIKE JOHNSON

shown the limits of his sway over House Republicans after they rebuffed his demands for a suspension of the country's borrowing limit in December.

In his acceptance speech Johnson vowed to 'drastically' slash the size of government as Republicans take power in Congress. "We're going to drastically cut back the size and scope of government, we're going to return the power back to the people," he said.

Johnson vowed not 'make deals with anyone', to get their support. "I don't do anything in exchange for a vote, other than

commit to make this institution work as effectively, as efficiently as possible," he said.

He did however huddled with some of the holdouts in a chamber off the House floor before they changed their votes.

Fresh faces in Congress

The speaker's election has been the key focus as the new Congress opened. But the day has also marked some firsts.

For the first time in US history, two Black women, Lisa Blunt Rochester from Delaware and Angela Alsobrooks from Maryland, have been serving in the Senate at the same time.

Andy Kim from New Jersey has become the first Korean American senator.

In the House, Sarah McBride has become the first openly transgender person in Congress.

Former Speaker Nancy Pelosi, who has recently had hip replacement surgery after a fall, has returned to Washington and has received a standing ovation from Democrats as she has cast her vote for Jeffries.

DW



Jeju Air flight 2216 was carrying 181 people from Thailand to South Korea on December 29, 2024, when it crashed

S Korea: Fatal crash cockpit transcript almost complete

Seoul, South Korea - In South Korea, the probe into the cause of the fatal Jeju Air flight 2216 crash continues with investigators working to convert audio from the cockpit voice recorder into text.

"The transcript of the cockpit voice recorder (CVR) is expected to be completed today, and the flight data recorder (FDR) is in the process of being

prepared for transport to the United States' for analysis, South Korea's land ministry said in a statement.

The recordings may provide more indications as to what happened in the moments leading up to the crash which saw the Boeing 737-800 land on its belly and slam into a wall at Muan International Airport, killing all but two of the 181 people on board.

The precise cause of the crash is not yet known although investigators suspect a bird strike, faulty landing gear and the runway barrier as possible issues.

This week, investigators have been examining the crash site in South Korea's South Jeolla Province and on Friday managed to lift sections of the plane's fuselage.

DW

Biden administration proposes \$8bn arms deal with Israel: Report

The deal includes munitions for fighter jets, attack helicopters and artillery shells

Washington, D.C., US - The US State Department 'informally' notified Congress of a US\$8bn proposed arms deal with Israel, including munitions for fighter jets, attack helicopters and artillery shells, according to a report on Friday.

The State Department presented the agreement as a measure to 'support Israel's long-term security by resupplying stocks of critical munitions and air defence capabilities', Axios reported, citing a source familiar with the matter.

"The President has made clear Israel has a right to defend its citizens, consistent with international law and international humanitarian law, and to deter aggression from Iran and its proxy organisations. We will continue to provide the capabilities necessary for Israel's defence," a US official was quoted in the report.

It comes as President Joe Biden approaches the final days of his term before the January 20 inauguration of Donald Trump.

The proposed arms sale,

pending congressional approval, includes AIM-120C-8 AM-RAAM air-to-air missiles for fighter jets, 155mm artillery shells, small diameter bombs, 500-pound warheads, bomb fuses and other related equipment, the report added.

The sale will reportedly see munitions delivered from current US stocks, while the majority will take one or more years to be produced and delivered.

The State Department did not immediately respond to Anadolu's request for comment.

The US faces criticism for providing military aid to Israel, as more than 45,650 Palestinians, mostly women and children, have been killed in the Gaza Strip since an attack by Hamas on October 7, 2023.

Nearly 1,200 people were killed in the cross-border attack led by the Palestinian group, according to Israeli figures.

Several human rights groups, former State Department officials and Democratic lawmakers have urged the Biden administration to halt arms transfers to



The President has made clear Israel has a right to defend its citizens, consistent with international law and international humanitarian law, and to deter aggression from Iran and its proxy organisations

US OFFICIAL

Israel, citing violations of US laws, including the Leahy Law, as well as international laws and human rights. Israel denies these allegations.

The Leahy Law, named after

former Senator Patrick Leahy, requires the US to withhold military assistance from foreign military or law enforcement units if there is credible evidence of human rights violations.

Biden halted shipments of 1,800 2,000-pound bombs and 1,700 500-pound bombs to Israel in May because of its offensive on the southern Gaza city of Rafah, citing civilian casualties in

the enclave as a consequence of the bombs. In July, he decided to move ahead with the shipment of 500-pound bombs to Israel after a two-month pause.

Anadolu Agency

27 Palestinians killed, 14 missing after airstrikes by Israel in Gaza

Gaza City, Palestine - At least 27 Palestinians were killed and 14 others are missing after Israeli airstrikes on Saturday targeted various areas in Gaza City and the southern city of Khan Younis.

A medical source told Anadolu that 11 Palestinians were killed and others injured in an airstrike on a home in the Shujaiya neighbourhood of eastern Gaza City.

Palestinian Civil Defence said in a statement that its teams retrieved the bodies of six people who were killed when an Israeli strike targeted a civilian vehicle in the eastern Satar area of Khan Younis.

In a separate attack, three members of the Shubaki family - a man, his wife, and their unborn child - were killed when Israeli airstrikes hit their home in western Gaza City, according to another Civil Defence statement.

Medics confirmed to Anadolu the death of a Palestinian man following an airstrike on the Intelligence Towers area in north-western Gaza City.

Another statement said res-



cue teams managed to extract two injured individuals from the rubble of a home belonging to the Ghoulia family in the Shujaiya neighbourhood but were unable to recover 11 others trapped beneath the debris, who remain missing.

In Khan Younis, the death toll from a bombing that targeted the Sharif and Mujayda families' home in the Mawasi area rose to three, including a child. Ten others were injured.

Two Palestinians were killed in Rafah's northern district in a separate strike, and a man succumbed to injuries sustained in an earlier bombing in central Khan Younis.

Nine more Palestinians were injured in a separate airstrike on a home in Mawasi, Khan Younis, the source added.

The Israeli army also shelled the Indonesian Hospital in northern Gaza and continued demolishing structures in Beit Hanoun

and Jabalia refugee camp.

Israel's continued attacks on hospitals and other off-limits civilian facilities such as mosques, churches, and schools are a possible war crime.

At least 59 more Palestinians were killed in Israeli attacks in the Gaza Strip in the last 24 hours, bringing the overall death toll since October 2023 to 45,717, the Health Ministry in the enclave said on Saturday.

Anadolu Agency

UNRWA plans to stop aid activities ahead of Israeli ban

Istanbul, Turkey - The UN relief agency for Palestine refugees (UNRWA) said it is planning to stop aid activities because of the Knesset legislation restricting its work, according to a report on Friday.

The Israeli parliament (Knesset) approved two bills in October aimed at prohibiting UNRWA's activities in Israel.

The laws are expected to take effect this month. Israeli lawmakers argue that UNRWA's aid operations allegedly serve as a cover for Hamas activities, a claim the agency has repeatedly denied. UN officials have raised alarms about the potential consequences of Israel's actions, according to the *New York Times*, citing officials.

They warn that no other organisation could replicate UNRWA's comprehensive services, which include providing food, water, medicine, education and shelter for millions of Palestinians in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. The suspension of critical humanitarian activities could exacerbate the already dire conditions in those areas.



"It would be a massive impact on an already catastrophic situation," said former UN humanitarian coordinator, Jamie McGoldrick.

"If that is what the Israeli intention is - to remove any ability for us to save lives - you have to question what is the thinking and what is the end goal?" he added.

Sami Abu Darweesh, a 30-year-old Palestinian living in a UNRWA-managed refugee camp in Gaza, expressed fears about the agency's potential shutdown. "The world has abandoned us. We have nothing but the aid we get from UNRWA to

survive," he said.

Since the start of Israel's military operations in Gaza on October 7, 2023, the Israeli government has intensified its campaign against UNRWA.

Israel claims that 14 of the agency's 12,000 employees in Gaza were complicit in the October 7 attacks, labelling UNRWA as a platform for Hamas and calling for its closure.

UNRWA, established in 1949, provides health, education and social services to Palestinian refugees in the occupied West Bank, East Jerusalem, Lebanon, Jordan and Gaza.

International service to Damascus Airport set to resume on Tuesday

Amman, Jordan - Damascus International Airport is set to resume international flights on Tuesday, according to the head of the Syrian Civil Aviation and Air Transport Authority.

In a statement to official Syrian news agency SANA, Ashad Al-Suleibi assured both regional and international airlines that efforts are underway to fully rehabilitate the airports in both Damascus and Aleppo - Syria's two largest cities - with the assistance of international partners.

