



# MUSCAT DAILY

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## Space ambitions grow with 3 rockets planned in 2025

Our Correspondent  
Muscat

Oman is set to launch three rockets in 2025, building on the success of its first experimental rocket, Duqm-1, according to Dr Saoud al Shoailli, Director General and Head of National Space Programme at Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology.

Speaking to *Muscat Daily*, Shoailli said, "Oman is ready to drive innovation and technological development regionally and internationally. These upcoming launches are part of our efforts to support scientific research and expand our capabilities in space exploration."

The planned missions aim to enhance Oman's contribution to the global scientific community by advancing research in environmental studies, communications and space technology. The launches are expected to bolster the sultanate's reputation as a key player in the global space industry while fostering innovation in space technologies.

Duqm-1, Oman's first experimental rocket, was launched successfully through a collaboration with Etlag, a company under National Space Services Company (NASCOM). Measuring 6.5m in length and weighing 123kg when fuelled, the rocket was developed with strict adherence to environmental and safety standards. Coordination with Environment Authority ensured that terrestrial



Duqm-1 positioned Oman on the global space map and showcased our readiness for future endeavours  
**DR SAOUD AL SHOAILLI**

► The 2025 launches aim to support scientific research, expand space exploration capabilities, and advance environmental studies and communications

► Oman seeks to attract local and international investments, create jobs and position itself at the forefront of space exploration in the region

and marine ecosystems were protected throughout its development and launch.

The Duqm-1 project involved 15 Omani engineers and techni-

cians, who gained valuable experience in the space industry. While the rocket components were manufactured abroad, assembly took place locally, reflect-

ing Oman's efforts to transfer and localise advanced technologies.

Shoailli described the project as a catalyst for growth of the sultanate's space sector. "It positioned Oman on the global space map and showcased our readiness for future endeavours. It also showed prospects of investment, job creation and technological advancement in the sultanate."

Oman's National Space Programme has facilitated international collaborations bringing cutting-edge technologies to the sultanate. Recent discussions with delegations from various countries have explored opportunities for future projects, reinforcing Oman's commitment to becoming a significant player in space exploration.

Oman's rockets project began in January 2023 with the signing of a usufruct agreement for a launch site. Since then, Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology has worked closely with national entities such as Ministry of Defence, Civil Aviation Authority, and Environment Authority, as well as international organisations.

Neighbouring countries are informed of launch plans as a precautionary measure.

Duqm-1 rocket and upcoming launches set the pace for Oman's ambitious plans for space exploration, as the sultanate seeks to attract local and international investments, create jobs and position itself at the forefront of space exploration in the region.

## Oman, Egypt discuss ties, regional developments

Muscat - On behalf of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, H H Sayyid Fahd bin Mahmoud al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Council of Ministers, received Dr Badr Abdel Aati, Egyptian Minister of Foreign Affairs and Immigration, on Monday.

During the meeting, the minister conveyed greetings and best wishes of the Egyptian leadership to the leadership in Oman, along with their wishes of further progress and prosperity to the Omani people. The minister underlined the attention accorded by the Egyptian leadership to the distinguished relations with Oman in various spheres.

They reviewed the march of



bilateral relations that stem from the advanced ties binding the two leaderships and peoples.

They also reviewed regional developments, stressing the importance of collaborative efforts to contain their repercussions.

The meeting dealt with matters of mutual interest and exchanged views on the efforts

exerted to peacefully settle regional and international disputes to serve interests of all peoples.

The meeting underscored the importance of activating tasks of the Oman-Egypt joint committee and intensifying consultations between the two sides on issues of mutual interest.

ONA

## Agreement reached on disputed articles of Personal Income Tax Law

Our Correspondent  
Muscat

Joint committees of State Council and Majlis A'Shura have reached consensus on several disputed articles of drafts of the Personal Income Tax Law, Financial Law, and Special Economic Zones and Free Zones.

In a meeting on Monday, the joint committees held constructive discussions on articles of disagreement.

The committees resolved differences in 30 articles of the Per-

sonal Income Tax Law, 21 articles in the Financial Law, and 22 articles related to the Special Economic Zones and Free Zones Law.

The disputed articles included both original draft laws and new articles proposed by Majlis A'Shura.

With all disagreements now resolved, the final versions of the laws have been approved. The draft laws will be submitted for further deliberation during an upcoming joint session of the State Council and Majlis A'Shura.



Researcher feted for work on sustainable energy solutions



Oman to issue R0750mn in local bonds, sukuk in 2025



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# Oman Astronomical Society rechristened to incorporate space research in mission

Our Correspondent  
Muscat

Oman Astronomical Society has been officially rebranded as Oman Society of Astronomy and Space, marking a major shift to broaden its scope and strengthen the sultanate’s position as a regional leader in astronomy and space research.

The transformation reflects the society’s commitment to fostering scientific advancements and contributing to the Oman Vision 2040 and the National Space Policy.

H H Sayyid Azzan bin Qais al Said, honorary president of the society, explained that the change in name aligns with the organisation’s future vision to expand its activities and contributions to both astronomy and space.

“It is in line with Oman Vision 2040, focusing on promoting scientific research and developing national expertise in space-related fields.”

He added that the society seeks leadership and excellence through the merger of Oman’s rich cultural heritage with cutting-edge scientific and techno-



*The change in name aligns with the organisation’s future vision to expand its activities to both astronomy and space*

**H H SAYYID AZZAN AL SAID**

logical advancements.

The rebranding aims to position the society as a central platform for innovation and scientific discovery in Oman’s astronomy and space sector. It will focus on

achieving the goals of the National Space Policy and its Executive Programme 2023-33, with an emphasis on the diversification of economy, better scientific research, and development of national competencies in space exploration.

The society also aims to cultivate national expertise, promote space and astronomical education, and increase public awareness of space technologies’ role in sustainable development.

Additionally, the society plans to expand cooperation with national and international institutions to enhance Oman’s role in global space projects.

Ibrahim bin Mohammed al Mahrouqi, vice president of the society, added that the latest transformation reflects their vision to enhance scientific activities and contribute to promoting space and astronomy in Oman.

“We aim to support space research, foster international cooperation, and lead Oman to global leadership in this advanced scientific field.”

Over the years, the society has made significant strides, including organising community initiatives like ‘World Space Week’, hosting international conferences, and participating in global space training programmes.

# MTCIT to establish yards for recycling, dismantling of ships

Our Correspondent  
Muscat

As part of its mission to achieve net zero emissions by 2050, the Ministry of Transport, Communications, and Information Technology (MTCIT) has decided to establish yards for recycling and dismantling of ships using advanced green technologies.

Ship breaking, also known as ship recycling, ship demolition, or ship dismantling, involves breaking up ships to extract reusable parts or raw materials, primarily scrap metal. These facilities will align with modern sustainability standards, supporting Oman’s environmental goals.



*In addition to the recycling centres, the ministry is focused on enhancing the management and development of the ports of Shannah and Masirah*

Mahna Musa bin Baqer, Director General of Ports at the MTCIT, said that the ministry oversees the sultanate’s ports and maritime sector, ensuring compliance with international standards for ship and port security. The ministry aims to enhance the operational efficiency of Omani ports, which witnessed remarkable advancements in recent years.

A key priority for the ministry is the creation of ship recycling and cutting centres that leverage modern green technologies. An economic feasibility study is currently underway, Mahna Musa informed, adding that this move demonstrates Oman’s commitment to sustainable maritime practices.

In addition to the recycling centres, the ministry is focused on enhancing the management and development of the ports of Shannah and Masirah. A public auction has been planned to attract private sector participation in their operation and development.

Notably, tourist facilities at Shannah Port have already been completed.

Mahna Musa added that the ministry is also advancing plans to establish a yacht dock in the wilayat of Quriyat. A plot in the Daghmar area has been allocated for this project, which will be offered for investment through a public auction.

To further improve the sec-

tor’s performance, the ministry has signed concession agreements with prominent international companies specialising in port management, operation, and development. It has also issued licences for establishing and operating marine docks outside the main ports, driving innovation and efficiency in Oman’s maritime infrastructure.

The ministry reported that all together 133 licences for marine tourism trips were issued to companies from January to the end of August last year. Additionally, eight companies are currently managing and operating marine tourist piers across the governorates of Musandam, South Batinah, Muscat and Dhofar.



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# National survey on NCDs launched in Dhofar to improve public health

Our Correspondent  
Muscat

The Directorate General of Health Services in Dhofar governorate officially launched the ‘National Survey of Non-Communicable Diseases’ project on Sunday at the Sultan Qaboos Youth Complex for Culture and Entertainment in Salalah.

The event was held under the patronage of H H Sayyid Marwan bin Turki al Said, Governor of Dhofar.

The launch featured two key presentations. The first outlined the objectives and scope of the national survey, while the second focused on the methodology behind the survey, including the use of geographic information systems (GIS) to organise the data and the essential role of field teams in the survey’s first phase.

Dr Hamoud bin Said al Fazari, Director of the Primary Care Department in Dhofar, highlighted the project’s importance, describing it as a critical national initiative aimed at improving community health and strengthening Oman’s healthcare system through evidence-based approaches.



The survey will cover all citizens and residents in Oman aged 15 and above to collect comprehensive data on the prevalence NCDs, including diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, chronic respiratory diseases, and cancer - conditions that pose significant health challenges globally and locally. It will focus on identifying key risk factors related to these diseases, particularly those linked to unhealthy lifestyles.

This exercise will be conducted in two phases - with the first one focused on field visits to update residential maps and gather demographic data on the population.

In the second phase, field teams will visit homes in various

governorates to collect health data, conduct physical assessments, and administer questionnaires to residents.

Dr Fazari added that the data gathered from this survey will be essential in shaping health policies and programmes aimed at preventing NCDs and mitigating the associated health and economic impacts.

“The findings will provide a scientific basis for targeting future interventions in the country’s healthcare system.”

The National Survey for NCDs was first launched in Muscat governorate in December 2024. It will now expand to include all governorates across Oman, the official added.

# Oman, Egypt explore new opportunities for trade and investment

Muscat - H E Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP), met with Dr Badr Abdel Aati, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Immigration and Expatriates Affairs of Egypt, during the latter’s visit to the sultanate on Monday.

During the meeting, the two ministers discussed ways to strengthen bilateral cooperation between Oman and Egypt in trade and investment. They stressed on the importance of activating the Omani-Egyptian Businessmen Council as a key platform to support and enhance economic relations between the two nations.

The ministers also explored opportunities to increase trade exchanges by diversifying the range of products, which would open up new possibilities across various economic sectors.

They agreed on the need to foster joint investments and encourage private sector institutions in both countries to identify promising investment opportunities.



# Over 400,000 visit Suhar Festival celebrating Omani culture, heritage

Our Correspondent  
Muscat

The third edition of Suhar Festival, held from November 19, 2024 to January 4, 2025 attracted over 400,000 visitors, becoming a major event in Oman's cultural calendar. With a variety of activities celebrating Omani heritage, arts and traditions, the festival highlighted Suhar's growing importance as a key cultural and tourism destination in the country.