"We are pleased to announce the resumption of international

flights to and from Damascus International Airport starting January 7," he said.

The move comes after more than a decade of suspended air traffic. In 2012, most airlines halted flights to and from the capital Damascus due to the regime's violent crackdown on protests that erupted in 2011, marking the beginning of the ongoing civil war.

Qatar Airways became the first international airline to announce the return of flights, scheduling three weekly services to Damascus starting on Tuesday.



Bashar Assad, Syria's leader for nearly 25 years, fled to Russia after anti-regime groups took control of Damascus on December 8, ending the Baath Party's decades-long regime.

The takeover came after Hayat Tahrir al-Sham fighters captured key cities in a lightning offensive that lasted less than two weeks.

A new administration led by Ahmed al-Sharaa has now taken charge.

Meanwhile, Syrian Foreign Minister Assad al-Shaibani announced on Friday he plans visits this week to Qatar, the United

Arab Emirates (UAE) and Jordan in his second trip abroad since taking the post in the Syrian interim government.

"We look forward that these visits contribute to support the stability and security, the economic recovery and build distinguished partnerships," he wrote on X.

Al-Shaibani, however, did not set a date for his Arab tour.

On Wednesday, Al-Shaibani has his first visit abroad to Saudi Arabia upon an invitation from his Saudi counterpart, Prince Faisal bin Farhan.

Anadolu Agency

New Orleans attack highlights rising threat of homegrown US extremism

Istanbul, Turkey - Following months of warnings about escalating global threats, the deadly New Year's attack in New Orleans has raised alarms about the ongoing and unpredictable nature of terrorism, according to officials and analysts.

The attack, in which Army veteran Shamsud-Din Jabbar drove a pickup truck into crowds, killing 14 people, has raised concerns about the growing risk of homegrown extremism in the US.

The attack came amid a tumultuous global landscape, including the chaos in Syria following last month's fall of Bashar Assad, which led to a resurgence of Daesh/ISIS operatives in the region.

Radicalising in isolation

Avowedly inspired by Daesh/ISIS, Jabbar's attack was not linked to any international operatives, but underscored the ongoing threat from individuals radicalising in isolation.

Outgoing FBI Director Christopher Wray had long warned of the potential for violence stemming from foreign terrorist groups. After Hamas' October 2023 attack in Israel, he emphasised the risk of similar attacks on US soil. "I'm hard-pressed to think of a time in my career where so many different kinds of threats are all elevated at once," Wray said in August.

Christopher Costa, a former counterterrorism official, emphasised the danger of individuals acting on personal grievances. "You pick the grievance, and then you'll find the ideology to act on it," reported WPLG TV, based in Miami, Florida.



The attack, in which army veteran Shamsud-Din Jabbar drove a pickup truck into crowds, killed 14 people

The New Orleans attack is considered one of the deadliest Daesh/ISIS-inspired assaults on US since a 2016 massacre in Orlando, Florida.

Despite Jabbar's lack of previous law enforcement attention, the attack followed tactics encouraged by Daesh/ISIS. The FBI found bomb-making materials linked to Jabbar in his rental property and home in Houston, Texas.

Cybertruck explosion

Meanwhile, a 37-year-old US Army master sergeant was identified as the person behind the New Year's Tesla Cybertruck explosion outside Trump Hotel Las Vegas, having taken his own life before the blast with 'no animosity' toward President-elect Donald Trump, according to investigators.

The attack came amid a tumultuous global landscape, including the chaos in Syria following last month's fall of Bashar Assad, which led to a resurgence of Daesh/ISIS operatives in the region

The incident 'ultimately appears to be a tragic case of suicide involving a heavily decorated

combat veteran who is struggling with PTSD (post-dramatic stress disorder) and other issues', Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department Sheriff Kevin McMahon told reporters on Friday, said Fox News. Only former Sgt. Matthew Livelsberger died in the explosion, and seven people were injured.

Recovered from one of Livelsberger's two phones was a journal documenting his final movements, alongside a manifesto revealing his battle with PTSD. Despite the apparent symbolism of the site of the attack using a Tesla truck, built by a company made by major Trump supporter billionaire Elon Musk, investigators said neither document indicated hostility toward Trump or a political motive.

Livelsberger was also registered with the 'No Labels' political party, a movement describing itself as promoting bipartisan cooperation and rejecting

extremism.

No political motive

Voting records from the El Paso County clerk's office in Colorado show he initially registered with the party in 2020 and re-registered this July and voted in November

An Army spokesperson confirmed that Livelsberger, a special operations soldier with the 10th Special Forces Group, had served in the military since 2006, achieving the rank of master sergeant.

A decorated combat soldier with ties to bases such as Fort

Liberty (formerly Fort Bragg), he also completed stints in the National Guard and Army Reserve. At the time of his death, he was on approved leave from his station in Germany.

"We are continuing to review his history and affiliations, but nothing so far suggests animosity toward the president-elect," McMahon added.

The case remains under investigation.

Meanwhile, the Pentagon said on Friday that no support was requested for two separate deadly attacks on New Year's Day, which were carried out by active military personnel and a veteran.

"To date, no DoD (Department of Defence) support has been requested in response to either incident in either New Orleans or Las Vegas," deputy spokeswoman Sabrina Singh told reporters.

"These are tragic events that happened in Las Vegas and New Orleans," said Singh.

Asked about the mental health of the suspects, Singh said the vast majority of army personnel perform their duties with honour, and the Pentagon encourages service members who need psychological treatment to seek help.

Singh rejected media reports that said US forces are reportedly building a base in the northern Syrian city of Ayn al-Arab.

"I've seen some of the reports and have gotten questions about that. There are no plans to build a US base in Kobani. So, I'm not sure where that's coming from," she said. The US continues to focus its mission in Syria to ensure the defeat of the Daesh/ISIS terror group, said Singh.

Anadolu Agency

Japan: World's oldest person dies at 116

Tokyo, Japan - A 116 year-old woman from Japan, thought to be the world's oldest person, has died, according to Japanese media reports.

Japanese public television station NHK reported on Saturday that Tomiko Itooka died at a retirement home on December 29 in Ashiya in the southern Hyogo prefecture.

Itooka was born on May 23 1908 in Osaka and was the oldest of three siblings. She had four children and five grandchildren.

The Guinness World Records listed Itooka as the

oldest living person after the August 2024 death of Spain's Maria Branyas Morera at the age of 117.

"During her long life, she has given us much courage and hope. We thank her once again and offer our sincere condolences to her family and loved ones," the television station quoted Ashiya's mayor Ryosuke Takashima as saying.

As of September, Japan counted more than 95,000 people aged 100 or older with 88% of that number being women. DW

Ortagus is deputy special envoy for Middle East peace

Washington, D.C., US - US President-elect Donald Trump on Friday appointed Morgan Ortagus as deputy special presidential envoy for Middle East peace.

Ortagus is set to serve as deputy to real estate executive Steven Witkoff, whom Trump appointed in November as special envoy to the Middle East.

"She will hopefully be an asset to Steve, a great leader and talent, as we seek to bring calm and prosperity to a very troubled region. I expect great results, and soon," Trump wrote on his social media platform, Truth Social. Ortagus said she was 'honoured' by the appointment.



Morgan Ortagus

"To be given the opportunity to once again represent my country and the Trump Administration in a crucial diplomatic role is a dream come true," she wrote

on X. 'The most important thing under Trump is that the US brings 'peace and stability to a troubled region', said Ortagus, who expressed gratitude to play a 'small' role to that end.

Ortagus served as State Department spokesperson between 2019 and 2021 during Trump's first term, under then-Secretary of State Mike Pompeo.

She worked at the Treasury Department as a financial intelligence analyst before that, and served as deputy US Treasury attaché in Saudi Arabia from 2010 to 2011.

Anadolu Agency



Greenland premier urges independence

Istanbul, Turkey - Greenland's Prime Minister Mute Egede encouraged the island's independence from Denmark on Friday, framing it as a step toward breaking free from 'the shackles of the colonial era', according to media reports.

His New Year's address emphasised Greenland's right to self-determination amid renewed global attention sparked by US President-elect Donald Trump's renewed interest in purchasing the territory, Politico reported.

Egede highlighted lingering inequalities in Greenland's relationship with Denmark, which governed the island as a colony until 1979 and continues to provide an annual subsidy of US\$514.5mn.

"History and current conditions have shown that our cooperation with the Kingdom of Denmark has not succeeded in creating full equality," said Egede, underscoring the need for Greenland to chart its own path.

Greenland, which achieved

self-rule in 1979 and gained the right to declare independence via a referendum in 2009, has been central to strategic and economic interests due to its vast reserves of oil, natural gas and minerals. The island, home to 57,000 people, also hosts a crucial US Air Force base.

Egede's comments came weeks after Trump restated his controversial proposal to buy Greenland, a move he first floated in 2019. The Greenlandic leader swiftly dismissed the notion, stating that the territory 'is not for sale and will never be for sale'.

Denmark, which has faced criticism for historical injustices in Greenland, including forced contraception campaigns in the mid-20th century, recently announced plans to increase defence spending on the island by €1.3bn.

Danish Defence Minister Troels Lund Poulsen attributed the timing of the investment to coincidence.

Anadolu Agency

US-made ATACMS missiles shot down: Moscow

Moscow, Russia - Russian forces shot down eight US-made ATACMS missiles, the Russian Defence Ministry said on Saturday.

"Air defence systems downed eight ATACMS US-made missiles and 72 drones," the Russian defence forces told news agencies. They did not specify whether there were any casualties or damage.

ATACMS missiles have a range of up to 300km (190 miles), as per publicly available data. The administration of outgoing US President Joe Biden has supplied Ukraine with the missiles, which are capable of penetrating inside Russia.

Moscow has warned that their use by Ukraine could trigger a hypersonic ballistic missile attack on central Kyiv. Moscow also on Saturday said it had taken control



ATACMS missiles have a range of up to 300km (190 miles), and are capable of penetrating deep inside Russia

of the village of Nadiya in Ukraine's eastern Luhansk region. The reports could not be immediately verified.

Meanwhile, Pro-Ukrainian protesters in Slovakia held a rally against Prime Minister Robert Fico in Bratislava on Friday.

Protesters gathered outside the government's office, under the slogan 'Slovakia is Europe! We've had enough of Russia!'

The protest was organised by the initiative 'Mier Ukrajině' (Peace for Ukraine), which advocates for arms deliveries to

Ukraine. Initiative members said the number of those who took part in the rally was estimated to be around 4,000. Protesters carried banners which read: 'Treason!' and 'We are Europe!' distributed by the initiative. Organisers accused the leftist-

populist prime minister of taking Slovakia into a pro-Russia direction. Fico had recently clashed with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, after Kyiv halted gas transfer from Russia to Slovakia.

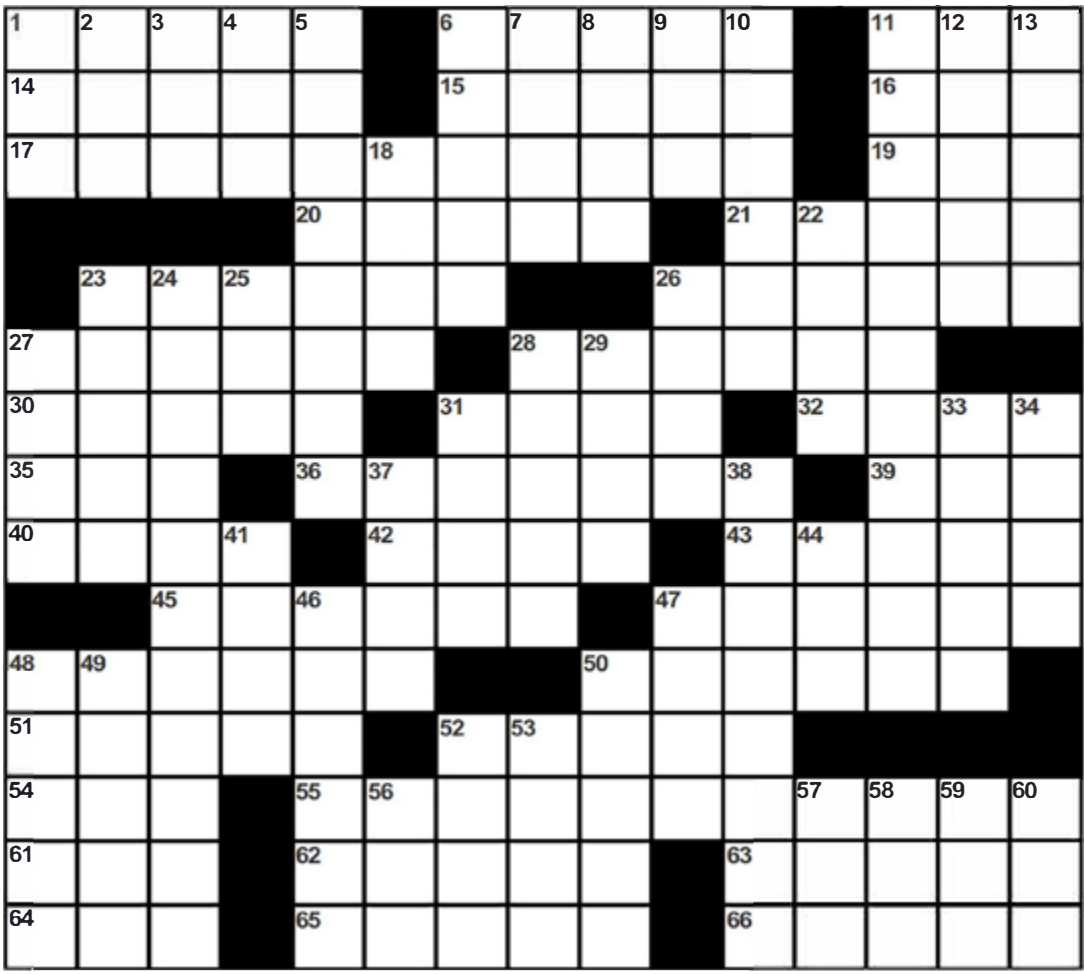
Operations at airport halted

Russian authorities had to temporarily halt operations at the airport in St Petersburg, citing safety reasons. Take off and landing at Pulkovo airport in St Petersburg were suspended for a few hours, amid reports of Ukrainian drones in the vicinity.

Russia's Defence Ministry said that 16 Ukrainian drones over the regions of Bryansk, Smolensk, Belgorod, Pskov and Leningrad were destroyed overnight.

DW

DAILY CROSSWORD



- ACROSS**
- 1) Getting on
 - 6) Say "Li'l," e.g.
 - 11) Branch
 - 14) Low point
 - 15) Arc lamp gas
 - 16) Babe in the woods
 - 17) Teen years
 - 19) Type of wrestling
 - 20) Decorative jugs
 - 21) France's major river
 - 23) Of the flesh
 - 26) Country on Lake Victoria
 - 27) Curiosity
 - 28) Ancient manuscripts
 - 30) Comanche clan
 - 31) Actor's goal
 - 32) Bygone despot
 - 35) Actor Arnold
 - 36) Compatibility device
 - 39) Cry's partner
 - 40) Future indicator
 - 42) Unpleasant burden
 - 43) All excited
 - 45) Charioteer constellation
 - 47) Kind of column
 - 48) Soaked to the gills
 - 50) Pang
 - 51) Double-reed instruments
 - 52) In front of
 - 54) Casbah headgear
 - 55) Arm of the Mediterranean
 - 61) British beverage
 - 62) Meat cuts
 - 63) Rose protection
 - 64) Confession component
 - 65) Related maternally
 - 66) Deviated from a course, as a ship
- DOWN**
- 1) Santa __, Calif.
 - 2) Wander (with "about")
 - 3) Words said at an altar
 - 4) Not even one
 - 5) Chinese restaurant offering
 - 6) Go great guns
 - 7) Goatish glance
 - 8) Not-final resting places
 - 9) One of the Seven Dwarfs
 - 10) Pep
 - 11) Reprimanding
 - 12) Three minutes, in boxing
 - 13) Euripides drama
 - 18) Go to and fro
 - 22) Male red deer
 - 23) Kind of drive
 - 24) Cheap
 - 25) Barbecue offering
 - 26) "What've you been __?"
 - 27) "Laura" director Pre-minger
 - 28) __New Guinea
 - 29) Crafts' counterparts
 - 31) Sudden sharp pain
 - 33) Surrounding glows
 - 34) Casting need
 - 37) Bump off
 - 38) Quickness
 - 41) In one's birthday suit
 - 44) Bad thing to see after hearing "Shark!"
 - 46) Flea market deal
 - 47) Belt out of the park
 - 48) Chesterfields, e.g.
 - 49) Old manuscript marks
 - 50) Annoy persistently
 - 52) Opera solo
 - 53) Clue
 - 56) "The Godfather" title
 - 57) When doubled, a dance
 - 58) Boar's mate
 - 59) " ... _ he drove out of sight"
 - 60) "Go on ... "

NOTE PAD

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YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE

ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

You can look forward to a day of calm. Your normally erratic emotions may be much more tame than usual. Down time with your lover is called for today. Find something you can do, just the two of you. Moderation is the key to your money today. Don't go overboard with spending. Avoid office politics or the local gossip today. You're better off working on your own.

LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

People may mistake your confidence for arrogance. The attention shouldn't be on you today. Give it to your partner instead. If someone asks for a donation today, give it without hesitation. Share your glory at work with those who helped you. A team makes for a successful idea. Your Lucky color is Lavish Blue. Your Lucky number is 9.

SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

Pay some attention to your inner life today. An important conversation may be needed with your partner today. Explore new ways to build your nest egg today. Great ideas will come to you. It's your job to keep the peace at work today. People look towards you for guidance. Your Lucky color is Light Blue. Your Lucky number is 15.

TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

It's your job today to hold everything together. Show your romantic side to your sweetheart today. They need to see how much you care. Jump on an investment opportunity that may come your way today. Don't wait too long. You may feel especially lazy today. Get at least the most important tasks done then take it easy.

VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

You feel the need to hide your feelings to keep others happy. Hiding your feelings may cause more problems later. Honesty is the best policy. A solid investment opportunity may appear today. Check it out quickly. Gossip only serves to get people in trouble today. Stay out of office politics completely.

CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

Stand up for yourself today. Relax. Love will come to you if you smile and make casual conversation with everyone. A small treat won't hurt you, just don't spend too much money. Team up with someone willing to look at the details today. You make a great pair. Your Lucky color is Magenta. Your Lucky number is 9.

GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

Surround yourself with loved ones today. Do what your partner wants today. A compromise will serve your relationship best. Look for a way to turn a hobby into a money-making endeavour. Pick a task and stick to it until it's done. Don't let anything distract you. Your Lucky color is Purple. Your Lucky number is 19.

LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

Today is a good day to examine your fears. Be brave. Your easy-going manner gives you the power to talk to a potential interest. Check to make sure your bills are paid. You've been putting it off. It may be a great day to stay back home. You may face trouble concentrating today. Your Lucky color is White. Your Lucky number is 13.

AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

Spend as much time with others as you can today but without compromising your work. Ask questions about your lover today. Learn more about their inner life. Save a little money for tomorrow. Be the leader today. Taking control of a project will make it easier for you and everyone else. Your Lucky color is Green. Your Lucky number is 5.

CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

It may land on you to be the one to keep everyone together. Listening will serve you much better than talking tonight. Your lover needs an ear. See if you can turn a creative hobby into a money-making venture. It's been on your mind. Share your ideas, but listen to others. You can find a compromise if you try.

SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

Respect will get you everywhere today. Make your partner happy today. Do something that will bring a big smile to their face. Save your receipts. What you buy today may not impress you tomorrow, so decide. Brighten up the workplace. Flowers or a piece of art will make your office cheerier. Your Lucky color is Baby Pink. Your Lucky number is 2.

PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

You will need to put your own needs aside and take care of another today. A relaxed evening impresses a lover more than an expensive date. Enjoy some quiet time. Small purchases are okay today. Get some things you need for yourself. Help a co-worker. Your list isn't nearly as important as theirs today. Your Lucky color is Yellow. Your Lucky number is 7.

TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

1. When Dartmoor Prison first opened in 1809 what was its purpose?

A. To house prisoners-of-war
B. To house serious offenders
C. A correctional house for young offenders
D. A workhouse

2. Which of these describes a boisterous, knockabout style of humour?

A. Bostick
B. Yardstick
C. Slapstick
D. Chapstick

3. Who was the first British monarch of the House of Windsor?

A. George V
B. Victoria
C. Edward VII
D. Stephen

Answers: 1.A 2.C 3.A

KIDS COLOURING



BOGGLER

A	S	D	E
A	A	K	E
O	N	H	N
M	Y	S	E

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

SOLUTION

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

DO YOU SUDOKU?

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

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

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

2	7	8	6	4	9	1	8
8	6	4	7	9	1	8	2
9	6	1	2	8	8	7	6
4	9	7	6	9	2	1	8
8	8	2	8	1	9	4	7
6	1	8	8	7	6	9	2
8	8	9	1	2	7	6	4
7	4	6	9	8	2	8	1
1	2	9	4	6	8	8	7

PANTEMONIUM IN SYDNEY

Pant’s blazing fifty gives India hope as bowlers continue to shine in fifth Test

Sydney, Australia - India brushed off the absence of captain Jasprit Bumrah to dismiss Australia for 181 and reach 141 for six for an overall lead of 145 on an extraordinary second day of the finely-balanced fifth Test on Saturday.

On a day of high drama at a sunbathed Sydney Cricket Ground, Bumrah took the first wicket to set India on their way but departed with the team doctor soon after lunch for medical scans of an undisclosed injury.

Prasidh Krishna (3-42), Mo-

The crowd of 47,257 enjoying the Sydney sunshine certainly got their money’s worth as the momentum shifted back and forth, as it has over the series, which Australia lead 2-1

hammed Siraj (3-51) and Nitish Kumar Reddy stepped into the considerable bowling void left by their captain to rout Australia and fire India to a slender first-innings lead of four runs at tea.

There was still plenty of spice in the wicket, however, and paceman Scott Boland took 4-42 in the final session to add to his four-wicket haul on Friday, as Australia lopped the top off the Indian batting and dug deep into the middle order.

Rishabh Pant threw off the shackles and produced some extraordinary shots in a stunning 28-ball half century to stop the

rot but he too departed for 61 in the final hour, Australia skipper Pat Cummins claiming the 14th wicket of the day.

There was still time for Boland to claim his fourth victim in the shape of Nitish Kumar Reddy, leaving Ravindra Jadeja, who was eight not out, and Washington Sundar, unbeaten on six, at the crease at the close of play.

The crowd of 47,257 enjoying the Sydney sunshine certainly got their money’s worth as the momentum shifted back and



India’s Rishabh Pant hit four sixes and six fours in his 33-ball 61



Jasprit Bumrah

BUMRAH STRUGGLING WITH BACK SPASM

Sydney, Australia - India might be without captain for the remainder of the fifth Test against Australia after he left the Sydney Cricket Ground for scans on a back problem on day two on Saturday.

The fast bowler, who has been by far the most influential player in the five-match series, left the ground with the India team doctor about an hour after the lunch break.

“He had a back spasm,”his teammate Prasidh Krishna told reporters after play.

“He went for scans and the medical team is monitoring him, so we’ll know whenever the medical team gets back to us.

“No matter who is leading us as a team, I think we’re very well prepared as a bowling unit. The plan was pretty clear even when Bumrah was not there.”

Krishna took three for 42 as India dismissed Australia for 181 on Saturday, but they were only 145 runs in front at the close of play with four wickets in hand, three if Bumrah is unable to bat.

His absence would be even more noticeable if Australia were chasing a relatively small victory target, given the skipper has taken 32 wickets at an average of 13.06 so far in the series.

“If he wasn’t to be there, then India would have to come up with a new plan,”said Australia coach Andrew McDonald.

“He’s the leading wicket taker in the series, so you’d say that it would be slightly beneficial for us.”

I sat out of this match because I’m not scoring runs, says Rohit

Sydney, Australia - Indian Test skipper Rohit Sharma said sitting out the final match of the series against Australia due to poor form does not mean he will retire, adding that critics will not decide when he should walk away from the sport.

Rohit was dropped after scoring only 31 runs in five innings as India look to draw the final test and retain the Border-Gavaskar Trophy, with pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah replacing him as captain in Sydney.

Rohit has only one fifty in his last 15 Test innings, which include 10 single-digit scores, but the 37-year-old said he had confidence

in himself to turn things around.

“This decision is not a retirement decision nor am I going to take myself out of the game,”Rohit told Star Sports broadcaster on day two of the Sydney test.

“I sat out of this match because I’m not scoring runs. There is no guarantee that runs will not come two or five months down the line. I have seen a lot in cricket. Every minute, every second, every day life changes.

“I have belief that things will change, but at the same time I have to be realistic as well. So life won’t change by what someone with a mic, pen or laptop writes



Rohit Sharma

or says. I’ve played the game for years.

“They can’t decide when we should retire, when we should sit out, when we should captain. I am a sensible man, a mature man, a father of two kids. So I think I know what I need in life.”

With India trailing 2-1 ahead of the fifth and final Test, Rohit said he “stood down”after a discussion with the selectors and head coach Gautam Gambhir, who had declined to confirm on the eve of the game if the batter would play.