Mohammed Suleiman al Kindi, Governor of North Batinah and Chairman of the main committee of the festival, expressed his satisfaction with the event's success, saying it reflected the spirit of community and underscored North Batinah's emerging status as a tourist destination.

"The festival's success highlights the growing appeal of cultural tourism in Oman, while underscoring the sultanate's commitment to preserving its heritage and promoting sustainable tourism," Kindi said.

"We are proud to have welcomed over 400,000 visitors, which demonstrates the public's growing interest in heritage, culture, entertainment,

sports and tourism. We made every effort to cater to the diverse interests of all our visitors."

Kindi thanked the contributions of government and private sector institutions, sponsoring companies and all those who supported the festival, adding that Suhar looks forward to hosting more events that highlight Oman's rich civilisation and heritage.

Running for 45 days, the festival had traditional art shows, handicraft workshops and poetry evenings, alongside sports competitions, including popular local games, and camel and horse races. Additionally, a giant screen was set up to screen Gulf Cup matches and other key football games, creating a thrilling atmosphere for sports fans.

One of the festival's key attractions was a consumer exhibition, which saw participation of over 50 government and private entities, as well as 120 artisan families showcasing their goods.

The festival contributed to the local economy by providing employment opportunities to over 160 jobseekers, further integrating the community into the event.



# Researcher feted for work on sustainable energy solutions

Our Correspondent  
Muscat

Omani researcher Noof Ali al Lawati has gained international recognition for outstanding contributions to chemical engineering and biotechnology.

Noof's academic journey has been marked by two prestigious awards - the Frank Whitt Prize from University of Nottingham in 2022 for exceptional performance in the Chemical Engineering with Environmental Engineering programme, and the prize for best research in 2024 during her MSc in advanced chemical engineering at Imperial College London.

Her research focuses on sustainable energy solutions, particularly development of organic photoanodes for green hydrogen production using photoelectrochemical (PEC) water splitting. This technology offers a method to convert solar energy into hydrogen, a clean energy source.

Explaining her work, Noof said, "My research focused on improving the efficiency of PEC devices, which convert solar energy into electrochemical energy to produce hydrogen and oxygen through water splitting."

She added that PEC devices have a unique advantage, operating in a single unit without the need for expansive solar or wind farms.

By making solar-to-hydrogen conversion more efficient and stable, Noof aims to position hy-



drogen as a viable alternative to conventional fossil fuels. The research holds significant promise

for advancing a low-carbon economy and promoting sustainability.

Noof's achievements have been widely acknowledged. Her MSc thesis won the third place at

the Green Hydrogen Summit Oman, awarded by Ministry of Energy and Minerals. She also secured second place in the EU-RECHA Student Contest 2023 for her research on optimising methanol production through CO<sub>2</sub> reduction, presented at the CAPE Forum in Portugal.

Reflecting on her academic journey, Noof highlighted the challenges of studying abroad, including balancing research, academic commitments and job applications while adapting to a new environment. "Managing my

*This research holds significant promise for advancing a low-carbon economy and promoting sustainability*

NOOF ALI AL LAWATI

time effectively was one of the biggest challenges, but it helped me build resilience and discipline," she said.

Looking ahead, Noof aspires to contribute to Oman's renewable energy sector, envisioning the sultanate as a global leader in green technologies.

She attributed her success to the unwavering support of her family, mentors and colleagues. "Their guidance and encouragement made this journey possible."

# 2 Omani films win 4 awards at Asian fest

Our Correspondent  
Muscat

Two Omani films - *Al Darrooj*, directed by Dr Humaid bin Saeed al Amri, and *Sand Girl*, directed by Salah al Hadhrami - claimed a total of four awards at the recently concluded Asian Talent International Film Festival 2024 held in Ahmednagar, India.

Amri shared his excitement with *Muscat Daily* informing that *Al Darrooj* won three awards at the festival - Best Short Film, Best Short Feature Film and Best Child Actor. "This recognition underscores the continued success of Omani cinema on the global stage and reflects the dedication of Omani filmmakers to use cinema as a platform to showcase the country's rich cultural heritage."

*Al Darrooj* has won numerous awards both locally and interna-



*This recognition underscores the continued success of Omani cinema on the global stage and reflects the dedication of Omani filmmakers to use cinema as a platform to showcase the country's rich cultural heritage*

DR HUMAID AL AMRI

tionally earlier, reiterating its wide appeal and strong connection with audiences and critics alike.

The film tackles an important social issue, telling the story of a young widow who, while caring for her disabled child, faces societal rejection. The film poignantly captures her emotional struggle as she navigates the difficult bal-

ance between securing her future and remaining devoted to her son.

Hadhrami's *Sand Girl* won the Best Documentary Award at the festival. He described the ten-minute film as a depiction of a woman living in Sharqiyah Sands, who, despite her modest means, graciously hosts and honours her

guests. The film highlights the traditional Omani and Arab custom of hospitality, emphasising that this welcoming tradition transcends the guest's nationality.

"These awards represent a significant achievement for Omani cinema," Hadhrami added. "It's an honour to see our work gaining recognition on an



international platform. *Sand Girl* celebrates the essence of Omani hospitality, a core value of our culture."

With over 26 awards in 2024 between them, *Al Darrooj* and *Sand Girl* have contributed to further elevating the profile of Omani filmmaking in the international film industry.

# Oman to host ICANN annual meet in Oct

Our Correspondent  
Muscat

Oman will host the largest annual meeting of the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) in 2025, set to take place from October 25 to 30 at Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre.

An official from Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA) stated that the annual general meeting is the most significant of ICANN's three annual gatherings. It will bring together a distinguished group of stakeholders, including government representatives, private sector leaders, civil society members and technical experts, to discuss critical issues related to Internet governance, policy development and the management of the



global Domain Name System (DNS).

The official added that the conference aims to shape global policies for DNS, improve transparency and accountability in ICANN's operations, promote capacity building through workshops, and foster consensus on

decisions that will enhance Internet governance and keep pace with technological advancements. "Oman's role as a regional technology and communications hub will be further cemented by hosting this prestigious event. It will provide an opportunity to boost the sul-

tanate's presence in the global Internet governance arena."

The event will be organised by TRA in collaboration with other relevant authorities.

ICANN meetings are an essential element of multistakeholder model and provide a venue to progress policy work, conduct outreach and business, exchange best practices, and interact with other members of the ICANN community.

Founded in 1998 and headquartered in Los Angeles, USA, ICANN is a non-profit organisation responsible for managing DNS and distributing Internet addresses (IP) globally. ICANN plays a crucial role in maintaining the stability, security and resilience of the Internet, making it one of the foundational entities in the global Internet ecosystem.

# MoSD launches solar initiative to support vulnerable communities

Muscat - Ministry of Social Development (MoSD) has partnered with Green Universe Enterprise to launch an initiative called 'Your Light is Ours' aimed at providing solar energy solutions to vulnerable segments of society. The project focuses on orphans, the elderly, foster families and youth hostels under the Child Care Centre.

A memorandum of cooperation, signed by Maani bint Abdullah al Busaidi, Director General of Family Development at MoSD, and Sumaya bint Nasser al Rawahi, CEO of Green Universe Enterprise, aims to enhance environmental sustainability while reducing energy costs for these communities.

The project will also gather



data on the target groups to implement alternative and renewable energy solutions.

The project aligns with the broader goals of promoting social and environmental sustainability. It will not only contribute to reducing monthly expenses for

these families and institutions but also encourage the use of clean energy.

By leveraging solar energy, the project aims to make a tangible difference in the lives of those in need, ensuring a brighter and more sustainable future.

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\*Rates as on January 06  
Source: xe.com

BRIEFS

Google pays \$69mn to use Canadian news outlet stories

Google has paid \$69mn to use news stories from Canadian media outlets on its platform, the tech company said.

Canadian news outlets were struggling to survive and lost ad revenue to Google and Meta. Under the Online News Act, both companies were told to pay large sums to the Canadian Journalism Collective (CJC) to compensate news media for using content. The money will be disbursed to the media companies.

Meta refused to pay and has blocked Canadian news content from its platforms, including Facebook and Instagram to avoid paying the CJC. Under the Google deal, 30% of the \$69mn will go to broadcasters and the rest will be divided among news publishers.

News Media Canada represents major news broadcasters and publishers.

Oman to issue RO750mn in local bonds, sukuk in 2025

Our Correspondent  
Muscat

Oman's government plans to issue government development bonds and sovereign local sukuk worth RO750mn in 2025. The planned local market issuances are part of the government's strategy to meet financing requirements, covering both a projected budget deficit and public debt servicing.

The government will raise the total RO750mn from the local market through eight issues of government development bonds worth RO550mn and two issuances of sovereign local sukuk worth RO200mn, according to details outlined in the Ministry of Finance's 2025 budget guidance.

The ministry has designed the borrowing plan for 2025 based on estimates outlined in the State's General Budget for 2025. This includes projections for public debt, financing needs, and the financing structure for the year ahead.

Total financing requirements for 2025 are projected at RO2.454bn, which includes a budget deficit of RO620mn and RO1.834bn needed for debt servicing. The government intends to cover these requirements through a combination of local borrowing (RO750mn), external



*Total financing requirements for 2025 are projected at RO2.454bn, which includes a budget deficit of RO620mn and RO1.834bn needed for debt servicing. The government intends to cover these requirements through a combination of local borrowing (RO750mn), external borrowing (RO1.304bn), and a withdrawal from reserves (RO400mn)*

borrowing (RO1.304bn), and a withdrawal from reserves (RO400mn).

In 2024, the sultanate planned to raise RO600mn from local borrowing and RO1.285bn via external debt.

For 2025, issuances of government development bonds are planned for February (RO100mn), April (RO100mn), June (RO60mn), July (RO60mn), August (RO60mn), September (RO60mn), October

(RO60mn), and December (RO50mn).

In addition, two issuances of local sovereign sukuk are scheduled for May (RO100mn) and November (RO100mn).

However, the Ministry of Finance has noted that the borrowing plan may be adjusted depending on actual financing needs and prevailing market conditions.

The ministry also highlighted that the 2025 borrowing plan is designed to meet the government's financing needs at a reasonable cost while managing risk within acceptable levels. It aims to improve the efficiency of the local debt market by expanding

the market for government securities. The plan also seeks to proactively manage debt, optimise financing costs, and diversify funding sources by broadening the investor base.

Preliminary results for the 2024 budget indicate a reduction in Oman's public debt by 5.3% to RO14.4bn at the end of 2024, down from RO15.2bn at the start of the year.

Oman's debt-to-GDP ratio stood at 34% by the end of 2024, a decrease from 36.5% in 2023. Additionally, public debt servicing costs fell to RO940mn in 2024, a 10.4% decline from the RO1.05bn originally estimated in the 2024 budget.

CBO issues RO45mn treasury bills

Muscat - The Central Bank of Oman (CBO) this week announced the issuance of government treasury bills worth RO45mn through two tenders.

In the first tender, the value of the allotted treasury bills amounted to RO20.350mn, with a maturity period of 28 days. The average accepted price was RO99.695 for every RO100, and the minimum accepted price was RO99.695 per RO100. The average discount rate and the average yield were 3.9754% and 3.9875%, respectively.