The match is finely poised with India at 141-6 in the second innings, leading Australia by 145

runs.

“The chat that I had with the coach and the selector was very simple - my bat is not scoring runs, I am not in form, this is an important match and we need players who are in form,”Rohit added.

“The boys are not in great form. So I had this simple thought in my mind - we can’t carry out-of-form players.

“That’s why I thought I should inform the coach and the selector about what’s on my mind. They backed my decision. They said, ‘You’ve been playing for many years, you’re the best judge of what you are doing.’”



Wesley Fofana

Chelsea’s ‘Fofana could miss rest of season’

London, England - Chelsea defender Wesley Fofana could sit out the rest of the season due to a hamstring injury, manager Enzo Maresca said on Friday as the club struggles for form without the French centre back.

Fofana went through injury hell when he missed the entire 2023-24 campaign due to an anterior cruciate ligament surgery in pre-season but started the new season strongly to form the bedrock of Maresca’s defence.

The 24-year-old started every game he was available for before he suffered the injury against Aston Villa last month.

Rickelton’s double ton puts South Africa in control against Pakistan

Cape Town, South Africa - Makeshift opener Ryan Rickelton posted the joint seventh highest score by a South African in Test cricket with 259 to help his side to a massive 566 for seven at tea on day two of the second and final Test against Pakistan at Newlands on Saturday.

The left-hander was dismissed 10 minutes before the interval having struck 29 fours and three sixes in a 343-ball stay at the wicket that has put his side firmly in control of the contest.

Rickelton put on a partnership of 235 with captain Temba Bavuma (106) on the first day and 148 with Kyle Verreynne (100) as the South African batters made hay in the sweltering conditions in Cape Town.

Having been elevated to open the innings due to an injury to Tony de Zorzi, Rickelton was finally dismissed when he attempted a tired swipe at seamer Mir Hamza and skied a catch to



Ryan Rickelton’s 259 is the joint seventh highest score by a South African

Mohammad Abbas at mid-on.

Tall all-rounder Marco Jansen is unbeaten on 57 from 48 balls and will resume after the interval with Keshav Maharaj, who has two.

Rickelton, who scored his maiden Test century against Sri

Lanka last month, resumed in the morning session on 176 and continued where he left off in seeing off Pakistan’s second new ball.

The tourists removed David Bedingham for five as he became wicketkeeper Mohammad Rizwan’s fifth victim of the innings, this time off the bowling of Abbas (2-93) with a poor shot outside off-stump.

A real estate investment trust launched by Argentine soccer star Lionel Messi has made its Spanish market debut at 57.4 euros per share.

That brought Verreynne to the wicket and after a nervous start, he unleashed his full array of strokes on the tiring tourists, reaching his fourth Test century from 144 balls with five sixes before he was caught by Aamer Jamal on the midwicket boundary off spinner Salman Agha (3-129).

When Pakistan bat, they will be without in-form opener Saim Ayub due to an ankle fracture sustained in the field on the first morning, limiting them to nine wickets in each of their innings.

Ayub is expected to be out for around six weeks and will be a doubt for Pakistan’s ICC Champions Trophy squad.



Newcastle United’s Alexander Isak scores against Tottenham

Isak on target again as Newcastle beat Tottenham

London, England - Newcastle United striker Alexander Isak continued his rich vein of form with another goal on Saturday to help his side beat injury-hit Tottenham Hotspur 2-1 away in the Premier League and move closer to the top four.

Isak scored eight league goals in December and struck again just before halftime to give Newcastle the lead after they had fallen behind to a Dominic Solanke header in the fourth

minute. Solanke’s goal had lifted the mood among home fans on a freezing day in north London, but Tottenham’s lead was quickly snuffed out when Anthony Gordon fired home an equaliser.

Tottenham were the better side after the break with Brennan Johnson hitting the post and James Maddison going close, but Newcastle hung on through 10 minutes of stoppage time for a fifth successive league win.

Real-time response

Late Bellingham goal helps Madrid beat Valencia and go top of LaLiga

Valencia, Spain - Late strikes from Luka Modric and Jude Bellingham earned 10-man Real Madrid a 2-1 comeback win at relegation-threatened Valencia on Friday as the visitors moved top of the LaLiga standings.

Real Madrid were a goal down with five minutes to go, but mounted another trademark comeback with Bellingham's winner arriving seven minutes into stoppage time as Real moved on to 43 points, two clear of second-placed Atletico Madrid, who have a game in hand.

The match, rescheduled due to devastating floods in the region late in October, kicked off in a tense atmosphere after home fans clashed with police during protests against the club outside the Mestalla stadium.

On the pitch, however, it was a thrilling start, as Real's Federico Valverde and Valencia's Hugo Duro both went close to breaking the deadlock within the first minutes, only to see their efforts blocked. Duro then put Valencia ahead in the 27th minute by tapping into an open goal after Thibaut Courtois had blocked Javi Guerra's first effort.

Real pushed hard for an equaliser, but Bellingham missed a golden chance to score with a poor penalty that hit the post after Enzo Barrenechea's foul on Kylian Mbappe in the 55th minute. Mbappe thought he had equalised five minutes later, but his strike was disallowed by the VAR for offside.

Carlo Ancelotti's side were then reduced to 10 men in the 79th minute when Vinicius Jr was shown a straight red card for slapping Valencia goalkeeper



Real Madrid's Jude Bellingham (R) celebrates with Kylian Mbappe after scoring against Valencia on Friday

Stole Dimitrievski.

The Brazil forward later apologised for his behaviour on his X account where he wrote: "Sorry and thank you team".

But substitute Modric finally brought the visitors level when he beat Dimitrievski with a low shot off Bellingham's through ball five minutes from time. The England midfielder then sealed the win, bearing down on goal before calmly beating the keeper with a right-footed finish to hand the hosts their first loss under new coach Carlos Corberan.

"The missed penalty gave (Bellingham) extra motivation, he gave a few minutes as only he

It hurts a lot to lose the advantage like that, especially after the sending off. We have to focus on the pitch.

HUGO DURO, VALENCIA

can do. He worked hard, the goal is a deserved reward for him for the game he played," coach Ancelotti told reporters.

Valencia remain second-bottom with 12 points, four points from the safety zone.

"It hurts a lot to lose like this. We are not in a good momentum and we had chances," Valencia striker Duro said.

"It hurts a lot to lose the advantage like that, especially after the sending off. We have to focus on the pitch. Whatever is on the outside doesn't matter to us."



Carlo Ancelotti

Real 'tremendously bad in first half, tremendously good in the second'

Valencia, Spain - Real Madrid manager Carlo Ancelotti was full of praise for his side's dramatic 2-1 comeback win at Valencia on Friday, but criticised their first-half performance, stating his team cannot show "two sides".

Luka Modric and Jude Bellingham scored late at the Mestalla stadium as Real, who were reduced to 10 men following Vinicius Jr.'s 79th-minute dismissal, fought back from a goal down following Hugo Duro's opener before the half-hour mark.

"It's difficult to explain how bad we were in the first half and how good we were in the second, and with a man down," Ancelotti told reporters.

"We deserved three points, but we can't show these two sides. Tremendously bad in the first half, tremendously good in the second with 10 men."

Bellingham sealed victory for his side in the 97th minute

having missed a penalty early in the second half.

While Ancelotti praised the England midfielder for his redemption, he also expressed concern that his side have missed three of their last four penalties, including two from Kylian Mbappe.

"It bothers me that we missed three penalties, I think I have to take responsibility for choosing who is going to take the penalty," he said.

"Bellingham didn't lose faith after missing the penalty, it gave him extra motivation. His last 30 minutes can only be done by him. He made an extraordinary effort."

The Italian coach added that the club will appeal Vinicius' straight red card as the Brazilian striker was sent off for slapping Valencia goalkeeper Stole Dimitrievski.

"We think it wasn't a red card... But the team reacted to this difficulty. We are going to appeal, I don't know if they will accept it," Ancelotti said.

Dumfries double fires Inter Milan into Super Cup final

Riyadh, Saudi Arabia - A second-half double from Denzel Dumfries earned Inter Milan a 2-0 win over Atalanta in Riyadh on Thursday to reach the Italian Super Cup final, where the Serie A champions will aim to win the trophy for the fourth successive time.

While Inter manager Simone Inzaghi went with his strongest available 11, Atalanta's Gian Piero Gasperini, already without top scorer Mateo Retegui through injury, surprisingly left both Ademola Lookman and Charles De Ketelaere on the bench.