In the second tender, the value of the allotted treasury bills amounted to RO24.650mn, with a maturity period of 91 days. The average accepted price was RO98.932 for every RO100, and the minimum accepted price was RO98.930 per RO100. The average discount rate and the average yield were 4.2822% and 4.3284%, respectively.

The interest rate on the repo operations with the CBO is 5.00%, while the discount rate on the Treasury Bills Discounting Facility with the central bank is 5.50%.

Treasury bills are short-term, highly secure financial instruments issued by the Ministry of Finance, providing licensed commercial banks with an opportunity to invest their surplus funds. The CBO acts as the issue manager and offers the added advantage of ready liquidity through discounting and repurchase (repo) facilities.

GCC inflation rises by 1.5%

Muscat - The general inflation rate in the GCC countries rose by 1.5% by the end of September 2024, compared to the same month in the previous year (2023), according to consumer price data released by the GCC Statistical Centre.

Among the GCC countries, Kuwait recorded the highest inflation rate in September 2024 compared to the same month the previous year, at 2.8%, followed by Saudi Arabia at 1.7%, Qatar at 0.8%, and both Bahrain and Oman recorded lowest inflation in the region at 0.4% each.

The annual increase in the GCC's general inflation rate is primarily attributed to a rise in housing prices, which saw a significant increase of 5.7%.

Additionally, the culture and entertainment category rose by 2.6%, followed by goods and services at 1.8%, restaurants and hotels at 1.5%, and food and beverages, as well as education, at 1.0% each.



*Kuwait recorded the highest inflation rate during the first nine months of 2024 compared to the same period of the previous year, at 2.8%, followed by Saudi Arabia at 1.7%, Qatar at 0.8%, and both Bahrain and Oman at 0.4% each*

In contrast, prices decreased in the transportation category by 3.0%, furniture and household equipment by 2.3%, tobacco by

1.2%, communications by 0.9%, and clothing and footwear by 0.8%, while health prices remained unchanged.

Oman's oil exports reach RO282mn barrels by Nov

Our Correspondent  
Muscat

Oman's oil exports recorded a slight decrease of 0.4% by the end of November 2024, reaching 282.192mn barrels compared to 283.413mn barrels during the same period in 2023, according to data released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

The NCSI statistics revealed that oil production in Oman declined by 5.1% by the end of November 2024, totalling 332.693mn barrels, down from 350.538mn barrels in the corresponding period of 2023.

Crude oil production fell by 6.5%, while the production of condensates remained stable by the end of November 2024 compared to the same period in 2023. The average oil price



rose by 0.1%, reaching \$81.8 per barrel at the end of November 2024, compared to \$81.6 per barrel at the end of November 2023.

Average daily production decreased by 5.4% by the end of November 2024. Regarding exports, Oman's oil shipments

to China increased by 1.5%, totalling 264.456mn barrels by the end of November 2024, compared to 260.636mn barrels during the same period in 2023.

Oil exports to India rose by 10.6%, while exports to South Korea surged by 51.7%.

Oil drops amid slowing economic activity

London, UK - Oil prices fell on Monday, retreating from three-month highs, as growing concerns over a potential recession in major global economies heightened fears that global oil demand could slow.

The international benchmark Brent crude fell by 0.6%, reaching \$76.01 per barrel in morning trade in London, down from \$76.47 at the close of the previous session. The US benchmark West Texas Intermediate (WTI) declined by 0.6%, dropping to \$73.18 per barrel, compared to its prior session close of \$73.63.

The uncertainty surrounding the trade policies of the incoming US administration contin-



ues to influence commodity prices, while also impacting the Federal Reserve's (Fed) policy outlook.

Market participants are awaiting the release of US employment data and the minutes

from this week's Federal Open Market Committee (FOMC) meeting.

While the Fed is expected to implement only two interest rate cuts this year, market players will look to the FOMC meeting minutes, due on Wednesday, for further insights into the central bank's future policy direction.

Fed is likely to maintain its policy rate at current levels in its first monetary policy decision of the year on January 29.

Developments in the US, the world's largest oil consumer, highlight concerns about an economic slowdown that could dampen oil demand.

Agencies

Saudi approves \$37bn borrowing plan

Riyadh, Saudi Arabia - Saudi Arabia's Minister of Finance Mohammed Abdullah Aljadaan has approved the annual borrowing plan for the fiscal year 2025, following its endorsement by the Board of Directors of the National Debt Management Center.

The plan highlights key developments in public debt for 2024, initiatives related to local debt markets, and the funding plan and its guiding principles for 2025, in addition to the 2025 issuances' calendar for the Local Saudi Sukuk Issuance Program in Saudi Riyal.

According to the plan, the projected funding needs for 2025 are estimated at approximately SAR139bn (approximately \$37bn). This amount is intended



to cover the anticipated budget deficit of SAR101bn for the fiscal year 2025 and the principals' repayment of the debts maturing in 2025, amounting to approximately SAR38bn, as outlined in

the Ministry of Finance's Official Budget Statement.

To enhance the sustainability of the kingdom's access to various debt markets and broaden the investor base, Saudi Arabia

aims in 2025 to continue diversifying local and international financing channels to efficiently meet funding needs.

This will be achieved through the issuance of sovereign debt instruments at fair pricing, guided by well-defined and robust risk management frameworks.

Additionally, Saudi Arabia plans to benefit from market opportunities by executing private transactions that can promote economic growth, such as export credit agency financing, infrastructure development project financing, capital expenditure (CAPEX) financing, and exploring tapping into new markets and currencies based on market conditions.

SPA

# Energy, EVs, climate: What will Trump do?

As President-elect Donald Trump hustles to assemble his governing team, environmental analysts have been looking for signs of what to expect from his second term. And for many, the outlook is bleak

Martin Kuebler

Donald Trump, an avowed climate skeptic, has made no secret of his plans for his second presidency.

On the campaign trail and since his reelection, he has pledged to boost fossil fuel exploitation, cancel tax credits for electric vehicles and clean energy projects, unravel environmental regulations, and claw back unspent funds from what he has called the "green new scam," landmark climate legislation passed by outgoing President Joe Biden.

Trump's rhetoric has echoed many proposals outlined in Project 2025, a 900-page playbook by the ultraconservative Heritage Foundation. Though Trump publicly distanced himself from the plan, several authors have been nominated for key positions.

They include Russ Vought, who as a top budget official would help set the administration's priorities and who, in Project 2025, stressed the overarching importance of the "president's agenda."

"We have no illusions that this is going to be a very destructive administration," said Rachel Cleetus, the policy director for climate and energy at the US-based Union of Concerned Scientists (UCS). "They are anti-science at their core."

Cleetus said she had yet to see any indication from the incoming government that it would use accepted climate research to "help guide good poli-



A key focus of Trump's campaign was his vow to substantially increase fossil fuel exploitation in the US

cymaking" and act in the public interest.

"Instead of independent judgment and expertise, there's a lot of almost cult-like loyalty to a president who has taken a very sharp posture against clean energy, completely beholden to fossil fuel interests," she told DW.

### Budget cuts, weakened laws

Trump's pick to head the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), former New York congressman Lee Zeldin, consistently opposed environmental protection and clean energy investments during his time in office. An NGO tracking political

support for green policies gave him a 14% score for his voting record.

Announcing his pick on November 11, the president-elect said Zeldin would help "unleash the power of American businesses, while at the same time maintaining the highest environmental standards, including the cleanest air and water on the planet."

As EPA head, Zeldin is expected to target many strict new rules introduced by the Biden administration, covering everything from air and water pollution to drilling, biodiversity, and toxic substances — a repeat of what Trump ordered the EPA to do when he took over from

Barack Obama in 2017.

"They talk about clean air and clean water, but they're [planning] to roll back all of these [...] pollution standards that are specifically designed to protect people's health and protect the environment," said Cleetus. "They're talking about slashing budgets, attacking staffing in all of these agencies."

Leading environmental groups have criticized Zeldin's nomination, with Ben Jealous, executive director of US environmental organisation, the Sierra Club, saying it "lays bare Donald Trump's intentions to, once again, sell our health, our communities, our jobs, and our future out to corporate polluters."

### 'Drill, baby drill!'

A key focus of Trump's campaign was his vow to turbocharge the extraction of planet-heating fossil fuels — which has already raked in record profits in recent years. Like Project 2025, he has spoken of restoring America's energy independence and promised voters he will "cut your energy prices in half."

Chris Wright, a climate skeptic and Trump's nominee to head the Department of Energy, is CEO of Liberty Energy, a power generation company focused on fracking and natural gas. He has enthusiastically touted the benefits of hydrocarbons like coal, oil, and gas, writing

in a January 2024 company report that there was "no such thing as 'clean' or 'dirty' energy."

"Trump is stacking his administration with executives from some of the largest fossil fuel corporations," wrote the Sierra Club on its website. "They want to loosen regulations, roll back clean energy progress, and destroy our planet for their profit."

### Clean energy, electric cars

Renewable energy projects and electric vehicles (EVs) will also be in the crosshairs come January. Trump is looking to undo federal mandates to reduce vehicle emissions and billions in consumer tax credits for clean

energy projects and electric cars, part of Biden's 2022 Inflation Reduction Act — even though clean energy and EV projects have created tens of thousands of new jobs in the last few years.

Industry analysts, however, believe it won't be easy for Trump to follow through on his plans to gut the IRA. Some of the funds are already invested in projects across the country — lithium extraction operations in California, solar panel plants in Texas, and factories making batteries and electric cars in Georgia — and despite Republican criticism of the legislation, well-paying jobs do enjoy some bipartisan support.

Highlighting the boom in renewable energy in places like China, India, and Brazil, Cleetus said any reversal of the IRA provisions would be "destructive" and risk that "the US will be left behind in this global clean energy revolution," with supply chains being set up elsewhere.

"I think there would be a lot of opposition from state and local entities, from businesses, from workers," she said.

While the raft of changes under Trump have alarmed environmental experts, Cleetus said it won't happen overnight. "There are many things that can't be undone just by the stroke of a pen," she said, citing the complex regulatory and administrative process, not to mention legal challenges. "We can expect legal avenues to be very active under the Trump administration."

DW

## Trump denies report on tariff plans

Washington, US — US President-elect Donald Trump refuted a story published by the Washington Post on Monday, stating that his team is not considering a tariff plan that would be applied to every country and cover only critical imports. He labeled the report as "fake news" on his social media platform, Truth Social.

The Washington Post report, which cited three anonymous sources, suggested that there are ongoing discussions about imposing tariffs only on certain sectors that are vital to national or economic security. This would be a significant change from the promises Trump made during his 2024 presidential campaign.

The report sparked a strong positive reaction in European stocks and currencies on Monday, as it suggested a less aggressive tariff policy from Trump's administration.

During his campaign, Trump, a Republican set to take office on January 20, promised to impose a 10% tariff on all global imports into the US and a 60% tariff on Chinese goods. Trade experts have warned that such duties could disrupt trade flows, in-



*The Washington Post report suggested that there are ongoing discussions about imposing tariffs only on certain sectors that are vital to national or economic security*

US President-elect Donald Trump has promised to impose a 10% tariff on all global imports into the US and a 60% tariff on Chinese goods

still under discussion and have not been finalized. However, it was not specified which sectors would be targeted by these tariffs.