The opening half ended scoreless, mostly thanks to Atalanta keeper Marco Carnesecchi, who first denied Lautaro Martinez with a reflex save from close range.

Carnesecchi then pulled off a double save, parrying away a powerful Martinez shot, then quickly getting back on his feet to stop Federico Dimarco's effort from the rebound.

Atalanta had one decent chance in the first half, thanks to a poor headed clearance attempt from Inter defender Alessandro Bastoni which left Giorgio Scalvini with a header



Inter Milan's Denzel Dumfries scores against Atalanta in Riyadh on Thursday

from close range that he sent straight at keeper Yann Sommer.

After the break, Inter forced a couple of early corner kicks, and took the lead when the ball came to Dumfries in the six-yard box. With his back to goal the Dutchman controlled with a header before firing an overhead shot into the net.

Gasperini responded by sending on Lookman and De Ketelaere, along with Ederson, but it was Inter who found the second goal on the counter just when Atalanta began to look dangerous.

Dimarco's crossfield pass missed Mehdi Taremi but fell to Dumfries who hit a scorching first time shot that left Carnesecchi with no chance as it went in off the crossbar.

"We know how difficult it is against Atalanta, they give us few spaces," Inter's Bastoni told SportMediaset.

"In these situations, individual talent must shine and today Denzel did just this."

Martinez should have put Inter out of sight when served by Dimarco and with just the keeper to beat, but again he was unable to beat Carnesecchi.

Milan beat Juventus to reach Super Cup final

Riyadh, Saudi Arabia - AC Milan reached the Italian Super Cup final after coming from behind to beat Juventus 2-1 on Friday in Sergio Conceicao's first game in charge, setting up a derby decider with Inter Milan.

A second-half penalty from Christian Pulisic and an own goal by Federico Gatti completed Milan's comeback after Kenan Yildiz had fired Juve into a 21st-minute lead.

Milan will play Inter in Monday's final, after the Serie A champions overcame Atalanta 2-0 in their semifinal meeting on Thursday, where Conceicao could immediately get his hands on a trophy after replacing the sacked Paulo Fonseca as Milan manager on Monday.

The expected intrigue of a father against son battle failed to materialise, after Juventus winger Francisco Conceicao was named in the starting 11 but was withdrawn after picking up an injury in



AC Milan's Christian Pulisic scores off a penalty in their Super Cup semifinal against Juventus 2-1 on Friday

the warm-up.

Conceicao's place was taken by Yildiz, and after a slow, cagey start to the game, it was the Turkish forward who broke the deadlock.

A through pass from Samuel Mbangula caught the Milan defence off guard and found Yildiz who took the ball into the area before smashing his shot into the roof of the net, beating Milan keeper Mike Maignan at his near post.

The game at last opened up and Nicolò Savona's foul on Hernandez gave Milan a penalty kick in the 71st minute which Pulisic sent straight down the middle to beat Michele Di Gregorio.

Milan went ahead four minutes later, through an own goal. Yunus Musah's cross took a wicked deflection off Juve defender Gatti which took the ball past Di Gregorio who had come off his line.

I'm not here to make friends, but to win, says Conceicao

Riyadh, Saudi Arabia - AC Milan manager Sergio Conceicao celebrated an Italian Super Cup semifinal success over Juventus in his first game in charge on Friday, but the new boss said he is not there to make friends.

Milan went in at the break a goal down, and it took a stern halftime talking-to from Conceicao to spark them into action, and their 2-1 victory set up a derby decider with Inter Milan on Monday.

"After the first 45 minutes, in the locker room I didn't give kisses, in fact I got a little angry because the team didn't do the things we had prepared," Conceicao told Mediaset. "This is a humble group, sometimes they lack a bit of ruthlessness to get to something more but over time we will get there."

Conceicao replaced the



Sergio Conceicao

sacked Paulo Fonseca on Monday, with Milan eighth in the Serie A standings.

"I'm not a very nice person, I don't like to give hugs to players, I'm more often angry but a group needs all this," Conceicao said.

"Ours is a quality group, I am very happy with them because they have also accepted a coach

who does not smile so much.

"I'm not here to make friends, but to win."

Conceicao saved his hugs for his son Francisco at the final whistle, after the Juventus winger had been named in the starting side but was forced to withdraw after picking up an injury in the warm-up.

GULF CUP

HEARTBREAK AFTER BRIGHT START

Bahrain come back from a goal down against Oman to win Gulf Cup



Oman's Abdulrahman al Mushaifri celebrates after scoring against Bahrain in the Gulf Cup final on Saturday

Oman took the lead through Abdulrahman al Mushaifri but a Mohamed Marhoon penalty and an own goal from Mohammed al Maslami took the wind out of their sails

Muscat - Two late goals - a penalty and an unfortunate deflection resulting in an own goal - put paid to Oman's Gulf Cup dreams as Bahrain came back from 1-0 down to win the title at Jaber Al Ahmad International Stadium in Kuwait City on Saturday.

Oman were clearly the better team for the most part of the match, taking an early lead through a splendid header from Abdulrahman al Mushaifri and controlling the pace of the game, but a penalty won and converted by Mohamed Marhoon in the 78th minute and an own goal from captain Mohammed al Maslami in the 80th took the wind out of Oman's sails.

Rasheed Jaber's men started

Khamisi before crossing it for Mahdi al Humaidan who failed to hit the target.

Two minutes later Bahrain again threatened, this time with a quick long-ranger from Mohamed Marhoon which Al Rushaidi pushed out for a corner.

That was Bahrain's best period in the first half and soon Oman took control. And moments later, in the 17th minute, they scored from their first corner. Al Busaidi's corner from the left, a wickedly dipping left-footer had danger written all over it and al Mushaifri met it with a bullet header that bulged the net leaving Bahrain goalkeeper Ebrahim Lutfalla rooted to his spot

In the 31st minute, Oman again attacked through the as Jameel al Yahmadi showed his skills but Bahrain survived at the cost of a corner. A few minutes later Al Mushaifri's flick off another corner hit the side netting. Al Mushaifri, with his close control and trickery, was too hot to handle for the Bahrain defence while his attacking partners Issam al Sabhi and Jameel al Yahmadi were also proving a handful.

But out of the blue, Oman defenders were caught off guard by a long Marhoon diagonal from the left and Ali Madan's right-footed volley sailed wide to the relief of Oman camp.

Oman had a great chance to increase their lead at the start of the second half when Mohammed al Maslami's long ball found Arshad Al Alawi's run from the deep but Al Mushaifri could not connect the cross.

Hurkacz and Swiatek shine as Poland reach United Cup final

Sydney, Australia - Poland marched into a second successive final at the United Cup mixed team tennis tournament on Saturday with a convincing 2-0 victory over Kazakhstan after Hubert Hurkacz and Iga Swiatek won their singles matches.

Last year's runners-up will take on the United States in Sunday's final after inaugural champions defeated Czech Republic on Saturday.

Tomas Machac looked set to draw the Czechs level at 1-1 in their semi-final and was serving for the contest against Taylor Fritz, but an apparent cramp took its toll and he lost three straight games before throwing in the towel at 7-6(4) 5-6.

The result gave the Americans an unassailable 2-0 lead that sent them through.



Poland's Iga Swiatek defeated Elena Rybakina of Kazakhstan

Last year's runners-up Poland will take on the United States in Sunday's final after inaugural champions beat the Czech Republic on Saturday

Earlier, world number two Swiatek wrapped up the tie with a battling display against the big-hitting Elena Rybakina for a 7-6(5) 6-4 victory at the Ken Rosewall Arena.

"I think this was the first time I was able to win against Elena on a faster surface," said an exhausted Swiatek after the epic battle.



Elena Rybakina with Stefano Vukov

Rybakina defends former coach after provisional ban

Sydney, Australia - Elena Rybakina defended her former coach Stefano Vukov after he was provisionally suspended by the governing body of women's tennis pending an investigation into a potential breach of its code of conduct, saying on Saturday he had not mistreated her.

"I said it already before that he never mistreated me or it was never anything like that," Rybakina said at the United Cup in Sydney.

Sabalenka marches into Brisbane final



Aryna Sabalenka

Brisbane, Australia - Aryna Sabalenka powered into the Brisbane International final with a 6-3 6-2 victory over teenager Mirra Andreeva on Saturday, taking a step closer to a first trophy of the year before her Australian Open title defence begins later this month.

World number one Sabalenka saved five breakpoints to edge a

tight opening set against her 17-year-old Russian opponent, who had stunned the then ailing Belarusian in the French Open quarter-finals seven months ago.