According to the report, preliminary discussions have mainly focused on several key sectors that Trump's team aims to bring back to the US. These sectors include defense industrial supply chain, critical medical supplies, and energy production.

The report cited two people

saying that these sectors might involve tariffs on steel, iron, aluminum, and copper syringes, needles, vials, and pharmaceutical materials; and batteries, rare earth minerals, and solar panels.

"The story in the Washington Post ...incorrectly states that my tariff policy will be pared back. That is wrong," Trump wrote, without elaborating on the specifics of his tariff plan.

(Source: Investing.com)

## China outlines monetary priorities for 2025

Beijing, China — China's central bank has outlined its monetary and financial priorities for 2025 following a two-day meeting that ended Saturday, emphasising expanding domestic demand, stabilising expectations and stimulating vitality to ensure sustained improvement in the Chinese economy.

The People's Bank of China (PBOC) said it will implement a moderately loose monetary policy in 2025, forestall and defuse financial risks in key areas, and

further deepen financial reform and high-standard opening up.

Unveiling its monetary policy for this year, the central bank explained that it will implement a moderately loose monetary policy to create a sound monetary and financial environment for stable economic growth.

It also noted leveraging a mix

of monetary policy tools to reduce the reserve requirement ratio and interest rates when appropriate in light of domestic and international economic and financial conditions and the operation of financial markets.

The PBOC said it will maintain sufficient liquidity and steadily increase financial supply, so that the

growth in social financing and money supply will match the target for economic growth and overall price levels.

The meeting also underlined putting existing financial resources to good use and improving efficiency in the use of funds. In the meantime, the PBOC will keep the exchange rate of the yuan basically stable at an adaptive and balanced level, and forestall exchange rate overshooting risks.

Xinhua



## US Steel, Nippon sue Biden administration over blocked merger

New York, US — US Steel and Nippon Steel, whose \$14.3 n merger was blocked by President Joe Biden, filed a lawsuit against the US government Monday, claiming Biden's executive order to bar the companies from combining was signed for "purely political reasons."

"Today's legal actions demonstrate Nippon Steel's and US Steel's continued commitment to completing the transaction — despite political interference," the companies said in a statement, as reported by CNN Business.

The suit is no surprise. The day Biden issued an order blocking the deal, the companies called the action "a clear violation of due process" and said they had "no choice but to take all appropriate action to protect our legal rights."

Biden had spoken for months about his opposition to the deal. The companies' statement said that Biden had "ignored the rule of law to gain favor with ... (the United Steelworkers union) and support his political agenda."

In addition to the suit seeking to throw out Biden's order, the companies filed a separate suit against Lourenco Goncalves, CEO of rival steel-maker Cleveland-Cliffs and Dave McCall, president of the United Steelworkers union, for their actions to try to block the deal, which the suit charges are



"anticompetitive and racketeering activities illegally designed to prevent any party other than Cliffs from acquiring US Steel as part of an illegal campaign to monopolize critical domestic steel markets."

### The White House again defended the decision to block the US Steel-Nippon merger deal in a statement Monday

In addition to seeking to block Cliffs and the USW from acting together, that separate lawsuit seeks "substantial monetary damages for their conduct."

The White House defended the decision to block the deal in a statement Monday.

"A committee of national security and trade experts de-

termined this acquisition would create risk for American national security," said spokeswoman Robyn Patterson. "President Biden will never hesitate to protect the security of this nation, its infrastructure, and the resilience of its supply chains."

USW President McCall issued a statement again praising the action by Biden and denouncing the suit.

"We are reviewing the complaint and will vigorously defend against these baseless allegations," he said.

Cleveland-Cliffs did not have an immediate response to the lawsuits.

Last summer, US Steel announced that without the investment in its older, union-represented mills promised by Nippon Steel as part of the deal, it might be forced to close the mills. In response, Cleveland-Cliffs said it would be willing to buy those mills.

Agencies

# MoCIIP to organise Discounts and Offers Festival to boost economy

The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP), in collaboration with the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MHT) and the Ministry of Information, will launch a special event on Thursday to stimulate economic and commercial activity in the Sultanate of Oman.

The Discounts and Offers Festival under the slogan 'Oman Celebrates' will be held in partnership with Muscat Municipality, the Consumer Protection Authority (CPA), the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority (SMEDA), the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI), and the governorate offices across Oman, a release stated.

The event, to be held under the auspices of Faisal bin Abdullah al Rawas, Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry, will run from January 11 to February 11, the release added.

The festival will showcase the strength of the national economy, and encourage local and international investments by fostering public-private partnerships and supporting commercial establishments in offering competitive discounts that benefit all segments of society.

Nasra bint Sultan al Habsiyah, Director-General of Commerce, stated that the launch of the Discounts and Offers Festival comes in celebration of the anniversary of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik's accession to power. It emphasises the private sector's



*The festival comes in celebration of the anniversary of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik's accession to power. It emphasises the private sector's role as a key partner in the renewed renaissance*

NASRA AL HABSİYAH

role as a key partner in the renewed renaissance Oman is experiencing under His Majesty's leadership. The initiative highlights the private sector's leadership role in creating a competitive economy aligned with global markets, in accordance with Oman Vision 2040.

The festival aims to boost economic and commercial activity, double trade movements in Oman, provide essential products at affordable prices for all social groups, and support shopping centres and leading brands



to increase their sales.

Habsiyah explained that the festival would significantly stimulate shopping activities and enhance consumption within the Sultanate of Oman, positively impacting Oman's competitive business environment - one of the ministry's strategic objectives aligned with Oman Vision 2040.

She added that the festival's inclusivity across all governorates of Oman ensures another key goal: Fostering the economic growth of governorates by sustaining and developing private sector institutions within them.

The festival targets consumers from all social groups, including citizens, residents,

commercial establishments, malls, major stores, e-commerce platforms and entrepreneurs, to enhance their role in economic activities.

The festival will include discounts of no less than 50% for malls and major companies, 30% for other establishments, and daily or weekly prizes for con-

sumers, totalling no fewer than 30 prizes. It also encourages participation from all governorates.

The national campaign was first launched last year on January 11, 2024. It targeted all consumer, food, hospitality, and other sectors, with 320 commercial establishments participating in Muscat Governorate alone.

Similar to the 'Oman Celebrates' campaign by MoCIIP, the 'Made in Oman' campaign supports national goals of economic growth and self-sufficiency. It promotes Omani products, boosts consumer confidence in their quality and highlights the diversity of local industries, fostering a strong national identity.

## Brand-new Lexus brings more luxury this season

Saud Bahwan Automotive has announced a unique opportunity to avail service perks up to five years/50,000km and first-year free registration with every new Lexus bought till January 23.

'Explore the finest Lexus collection at Saud Bahwan Automotive showrooms near you before the campaign ends on January 23,' the company stated.

For Lexus enthusiasts, its innovative vehicle lineup includes the luxury crossover SUVs; Lexus RX and Lexus UX. For a more powerful ride; experience the prowess of Lexus LX, an epitome of innovation and performance coupled with luxury.

Shine into the limelight, attend corporate meetings spend quality family time in the meticulously engineered Lexus RX.

The RX500 is available in three power trims; RX350 featuring a 2.4L Turbo Charged, 4-cylinder engine and the RX350h and RX500h with hybrid capabilities.



ities. Equipped with the latest technologies, the RX AWD provides an unparalleled driving experience with matchless fuel efficiency by both the hybrid and gasoline-powered trims.

The Lexus UX is a game-

changer in its league, equipped with a 2.0-litre four-cylinder gas engine and a high-torque electric motor the crossover delivers an exhilarating response. The UX300h is perfect for those seeking comfort without com-

promising on quality, style and comfort.

Stand out among the crowd and make a statement in the bold and daring UX suited to match your corporate lifestyle. Merging traditional Japanese aesthetics,

the spacious driver's cockpit is augmented with high-tech features and safety features that spell sophistication.

Carefully crafted into the interiors, the Lexus Interface lets one personalise one's multimedia experience; featuring a 12.3" high-resolution touchscreen display, hands-free access to advanced features, including wireless Apple CarPlay and Android Auto compatibility provide seamless connectivity throughout drive.

In the sedan category, the Lexus ES offers various trims with different performance outputs including the Lexus ES 250, and ES350 in gasoline-powered powerful engines of 2.5L, 16-valve, DOHC, and 3.5L, 24-valve V6 engines paired to an 8-speed Shift transmission. Bringing in new experiences, the ES300 is also available with Hybrid capabilities, the ES300h features a powerful dual-motor setup with hybrid capabilities.



## BankDhofar expands with 131 branches

BankDhofar, one of the leading financial institutions in Oman, has significantly expanded its network with 131 branches, reinforcing its commitment to enhancing customer accessibility across the sultanate.

In 2023 alone, the bank opened 43 new branches, each offering a comprehensive suite of banking services designed to meet the diverse needs of its customers. From card collections to tailored banking solutions, BankDhofar's branches make these services easily accessible to all segments of its clientele.

With this impressive expansion, BankDhofar is now the second-largest bank in Oman by branch network size.

However, these branches represent more than just the bank's physical presence - they are fully equipped and staffed to deliver a wide range of banking solutions to all segments of society, including women, youth, children, and high-income groups, particularly holders of the Al-Riyada

and Al-Rifaa cards. The branches also cater to high-net-worth customers, providing specialised services with a focus on safety, confidentiality, and personalized care.

BankDhofar's offerings include clear and strategic savings and investment plans, such as fixed and recurring deposit accounts and long-term deposit accounts designed to support children's education.

These products help parents save for their children's higher education needs, while retirement planning options enable customers to grow their savings for financial security and stability in their later years. BankDhofar has introduced specialised accounts that offer unique benefits and privileges. Recently, the bank launched a special credit card for women that includes first-year fee exemptions, access to exclusive rewards programs, and additional perks like airport lounge access at Muscat and Salalah International Airports.

## Abraj Energy secures top honours at HSE Awards in Kuwait

Abraj Energy Services, Omani's Leading Oil and Gas services provider, has been honoured with two distinguished awards at the ASSP GCC HSE Excellence Awards 2024 in Kuwait.

The adjudication panel recommended Abraj for the Gold Award for HSE Excellence in the Oil & Gas category, recognising its leadership in occupational health and safety practices.

Abraj received the Silver Award for Best HSE Initiative, recognising its innovative contributions through the Abraj CCTV Support Center (Abraj Eyes), which plays a key role in advancing workplace safety and environmental responsibility by providing enhanced surveillance



and real-time monitoring solutions. The award ceremony took place on December 19, under the patronage of Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) and its subsidiaries, along with international

regulatory bodies.

Saif al Hamhami, CEO of Abraj Energy Services, stated, "This milestone reflects our deep commitment to integrating occupational health and safety

principles into every aspect of our operations. It reinforces our reputation as leaders in workplace safety and operational excellence. It fills us with immense pride as we continue to set the

standard of excellence in the Gulf region's private sector."

Abraj's HSE achievements have earned widespread recognition, including a commendation from Kuwait Chevron during their recent visit to an Abraj rig in the Wafra Oil Field. The delegation acknowledged the company's exceptional safety standards and innovative practices, further reinforcing Abraj's reputation as an operational excellence and safety leader within the oil and energy industry.

Abraj has solidified its position in the oil and Energy sector through a series of remarkable achievements in 2024, including successfully executing a fracturing project in Nimr Oil Field.

# Meethaq's sharia'a board meets to discuss 2024 financial reports

The Sharia'a Supervisory Board (SSB) of Meethaq Islamic Banking from Bank Muscat reviewed Meethaq's performance, internal technical audit reports, financial statements for the third and fourth quarters of 2024, and the annual sharia'a audit report of the transactions and charitable fund, and the annual sharia'a control department works. It also looked into investment in a number of sukuk.

These were discussed during the sixth board meeting of 2024 convened at the bank's head office, and chaired by Sheikh Dr Abdullah bin Mubarak al Abri, the board chairman, alongside members of the board, and the sharia'a supervisory and audit management members.

The board endorsed several items including the investment policy, the code of conduct policy, the terms and conditions document, as well as the sharia'a certificates.

The SSB's regular meetings play a pivotal role in deliberating on topics pertaining to Islamic transactions, business contracts



and practices, thereby facilitating the formulation of requisite recommendation and resolutions

The SSB is composed of scholars renowned for their expertise in Islamic jurisprudence, particularly in Islamic transaction processing and contemporary economy. Their primary scope of duties encompasses the review and approval of products, services, activities, investments, operations, and transactions before implementing them for business practices.

The SSB oversees these aspects through the internal sharia'a audit department to ensure their conformity with the legal aspects outlined in the decisions and fatwas issued by board.

Since its inception in 2012, Meethaq Islamic Banking has

products undergo rigorous sharia'a-compliance certification by the SSB, adhering to guidelines established by the Central Bank of Oman.

Over its 14-year journey, Meethaq has solidified its position as a leader in the Islamic banking sector within the Sultanate of Oman. Meethaq has achieved notable milestones, including the expansion of its branch network to 31 branches and centers of Hafawa for Priority Banking throughout various governorates.

This extensive network is further enhanced by over 55 ATMs and CDMs, in addition to access to more than 890 devices of Bank Muscat, strategically located across the Sultanate.

To reinforce its pioneering role in the banking industry, Meethaq Islamic Banking has garnered numerous regional and international accolades in recent years, acknowledging its exceptional banking services, products, and financing solutions for both individual and corporate clients.

# First conference on disease control starts in Musandam



Dr Nawal Ibrahim al Shihi

The first Musandam Conference on Disease Surveillance and Control, kicked off on Monday at the Khasab Hotel in Musandam, under the patronage of H E Dr Said Harib al Lamki, Undersecretary for Health Affairs in the Ministry of Health.

The two-day conference, under the theme 'A Collaborative Approach to Accelerate Communicable Disease Prevention and Control', is being organised by the Directorate General of Health Services in Musandam, represented by the Department of Disease Surveillance and Control. A number of ministry officials and representatives from the World Health Organization (WHO) have arrived in Musandam to attend the conference, a release stated.

During the opening ceremony, Dr Nawal Ibrahim al Shihi, Director of Disease Surveillance and Control in Musandam, provided an overview of the disease surveillance and control services in the governorate.

Dr Amal al Maani, Director General of the Center for Disease Surveillance and Prevention, highlighted the development of public health systems in the Sultanate of Oman, focusing on the challenges and opportunities.

The resource persons have begun discussions on the latest scientific developments and health challenges in the field of communicable disease control and prevention methods.

The conference highlights the collaboration between various sectors to achieve common goals in enhancing public health, such as municipalities, food quality and safety centers under the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, and Environment, as well as the police and other government and private sectors.

It features lectures by several local and international experts from the Ministry of Health's Center for Disease Surveillance and Prevention, Royal Hospital,

the Regional Office of the World Health Organization (WHO), the Regional Office of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the University of Connecticut, and the Datahaven Foundation.

More than 120 healthcare professionals from all governorates of Oman, including epidemiologists, public health specialists, and environmental and occupational health experts from the Ministry of Health and the Disease Surveillance and Control Departments of the Directorate

*A number of ministry officials and representatives from the World Health Organization (WHO) have arrived in Musandam to attend the conference*

General of Health Services across various governorates are participating in the conference, in addition to participants from other relevant authorities.

It is worth noting that the conference is considered a cornerstone in achieving Oman Vision 2040. It provides an important opportunity to raise community awareness and improve practices in the field of communicable disease control.

# Subaru tops charts as 'Most Reliable Car Brand'

Subaru, the esteemed Japanese automaker represented by the OTE Group in Oman, proudly announces its recognition as the most reliable car brand, as reported by consumer reports.

This recognition underscores Subaru's unwavering commitment to producing durable, safe, and innovative vehicles that cater to both adventure enthusiasts and everyday drivers.

"Being recognised as the most reliable vehicle brand is a reflection of our dedication to quality, safety, and customer satisfaction," said the business unit head at Subaru. "Our vehicles are designed to deliver exceptional performance, whether navigating



challenging terrains or cruising through city streets. This recognition reaffirms our promise to provide drivers with unmatched confidence and driving enjoyment."

Among Subaru's lineup, the Forester stands out as a true testament to the brand's engineering excellence. Renowned for its spacious interior, smooth ride, and standard all-wheel drive, the Forester has earned a reputation as one of the most dependable

SUVs on the market. This reliability ranking further solidifies its position as a top choice for drivers seeking both comfort and performance.

The Crosstrek ranks second in reliability, offering a perfect bal-

ance of off-road capability and city driving practicality. With standard all-wheel drive and exceptional ground clearance, it stands out as a top choice within Subaru's diverse lineup.

Consumer Reports' reliability ratings are highly regarded in the automotive industry, drawing from comprehensive survey data and expert technical knowledge. These ratings provide consumers with unbiased assessments, aiding them in making informed decisions.

Subaru also remains committed to environmental sustainability, producing eco-friendly vehicles and supporting conservation initiatives worldwide.



# Omran welcomes US students for workshop

As part of its role in enhancing the tourism sector in the Sultanate of Oman, the Oman Tourism Development Company (Omran Group) hosted a delegation from George Washington University for a dedicated workshop on sustainable tourism.

The event took place at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre, with the participation of 15 students from the university's Business Arabic Programme and their faculty members.

The workshop aims to introduce students to Oman's experience in achieving sustainable development within the tourism sector while highlighting Omran Group's pivotal role in enhancing Oman's presence on the global tourism map and in turns, supporting its economic growth. The programme included a presenta-

tion by Dr Salim al Flaiti, Head of HR Business Partners at Omran, showcasing the group's sustainable tourism projects. This was followed by an interactive discussion session, providing students with the opportunity to engage and ask questions.

Commenting on the event, Dr Flaiti said, "This workshop is part of our ongoing efforts to raise international awareness about Oman's tourism potential. Through this initiative, we aim to acquaint the next generation of leaders with our vision for sustainable development and showcase our projects as a model for balancing economic growth with the preservation of cultural and environmental heritage."

Renaad al Sarhani, Human Capital Generalist at Omran, expressed her delight in organising

this event, stating, "Collaborating with international academic institutions like George Washington University reflects the Group's commitment to fostering cultural and academic exchange. It also provides us with an opportunity to present an authentic perspective on the positive transformation taking place in Oman's tourism sector."

In addition to participating in the workshop, the students had the opportunity to explore Oman's renowned cultural and tourist landmarks, including some Unesco-listed heritage and natural sites.

This workshop is part of the ongoing collaboration between Omran Group and George Washington University, following a previous visit by a university delegation to Oman in March

2024 as part of its academic program aimed at fostering cultural and economic understanding between nations.

These initiatives align with national efforts to diversify the economy and develop non-oil sectors, with a strong focus on tourism as a cornerstone of sustainable development.

Omran continues to play a pivotal role as a strategic partner in achieving Oman's sustainable development goals by developing tourism projects that blend innovation with respect for the environment and local culture. Notable projects include the tourism destinations in Jabal Akhdar and Suhar, which exemplify the group's commitment to creating job opportunities, stimulating investments, and preserving Oman's unique identity.

# Royal Academy launches impactful speech programme



As part of its commitment to supporting and developing national talents, the Royal Academy of Management (RAM), in collaboration with the Ministry of Endowments and Religious Affairs, has launched the 'Minbar for an Impactful Speech' programme.

This initiative brings together 50 preachers from various governorates across the Sultanate of Oman. It represents a significant step in enhancing the role of mosque preachers in promoting national, social, and humanitarian values, while meeting the growing demand for impactful public speaking and preaching skills.

The programme aims to create a lasting impact by equipping preachers with strategic vision and innovative tools, empowering them to strengthen their societal roles. It also supports

Oman's wider efforts to cultivate a cohesive society capable of addressing current and future challenges.

Moreover, the programme seeks to develop skilled individuals who can guide their communities convincingly and effectively, with a focus on utilising modern technologies to disseminate knowledge while preserving Omani identity and culture.

Dr Ali bin Qassim al Lawati, president of the Royal Academy of Management, said that the 'Minbar for an Impactful Speech' programme is a cornerstone initiative for supporting mosque preachers. It exemplifies the strong collaboration between the Royal Academy of Management and the Ministry of Endowments and Religious Affairs.

"The programme is designed to foster values of tolerance,

openness, and constructive dialogue, while underscoring the vital role of preachers in raising societal awareness and contributing to Oman's development journey," he assented.

Enhancing skills in public speaking and influence represents a long-term investment in building community leaders who can support sustainable development.

"Through this programme, we aim to empower participants to communicate their messages with greater impact, while reinforcing national values and the Omani identity."

The ten-day programme includes comprehensive modules and practical sessions delivered by experts and specialists in public speaking and influence. It adopts an approach that integrates theoretical learning with hands-on practice.

# North Korea launches first ballistic missile of 2025

Seoul, South Korea - North Korea on Monday fired its first ballistic missile of the year into the East Sea, also known as the Sea of Japan, just two weeks ahead of US President-elect Donald Trump's inauguration. The launch was confirmed by South Korean and Japanese authorities, though Pyongyang has yet to provide details. South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) said the missile appeared to be of intermediate range, with an estimated flight distance of 3,000 to 5,500km (1,864 to 3,418 miles), though further analysis is ongoing.

The missile was reportedly fired from the Pyongyang area, the JCS added as the launch coincided with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken's visit to Seoul amid South Korea's political crisis. Japan's Prime Minister's Office said a suspected ballistic missile was launched by North Korea, with the projectile falling outside Japan's exclusive economic zone (EEZ). Authorities called for ensuring the safety of aircraft, vessels, and other assets, stressing readiness for contingencies.



The launch was confirmed by South Korean and Japanese authorities, though Pyongyang has yet to provide details

**Blinken condemns missile launch**  
Addressing a news conference in Seoul, Blinken condemned North Korea's missile launch.