Firing on all cylinders in her opening tournament of the new season, Sabalenka shifted gears in the second set for an early break and won to meet Russian Polina Kudernetova.

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2025

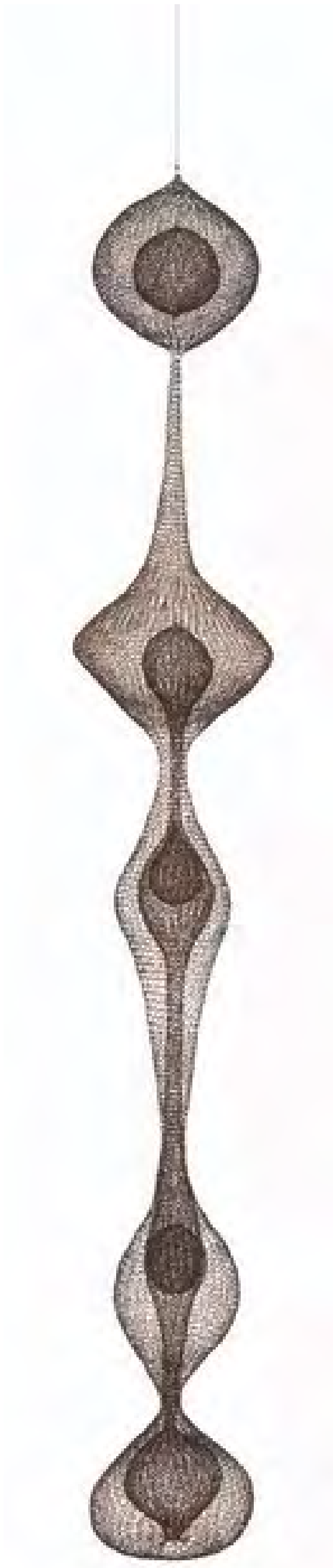
THE YEAR 2025 CONTINUES THE SPATE OF EXHIBITIONS THAT HELD SWAY LAST YEAR IN HONOUR OF RENOWNED ARTISTS. MUSEUMS AROUND THE WORLD HAVE MAJOR SHOWS LINED UP

This past year was a landmark one for blockbuster exhibitions worldwide. Major retrospectives honoured beloved historical artists, from Caspar David Friedrich's 'Infinite Landscapes' at Berlin's Alte Nationalgalerie to 'Van Gogh: Poets and Lovers' at London's National Gallery.

It was also a significant year for biennials, from the Whitney Biennial to the Venice Biennale. The main exhibition at the latter, 'Foreigners Everywhere', was themed around concepts of migration and globalisation, and placed an emphasis on the work of Indigenous, queer, outsider, and folk artists.

This focus is set to extend into 2025, as museums around the world have programmed major exhibitions giving marginalised voices their flowers - from those who have laboured in obscurity for years to the next generation of creatives poised to shape the future of the art world.

Here are some must-see museum shows of early 2025:



Ruth Asawa - **A Retrospective**

SFMOMA, San Francisco, and MoMA, New York (April 5 – September 2)

Almost 12 years after Ruth Asawa's death, SF-MOMA will present the first major national and international museum retrospective of her groundbreaking work. Born in California in 1926, Asawa was displaced to an internment camp during World War II due to her Japanese heritage. When released, she studied at Black Mountain College in North Carolina before embarking on a prolific six-decade career, working across a wide range of mediums from drawing to sculpture, and often referencing organic forms in line with her deep affinity with nature.

Three hundred of Asawa's works will feature in the exhibition, arranged chronologically. Her signature hanging looped-wire sculptures of forms within forms will be prominently displayed, as will documentation of her dedicated arts advocacy and public sculpture practice.

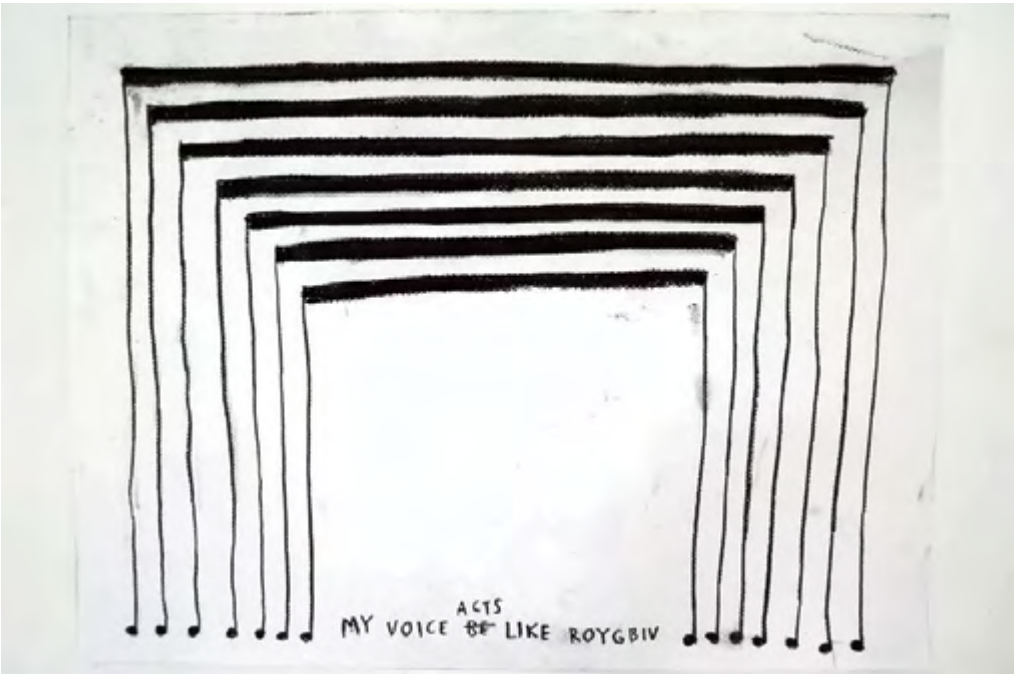


Robert Rauschenberg, John Cage, Merce Cunningham, Jasper Johns, Cy Twombly - **Five Friends**

Museum Brandhorst, Munich, and Museum Ludwig, Cologne (April 10 - August 17)

This year marks the centennial of American artist Robert Rauschenberg's birth. To honour this milestone, the artist's foundation has coordinated a diverse programme of exhibitions and events across Europe and the United States. A highlight will be 'Five Friends', landmark group show placing Rauschenberg's work in dialogue with that of his closest collaborators - John Cage, Merce Cunningham, Jasper Johns, and Cy Twombly - all of whom profoundly influenced the fields of music, dance, painting, sculpture, and drawing in the post-war period.

Opening at Munich's Museum Brandhorst before touring to Museum Ludwig during Art Cologne 2025, 'Five Friends' will feature over 150 works of art, scores, stage props, costumes, photographs, and archival materials. At Brandhorst, there will also be a series of dance performances and concerts taking place within the show, highlighting the close personal and professional relationship between choreographer Cunningham and composer Cage.



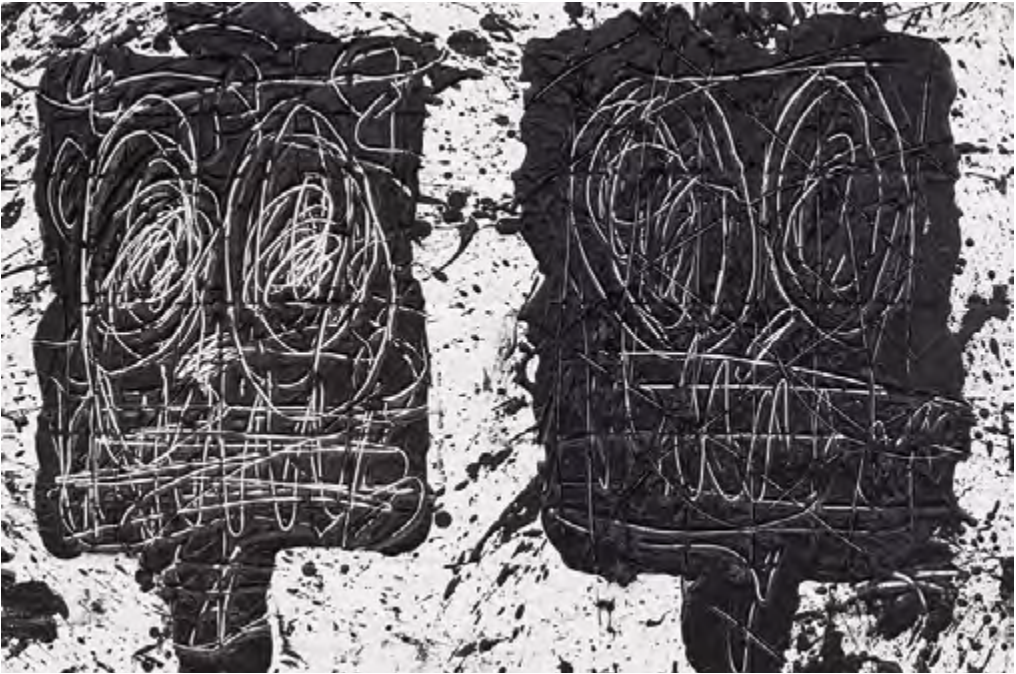
Christine Sun Kim - **All Day All Night**

Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (February 8 - July 31)

California-born, Berlin-based artist Christine Sun Kim is renowned for creating work that explores sound, language, and the complexities of communication. Drawing from her lived experience, she has continuously campaigned against the systemic marginalisation of the Deaf community, both within and outside the art world. Those who haven't seen her work in a gallery may still be familiar with her 2015 TED Talk, 'The Enchanting Music of Sign Language', or her performance of the U S national anthem in American Sign Language at

the 2020 Super Bowl.