*We condemn the DPRK missile launch just today, yet another violation of multiple UN Security Council resolutions*

ANTONY BLINKEN

"We condemn the DPRK missile launch just today, yet another violation of multiple UN Security Council resolutions,"

Blinken said, using the initials of North Korea's official name, Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

Blinken is on a two-day visit to South Korea, where he held talks with his counterpart, Cho Tae-yul, as part of his final trip before Trump's inauguration on January 20.

Later, the two officials addressed a joint news conference. Commenting on North Korea's ties with Russia, Blinken said Pyongyang was 'already receiving Russian military equipment and training'.

Anadolu Agency

# Is Donald Trump set to pardon January 6 rioters?

Trump may issue pardons to many of the more than 1,500 people charged in connection with the attack

Washington, D.C., US - Four years after the January 6 Capitol riots, attention has turned to the possibility that President-elect Donald Trump may issue pardons to many of the more than 1,500 individuals charged in connection with the attack, NBC News reported.

The inauguration of Trump as US President is scheduled to take place on January 20.

In an interview, Trump had pledged to prioritise relief for his supporters on his first day in office, criticising their treatment within what he described as a 'corrupt' justice system and vowing quick action. Although, Trump hinted at exceptions for those he deemed 'radical' or 'crazy'.

In an exclusive interview with NBC News' 'Meet the Press', Trump said that on his first day in office, he will bring legal relief to the January 6 rioters who he said have been put through a 'very nasty system'. "I'm going to be acting very quickly. First day. They have been in there for years, and they're in a filthy, disgusting place that shouldn't even be allowed to be open," Trump added.

Trump further said that there 'may be some exceptions' to his pardons 'if somebody was radi-



In an interview, Trump had pledged to prioritise relief for his supporters on his first day in office

cal, crazy'.

On being asked about over 900 other people who had pleaded guilty in connection to the attack but weren't accused of assaulting officers, Trump said: "I know the system. The system's a very corrupt system. They say to a guy, 'You're going to go to jail for two years or for 30 years'. And these guys are looking, their whole lives have been destroyed. For two years, they have been destroyed. But the system is a very nasty system," NBC News reported.

During his campaign events

*I know the system. The system's a very corrupt system. They say to a guy, 'You're going to go to jail for two years or for 30 years'. And these guys are looking, their whole lives have been destroyed*

DONALD TRUMP

last year, Trump had frequently brought up the events of January 6, and denounced the 2020 elections that he lost.

While addressing a rally in March 2024 near Ohio's Dayton, he had announced to issue pardons for Trump supporting 'hostages' on the first day of his presidency. Referring to the people imprisoned in connection with the January 6 Capitol riots as hostages, Trump, in his opening remarks had said: "You see the spirit from the hostages. And that's what they are - hostages."

In a post on social media platform Truth Social, Trump in March 2024 wrote: "My first acts as your next President will be to Close the Border, DRILL, BABY, DRILL, and Free the January 6 Hostages being wrongfully imprisoned!"

Notably, over 1,350 people were charged in nearly all 50 US States for crimes related to the breach of the US Capitol, according to the US Department of Justice, after rioters stormed the building to protest former President Trump's election loss and the validity of Biden's win.

ANI



Bangladesh's former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina

## Bangladeshi court issues 2nd arrest warrant for Hasina

Dhaka, Bangladesh - A Bangladeshi court issued a second arrest warrant for exiled former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, this time for her alleged role in enforced disappearances, the chief prosecutor said on Monday.

The International Crimes Tribunal, established by Hasina during her administration to try crimes against humanity, also issued warrants for 11 other close allies of Hasina, mainly in the security forces, and asked the authorities to produce them before the court by February 12.

Hasina fled India in an uprising on August 5. A transitional government headed by Muhammad Yunus took office on August 8.

The Yunus-led government said it will do everything possible to bring Hasina and her allies to justice through proper trial for killing over 1,500 people and injuring over 22,000 others in the uprising.

Hasina, however, repeatedly denied the allegations.

Justice Golam Mortuza Mozumder issued the order in response to an application from the prosecution.

Hasina's former defence advisor Maj. Gen. (Retd) Tarique Ahmed Siddique and former inspector general of police, Benazir Ahmed, are among those named in the charges.

"A horrible culture (forced disappearance) had begun in the country during the Hasina regime. And giving justice to the victim families through a proper trial can be the right way to end this horrible practice," Chief Prosecutor Tajul Islam of the tribunal told reporters.

Earlier, the same tribunal issued an arrest warrant for Sheikh Hasina in a case alleging genocide committed during the student-led uprising that ousted Hasina.

Bangladesh, in the meantime, made a formal request to India to send Hasina back to face the trial.

"Year after year, people were detained in secret prisons and tortured and killed. This is a crime against humanity under the national and international law. And that crime was organised under the direct orders of ex-Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina," Islam alleged.

Earlier, the report submitted by the Commission of Inquiry into Forced Disappearances, formed by the Yunus government, found evidence of Hasina's involvement as an 'instructor' in forced disappearances reported during her 15-year rule.

Anadolu Agency

## Nepal: Passenger aircraft makes emergency landing

Kathmandu, Nepal - Buddha Air, a domestic passenger aircraft operating in Nepal on Monday morning made an emergency landing at Tribhuvan International Airport in Kathmandu after reporting 'flame out' in the left engine.

Issuing a press release, the Tribhuvan International Airport (TIA) announced that Buddha Air's (BHA953) made a landing after reporting 'flame out' in the left engine after take-off at 10:37am (NST).

"The aircraft, Buddha Air

flight no BHA953, took off from Kathmandu at 10:37am (0453 UTC) carrying 72 passengers and four crew members, to Chandragadhi (Bhadrapur) and at 43 nautical miles east reported flame out. After flying on single engine and following a full emergency declaration, it returned back to Kathmandu. From the Gurans point using VOR approach landed at the Tribhuvan International Airport at 11:15am (UTC 0530) safely," the release from Tribhuvan International Airport read.

As per the flight carrier, the aircraft is undergoing technical inspection. "A separate aircraft is being arranged for the passengers to fly towards the destination," the company said in a statement.

According to the officials, the airport in Kathmandu also was closed for a brief period of time. "After the landing of the aircraft, the airport is now functional and open," a spokesperson of Tribhuvan International Airport told ANI over phone.

ANI

## South Korea set to renew efforts to detain impeached President Yoon

Seoul, South Korea - Investigators trying to arrest suspended South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol have asked for an extension to the warrant that expires on Monday.

Yoon remains holed up in his presidential residence in Seoul after last week's failed attempt to arrest the embattled leader.

Investigators working for the Corruption Investigation Office for High-ranking Officials (CIO) tried to execute a court warrant for Yoon's arrest on Friday after he ignored three summonses for questioning over his failed attempt to impose martial law on



Yoon Suk Yeol

December 3. On Monday afternoon, the anti-corruption agency confirmed that it had asked police to take over efforts to detain Yoon following the standoff with

presidential security.

South Korea's anti-corruption agency has faced questions about its competence after failing to detain Yoon, and police have the resources to possibly make a more forceful attempt to arrest him.

Yoon's team of attorneys claim the agency's arrest warrant is illegal, saying there are no legal grounds for it to delegate certain parts of an investigation process to another agency.

Yoon's lawyers had submitted an objection to the warrants against the president on Thursday, but the Seoul Western Dis-

trict Court dismissed the challenge on Sunday.

Meanwhile, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken is holding talks on Monday in South Korea, seeking to encourage policy stability, including in Seoul's complicated relationship with Japan.

Blinken met with South Korean Acting President Choi Sang-mok and reiterated the United States' 'unwavering' defence commitment to the country, calling for close communication to deter against possible North Korea provocations, according to an official readout.

DW

# Germany: Olaf Scholz condemns CDU post about Putin meetup

Berlin, Germany - German Chancellor Olaf Scholz and his Social Democratic Party (SPD) condemned on Sunday a statement by a member of the opposition Christian Democratic Union (CDU) claiming the chancellor had a meeting planned with Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Roderich Kiesewetter, a CDU foreign affairs and security expert, had posted the day before on X, formerly Twitter, saying the alleged meeting was scheduled to take place before German elections set for February.

"We must prepare for an election campaign surprise," Kiesewetter had reportedly written in the post, which now appears to have been deleted. He had suggested that Scholz would travel to Moscow for the meeting.

**How did the SPD react?**

Scholz and his party both condemned the post and Kiesewetter. Government spokesman Steffen Hebestreit denied plans for such a trip.

"It would make no sense at all," the government spokesman told the Redaktion-snetzwerk Deutschland (RND) media group, calling the comment 'slander'.

Hebestreit said that 'legal steps' would be taken against the CDU politician.

Scholz also sharply criticised Kiesewetter's post, describing it in a press conference as a 'false allegation' and calling it 'deeply inappropriate'.

SPD General Secretary Matthias Miersch said the claim was 'vicious and sneaky'.



Scholz criticised Kiesewetter's post, describing it as a 'false allegation'

*Roderich Kiesewetter, a CDU foreign affairs and security expert, had posted on X saying the alleged meeting was scheduled to take place before German elections set for February*

SPD parliamentary group leader Rolf Mützenich described it as 'pure fabrication'. Both demanded that Kiesewetter, who is also a member of the Bundestag, retract his statement and apologise to Scholz.

Mützenich called on the CDU party leader and candidate for chancellor, Friedrich Merz, to intervene.

"With such pure fabrications, key representatives of the CDU/CSU parliamentary group are evidently trying to construct arguments against

the sensible foreign policy course of Olaf Scholz," Mützenich said, referring to the conservative bloc of the CDU and its Bavarian sister party, the Christian Social Union (CSU).

**Scholz stresses Ukraine support**

Earlier in November, Scholz spoke on the phone with Putin, for the first time in nearly two years. The call prompted criticism from Kyiv as well as some Eastern European NATO partners.

Speaking to reporters during a SPD presidium meeting on Sunday, Scholz did not rule out the possibility of another telephone call with Putin 'if it can perhaps deliver at least a small benefit'.

The chancellor nevertheless stressed that Germany remains Ukraine's 'biggest supporter' in the fight against Russia's aggression.

"We must prevent this war from escalating into a war between Russia and NATO," Scholz also added.

DW

# Release Kamal Adwan Hospital director: WHO

Geneva/Gaza City - The World Health Organization (WHO) chief on Monday urged Israel to release the director of Kamal Adwan Hospital in Gaza.

"Kamal Adwan Hospital in North Gaza remains completely out of function and we have received no updates on the safety and wellbeing of its director Dr Hussam Abu Safiya since his detention on 27 December," Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus wrote on X. "We continue to urge Israel to release him. We repeat: attacks on hospitals and health professionals must end. People in Gaza need access to health care," Tedros added, repeating his call for a ceasefire.

Abu Safiya was detained by Israeli forces along with others during a raid on the hospital on December 27.

On Monday, Germany also called on Israel to allow access to the International Red Cross to visit the abducted director of the Gaza-based hospital, but stopped short of demanding his release.

"We demand that Hussam Abu Safiya, the director of the Kamal Adwan Hospital, be treated according to international standards, has access to the International Red Cross and has access to legal support," deputy Foreign Ministry spokesman Christian Wagner told journalists in Berlin.

Asked whether his country would support the doctor's release, Wagner said merely that the three above-mentioned demands were what his government was calling for. Wagner's remarks come in the wake of calls by the WHO chief, who urged Israel to release Abu Safiya.

**Another newborn freezes to death**

Meanwhile, a new Palestinian



Kamal Adwan Hospital director Dr Hussam Abu Safiya was detained by Israeli forces during a raid on December 27

*We continue to urge Israel to release him (Dr Safiya). We repeat: attacks on hospitals and health professionals must end. People in Gaza need access to health care*

**TEDROS ADHANOM GHEBREYESUS**

newborn baby froze to death in Gaza, taking the death toll from the cold weather to eight amid Israel's genocidal war on the enclave, the Health Ministry said on Monday.

A ministry statement said that 35-day-old Yousef Ahmad Kalloub lost his life due to the harsh winter cold in the territory. Palestinian civilians have been under a brutal Israeli war since a Hamas attack on October 7, 2023. Tel Aviv has also imposed a stifling blockade on

the enclave, leaving the territory's entire population on the verge of famine.

A cold wave and torrential rains have even worsened conditions for the helpless civilians, leaving them struggling to live in their worn-out tents in displacement camps.

**Death toll surges to 45,854**

At least 48 more Palestinians were killed in unabated Israeli attacks in the Gaza Strip, bring-

ing the overall death toll since October 2023 to 45,854, the Health Ministry in the enclave said on Monday.

A ministry statement added that some 109,139 others were injured in the ongoing assault.

"Israeli forces killed 48 people and injured 75 others in three massacres of families in the last 24 hours," the ministry said.

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

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

Anadolu Agency

# Syria's top diplomat in Qatar in bid to build ties

Doha, Qatar - Syria's new foreign minister has continued with regional visits aimed at building bridges with neighbours, arriving in the Qatari capital, Doha, on Sunday and meeting his Qatari counterpart.

Asaad Shaibani met Qatar's Prime Minister, Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani, who also serves as foreign minister and said his country supported 'Syria's unity, sovereignty and independence'.

Shaibani also used his visit to call on the United States to lift sanctions on Syria, many of which it imposed during the rule of ousted President Bashar Assad.

Rebels led by the Islamist Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) group overthrew Assad on December 8, following a lightning



Syrian FM Assad Shaibani met Qatar's Prime Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani

offensive that lasted less than two weeks.

Since then, Syria's new de facto authorities have been working on reestablishing diplomatic ties with regional and global governments, most of which had

been severed due to Assad's vicious crackdown on protesters.

**What did the top diplomat say?**

After meeting Qatari Minister of State Mohammed bin Abdulaziz

Al-Khulaifi, Shaibani reiterated calls on the US to lift its sanctions on his country. "We conveyed to Doha our concerns about the challenges related to the economic sanctions imposed on the Syrian people," Syrian radio sta-

tion Sham FM quoted him.

The interim foreign minister called the measures a 'barrier and an obstacle to the rapid recovery'.

Some 90% of Syrians live below the poverty line, with over half the population not knowing where their next meal would come from, according to the United Nations.

On Sunday, Syria's new finance minister, Mohammed Abazeed, told the Reuters news agency that the government planned to hike next month's salaries for many public sector employees by 400%.

The increase would be financed by existing state resources, in addition to regional aid, new investments, and the potential for unfreezing Syrian assets kept abroad.

DW

# New Orleans attacker used Meta glasses for reconnaissance

New Orleans, US - Authorities are investigating the background of Shamsud-Din Jabbar, a 42-year-old US Army veteran and Daesh/ISIS supporter, who used Meta smart glasses to record reconnaissance footage in New Orleans before a New Year's Day truck attack that killed 14 people and injured 35 others, press reports revealed on Monday.

Jabbar traveled to Egypt and Canada in 2023, and FBI officials are examining whether these trips are connected to his attack on Bourbon Street.

"Our agents are gathering answers as to where he went, who he met, and how those trips may or may not tie into his actions in our city," Lyonel Myrthil, special agent in charge of the FBI's New Orleans field office, told Al Jazeera.

In addition, according to NBC News, Jabbar had stayed in New Orleans twice before the attack, in October and November. He resided in rental homes while recording videos in the French Quarter using Meta smart glasses during his cycling activities.

# Marking 'a new era of freedom, expession', universities reopen in Syria

Damascus, Syria - Universities in Syria, which had been closed since December 8 due to uncertainty following the fall of the Bashar al-Assad regime, resumed education on Monday.

After suspending education for two weeks on December 8, universities remained closed due to the Christmas holiday. Following a break of approximately one month, education activities have resumed, with many students returning to campus to take their final exams.

Students and teachers, excited to return to their universities,

shared their experiences and emotions about the recent events in Syria with Anadolu.

Reem Al Zohaili, a graduate of Damascus University's Faculty of Architecture and Higher Institute of Languages, who now works as a teacher, expressed the joy and relief felt after the regime's downfall. "Under Assad's regime, people were not allowed to do anything or speak about anything, even political topics. Now, people are free to speak and act as they wish - it feels like being released from prison," she said.

Highlighting the newfound



freedom, Zohaili noted: "In the past, I used to push my students to participate in the class to give opinions about things, even though we never talk about politics. I can feel that students are now more open. They participate, they give their own opinions."

Zohaili recounted the oppressive environment during the regime, where discussing political matters often led to imprisonment. She revealed that some students were expelled and jailed in 2014 and 2015 for criticising the regime, and many lost their lives in bombings targeting

schools.

Jouman Msouti, an English teacher at the Higher Institute of Languages and a graduate of Damascus University, said the regime's fall came as a shock to many. "Something happened that no one thought possible - the regime fell. No one could have imagined it," she said.

Msouti expressed optimism for Syria's future, stating that while establishing a new system would take time, the opportunity to build a peaceful, unified country had arrived.

Anadolu Agency

INDIA

# Two cases of HMPV detected in Karnataka

Human Metapneumovirus is a respiratory virus that is already circulating globally, including in India

New Delhi - The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) has confirmed the detection of two cases of Human Metapneumovirus (HMPV) in Karnataka, identified through routine surveillance for respiratory viral pathogens.

Ministry of Health in a release has stated that these cases were detected as part of ICMR's ongoing efforts to monitor and control respiratory illnesses across the country.

HMPV is a respiratory virus that is already circulating globally, including in India. It has been associated with respiratory illnesses in various countries, although there has been no unusual surge in cases in India.

The ICMR emphasised that despite the detection of these two cases, there has been no significant increase in Influenza-Like Illness (ILI) or Severe Acute Respiratory Illness (SARI) cases in the country.

One of the affected individuals is a 3-month-old female infant, who was diagnosed with HMPV after being admitted to Baptist Hospital in Bengaluru. She had a history of bronchop-



Indian Council of Medical Research confirmed detection of two cases of HMPV, identified through routine surveillance for respiratory viral pathogens

neumonia and was discharged after receiving treatment.

The second case involves an 8-month-old male infant, who tested positive for HMPV on January 3, 2025, following his

admission to Baptist Hospital in Bengaluru, also with a history of bronchopneumonia.

This infant is currently recovering and is in stable condition. Neither of the infants had any

history of international travel, suggesting that the cases are local and not connected to outbreaks outside the country.

The Union Health Ministry continues to monitor the situa-

*The Ministry of Health has stated that these cases were detected as part of ICMR's ongoing efforts to monitor and control respiratory illnesses across the country*

(WHO) has been providing regular updates on the situation in China to inform public health measures.

Meanwhile, Karnataka Health Minister Dinesh Gundu Rao assured the public that the HMPV is an existing flu virus causing respiratory issues and is not a cause for panic, adding that 'the child exhibiting HMPV symptoms is stable and will be discharged soon, with no history of international travel. There is no emergency as of now. People should stay calm'.

In neighbouring state of Kerala, Health Minister Veena George advised the elderly and pregnant women to wear masks, adding there is no need to panic as of now.

"We should all pay attention to some things in the context of the news that there is a major outbreak of viral fever and pneumonia in China. There are

no reports of any viruses that are likely to become a pandemic or spread very quickly to other areas in China at this time," George said.

She further said that since Malayalis are in all parts of the world, and expatriates from many parts of the world, including China, are coming to our country, we should be 'cautious'.

"According to the available information, three types of viruses can be the cause of the frightening respiratory infections in China. They are Human Metapneumovirus (HMPV), some variants of Covid 19, and Influenza A virus infections. There are no reports of any of these having genetic mutations that could lead to a pandemic. However, as mentioned earlier, we should be cautious," she added.

The Health Minister said that infections, including human metapneumonia virus, are more likely to affect children and the elderly, so they, as well as those with other serious illnesses and people receiving palliative care, should be more cautious.

ANI

## How India became a cocaine and methamphetamine hub

New Delhi - In the biggest-ever drugs bust in New Delhi, officials confiscated over 560kg (1,200 pounds) of cocaine and some 40kg of hydroponic marijuana in October. The seized substances were valued at approximately US\$669mn and led to multiple arrests of smugglers and dealers linked to an international drug syndicate.

Within days, police seized another 208kg of cocaine hidden in packs of chips and other food items in a rented shop.

In the same month, a joint operation between Delhi and Gujarat state police departments resulted in the confiscation of 518kg of cocaine from a pharmaceutical company in Gujarat, valued at around US\$595mn. This was part of a larger investigation that uncovered a narcotics syndicate.

"That India has always been a hub of (drugs) smuggling is a known fact, but the number of (smuggling) routes have increased and the methods of trafficking have become more sophisticated of late," Romesh Bhattacharjee, a former narcotics commissioner, told DW.

"While precise statistics are difficult to confirm, it is estimated that for every kilogram of drugs seized, up to 10kg or more may remain unseized," added Bhattacharjee.

The total value of drugs found in 2024 reached US\$1.07bn, according to estimates by various security agencies. But experts say that may be just the tip of the iceberg. G Shree Kumar Menon, a former director general of the National Academy of Customs, Indirect Taxes and Narcotics, told DW the situation paints an alarming picture of the volume of drugs entering India. According to the Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI), cocaine smuggling through air routes has become a dominant method of trafficking the expensive drug.



This file photo shows a woman going through a photo exhibition of an anti-drug awareness campaign launched by the Delhi Police, in New Delhi on December 7 (ANI)

"Smugglers often hide drugs in luggage, courier packages, or have them ingested by human carriers. Alongside cocaine, there is an uptick in methamphetamine smuggling, particularly in northeastern states like Assam and Mizoram," read a DRI report.

A particularly alarming trend highlighted in the report is the emergence of 'black cocaine', a new form of drug that is difficult to detect by authorities. Black cocaine is chemically masked with substances like charcoal or iron oxide, creating a black powder that can evade drug-sniffing methods.

"We are being challenged by increasingly sophisticated smuggling methods, shifting global trade patterns and the misuse of emerging technologies," a DRI official told DW on condition of anonymity.

### More young users than ever

"There is a noticeable increase in cocaine consumption by Gen Z, prompted by increased purchasing power," said Menon. "Cocaine is an expensive drug, and its increased consumption denotes a shift in lifestyle habits and preferences. Market analysis also reveals that cocaine users also

*The total value of drugs found in 2024 reached US\$1.07bn, according to estimates by various security agencies. But experts say that may be just the tip of the iceberg*

indulge in methamphetamine," he added.