Spring 2025 will be a season of milestones for Kim - as well as presenting her first major London exhibition at the Wellcome Collection with collaborator Thomas Mader, she will open her first major solo museum survey at the Whitney in New York before it tours to the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis. Titled 'All Day All Night', the show will feature over 90 works from 2011 to the present day, including rarely seen drawings, site-specific murals, paintings, video installations, performance documentation, and sculptures.



Rashid Johnson - **A Poem for Deep Thinkers**

Guggenheim Museum, New York (April 18, 2025 - January 18, 2026)

Rashid Johnson is known for exploring race, masculinity, mysticism, and the conditions of artmaking through his multidisciplinary practice. Spanning the last three decades of his career, 'A Poem for Deep Thinkers' will be the Chicago-born artist's largest exhibition to date and the first expansive museum survey of his work in over a decade.

Named after a poem by American poet, writer, teacher, and political activist Amiri

Baraka, 'A Poem for Deep Thinkers' will take over the entire rotunda of the Guggenheim in New York. Around 90 works considering themes of social alienation, rebirth, and escapism will be on display, including Johnson's films, black-soap paintings, and spray-painted text works.

His well-known series 'The New Negro Escapist Social and Athletic Club', 'Anxious Men', and 'Broken Men', among others, will be on view.



Anselm Kiefer - **Sag mir, wo die Blumen sind**

Stedelijk Museum and Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam (March 7 - June 9)

Amsterdam's Stedelijk and Van Gogh Museums both have strong links to Anselm Kiefer. While the former has acquired and displayed the German artist's work since the 1960s, the latter, as its name suggests, is dedicated to showcasing the work of Vincent van Gogh, whom Kiefer cites as a major inspiration. As a result, the two institutions have joined forces for the first time to present 'Sag mir, wo die Blumen sind' (Tell me where the flowers are), a two-part exhibition spread across

both venues.

At the Van Gogh Museum, previously unexhibited works by Kiefer will be shown in combination with key paintings by Van Gogh, highlighting the connections between their practices. Meanwhile, the Stedelijk's contribution will offer an unprecedented opportunity to see all of Kiefer's works in the museum's collection displayed together, and to understand his important role as one of the first German artists to address his homeland's fraught history.



EGYPT VISION 2030

Giza's GEM

AFTER OVER A DECADE OF DEVELOPMENT, THE GRAND EGYPTIAN MUSEUM (GEM) HAS OPENED ITS DOORS - PARTIALLY

In late October, the Grand Egyptian Museum (GEM) opened 12 of its main galleries and began welcoming around 4,000 visitors daily. The galleries, in chronological and thematic order, feature a selection of the collection's 15,000 artefacts as the museum fine-tunes its operations ahead of what hopefully will soon be its grand opening. Originally announced in 2002, the GEM has long been heralded as a symbol of Egypt's future, as part of President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi's Egypt Vision 2030, a large portion of which involves a major redevelopment of the Giza plateau, where GEM - and the famous Pyramids of Giza - is located. The challenge for the museum's designers, Dublin-based Hengam Peng Architects, was to honour ancient Egyptian history, known for its ancient innovations and luxury and long a draw for foreign tourists, while positioning modern Egypt in a similar light. This balance between old and new starts at the entrance. There, visitors are immediately greeted by a 3,000-year-

old statue of Ramses the Great, the legendary ruler of Egypt's Nineteenth Dynasty. Carved from granite, the statue was discovered in fragments and endured several unsuccessful restoration attempts before it was placed in Cairo's Ramses Square. Exposed to pollution and the vibrations of nearby traffic, the statue's preservation was at risk. However, it has been carefully restored and relocated to its new home at the GEM, where it joins other protected pieces. The massive statue is contrasted by a sleek, expansive atrium that devotes significant real estate to community space and a mix of retail and dining options that encourages visitors to linger. The museum incorporates homegrown brands such as El Kahhal Looms - a family-owned, century-old textile dynasty - and Azza Fahmy, the first woman to train in Egypt's jewellery quarter, Khan El Khalili. Both brands offer a clever nod to how they simultaneously celebrate Egypt's history and present. Last month, the Egyptian government signed a memorandum of under-

standing with GEM to provide local artisans resources, expertise, and a platform to showcase their work at the museum's gift shop. The atrium has also served as host for several recent high-profile events, including the launch of Cairo Food Week, a welcoming of the UK's Royal Philharmonic Orchestra to mark their first performance in the country, and the RiseUp Summit, a leading tech and entrepreneurship conference in the region. The most remarkable aspect of the museum is how it reflects the core pillars of ancient Egyptian civilization - preservation, legacy, and documentation. In ancient Egypt, there was a uniquely human drive to document the klives, whether to leave 'easter eggs' for future generations like us, or out of a deep-seeded desire to ensure they would not be forgotten. The GEM continues this commitment with advanced conservation labs that use cutting-edge technology to safeguard over 100,000 artefacts, ensuring they are preserved for future generations. Temperature control, humidity regulation, and UV protection all play a crucial role in the preservation methods. The concept of shifting Egyptology back to Egyptians carries a deeper message. While Egyptology originally stemmed from local excavations, its modern framework - shaped by institutional funding and scholarly influence - was largely developed by Western powers, especially in the 19th and 20th centuries. France's invasion of Egypt in the late 18th century, followed by British and German excavations and studies, led to institutions approaching the subject through a Western lens. This developed challenges that Egypt continues to address, including the illicit trade of antiquities and a foreign examination of its cultural identity. In 2010, GEM launched its own conservation efforts - quickly becoming the largest in the region - ensuring that Egypt actively participates in the pro-



tection of its legacy and declaring GEM's intent to share Egyptian history on its terms, with respect, responsibility, and innovation. This vision is evident in its new galleries, starting with the Prehistoric period of 700,000 BCE. Here, stone tools buried alongside their owners offer glimpses into early Egyptians' views on life and death. Statues of royal figures like Ramses II and monumental sculptures such as the Victory Column of King Merneptah reveal social structures, reflecting a dedication to documenting rulers, achievements, and the desire for Egyptian rulers to solidify their legacies. Many of the artefacts are displayed through visual storage, a clever choice used to maximise space while also allowing for a more extensive array of objects to be exhibited. This curation method also focuses on highlighting artefacts' interconnections as key parts of Egypt's cultural narrative rather than as isolated pieces. GEM stands apart by humanising these artifacts - a localised perspective rooted in human history, culture, and society. Curation at the museum typically focuses on storytelling and contextualisation, bringing audiences into the

lives of the various social classes of ancient Egyptian civilisation. Seeing a coffin in its rightful context versus a foreign display alters one's understanding, and though repatriation efforts have intensified in recent years, public knowledge of ancient Egypt remains influenced by Western narratives. This divide affects foreigners and Egyptians alike, the latter historically cut off from their heritage, either removed abroad or viewed through an exoticised lens. Though its highly-anticipated Tutankhamun Galleries have yet to open, the GEM continues its journey to completion following a revolution, a pandemic, and multiple regional crises. Spanning 500,000sqm - twice the size of the Louvre - the GEM marks a significant shift in how Egypt's history is understood and presented. As the museum continues toward full completion, GEM has shown that its role extends beyond serving as a repository for artefacts. Positioned as both a global cultural hub and a research centre for Egyptology, the GEM provides Egypt's history with the platform to reclaim and present its narrative on its own terms and on its own stage. (Courtesy: artnews.com)

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