In 2018, the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment estimated that there were 23mn opioid users in India, marking a 600% increase since 2004.

But that figure has taken a quantum leap since then, according to government agencies and experts. Heroin, crystal meth, synthetic drugs and hydroponic marijuana are increasingly being used by the youth, fuelling a growing domestic demand.

There has also been an increase in home labs producing meth across the country, which illustrates a troubling rise in the consumption of

methamphetamine.

A report submitted to the Indian parliament in 2023 revealed alarming numbers related to drug abuse in Punjab state, pointing to growing addiction among children. It found more than 6.6mn drug users in Punjab, with nearly 697,000 children between 10-17 years of age. Among these, 343,000 children consume opioid drugs (including heroin), 18,100 cocaine, and around 72,000 use other substances.

The UN anti-drug agency UNODC cites India as a major hub of illicit shipments of precursor drugs destined for meth labs internationally, including both neighbouring countries like Myanmar and far off destinations in Central America and Africa.

For instance, Greater Noida, which is adjacent to Delhi, has unexpectedly emerged as a hot spot for a string of drug busts involving foreigners running meth labs.

In late 2024, the Narcotics Control Bureau and Delhi Police uncovered a clandestine meth lab in Greater Noida, linked to a Mexican drug cartel. Approximately 95kg of methamphetamine was seized.

DW

## TN Assembly: Governor R N Ravi skips customary address

Chennai, Tamil Nadu - High drama was seen on Day 1 of the Tamil Nadu Assembly session of 2025. Governor R N Ravi did not deliver his customary address during the first session of the state legislative assembly on Monday, citing a serious issue concerning National Anthem.

According to a statement from the office of Raj Bhawan, upon the Governor's arrival at the assembly, only 'Tamil Tai Vazhdu', the state anthem, was sung instead of the National Anthem, which is traditionally played during such occasions.

"The Constitution of Bharat and the National Anthem were once again insulted in the Tamil Nadu Assembly today. Respecting the National Anthem is among the first Fundamental Duty as enshrined in our Consti-



Tamil Nadu Governor R N Ravi

tution. It is sung in all the state legislatures at the beginning and the end of Governor's address. Today on arrival of Governor to the House only Tamil Thaa Vazhthu was sung. Governor respectfully reminded the House of its Constitutional Duty and fervently appealed to the Hon'ble Chief Minister who is the Leader of the House and the Hon'ble Speaker for singing the

National Anthem. However, they cussedly refused. It is a matter of grave concern. Not to be a party to such brazen disrespect to the Constitution and the National Anthem, Governor in deep anguish left the House," a statement from Raj Bhavan said.

Reacting to Ravi's walkout, Chief Minister M K Stalin said the governor had made it his custom to violate the Constitutional practice of reading out the government's address.

"The Governor's actions in continuously insulting the people of Tamil Nadu, the government elected by them, and the century-old Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly are unbecoming of the position he holds," Stalin said in a post on X.

Agencies

## Jaishankar praises Sullivan for strengthening India-US ties

New Delhi - External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Monday met with US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan in New Delhi, with discussions on enhancing bilateral, regional and global cooperation.

Highlighting the significance of their discussions, Jaishankar acknowledged Sullivan's 'personal contribution' in strengthening the India-US partnership over the past four years.

Sharing a post on X, Jaishankar wrote, 'Delighted to meet US NSA @JakeSullivan46 in New Delhi today morning'.

"Continued our ongoing discussions on deepening bilateral, regional and global cooperation. Valued the openness of our conversations in the last four years. Appreciated his personal contribution to forging a closer and stronger India-US partnership," the post added.

Sullivan is on a visit to India. During his meeting with NSA Ajit Doval, Sullivan will discuss



US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan meets with External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar, in New Delhi on Monday (ANI)

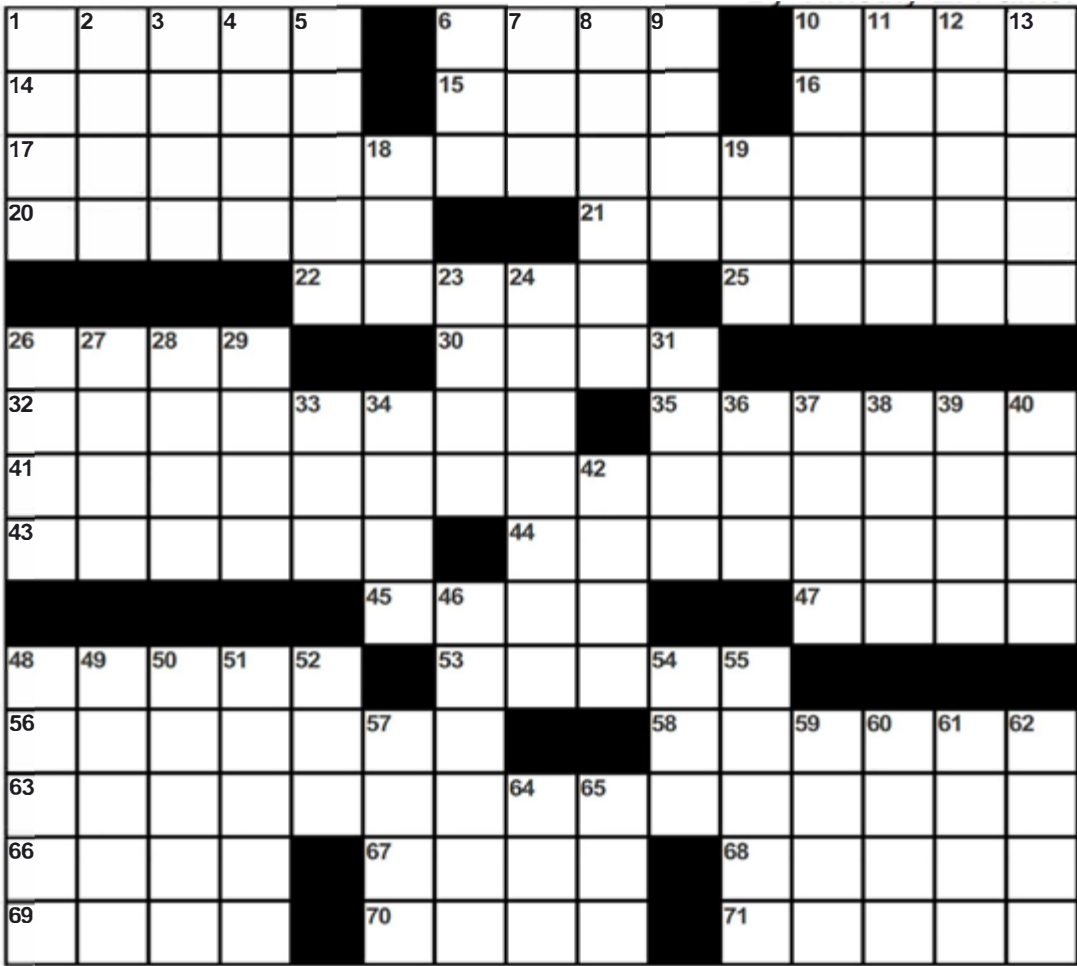
issues ranging from space, defence, strategic technology cooperation as well as shared security priorities in the Indo-Pacific region, US National Security Council Spokesperson Sean Savett had said in a statement. "National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan will travel to New Delhi, India on January 5-6 for a capstone meeting with Indian National Security Advisor Ajit Doval that will span a range of issues across the

breadth of the US-India partnership - from space, defence, and strategic technology cooperation to shared security priorities in the Indo-Pacific and beyond," the statement from White House noted.

The US NSA will also make a visit to IIT Delhi, where he will meet Indian entrepreneurs and discuss the India-US alliance on innovation and iCET initiative.

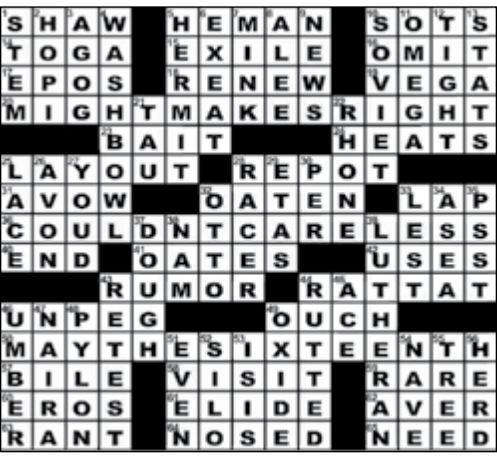
ANI

DAILY CROSSWORD



- ACROSS**
- 1) Open a pill bottle
  - 6) Peke squeaks
  - 10) Celebratory poems
  - 14) La\_ University (Philadelphia school)
  - 15) Unglazed pot with a wide mouth
  - 16) " \_ Las Vegas" (Presley film)
  - 17) What "helps the medicine go down," in song
  - 20) Take off the books
  - 21) Obscuring, in a way
  - 22) "Filthy" dough
  - 25) Uptight
  - 26) Cannabis product
  - 30) Oregano, e.g.
  - 32) Walled off
  - 35) \_Lorraine (region of France)
  - 41) Shortened weapon
  - 43) Waterfall phenomenon
  - 44) Received a varsity award
  - 45) Surgery aftermath
  - 47) Type of media
  - 48) One in deep thought
  - 53) Government operative
  - 56) Remove, as a bracelet
  - 58) Win, at an auction
  - 63) Nondrinking period
  - 66) A little over 2 pounds
  - 67) Unstable subatomic particle
  - 68) Ball charmer
  - 69) No longer hidden
  - 70) "Can I get you anything?"
  - 71) Hurdles for graduate students
- DOWN**
- 1) Superpower no more
  - 2) Neck section
  - 3) Horse hooves sound
  - 4) Moisturizer ingredient
  - 5) Colony type
  - 6) Not me or them
  - 7) Sick
  - 8) Sandpiper relative
  - 9) Umpire's scream, sometimes
  - 10) Developing egg
  - 11) Cook's exhortation
  - 12) The "Good Times" family
  - 13) Nickname for a non-com
  - 18) Winter malady
  - 19) Take a seat
  - 23) Culinary guru
  - 24) It signals danger
  - 26) Sound like a snake
  - 27) Hairy twin in the Bible
  - 28) Freshly cut, as a lawn
  - 29) Academy freshman
  - 31) Bangkok buck
  - 33) "And now, without further\_ ..."
  - 34) AAA offerings
  - 36) Auctioneer's batch
  - 37) Part of a flower
  - 38) City in India
  - 39) Billiard sticks
  - 40) Make-meet connector
  - 42) Dried up
  - 46) Bottle top capacity
  - 48) Some cologne scents
  - 49) Get the knots out
  - 50) It might go from 1 to 10
  - 51) "Rocket Man" singer
  - 52) "Norma\_" (1979 movie)
  - 54) San Francisco hill
  - 55) Prefix with "jet" or "prop"
  - 57) Unnamed quantity
  - 59) Stadium seating level
  - 60) Famed gymnastics coach Karolyi
  - 61) "\_just have to do"
  - 62) Changes color
  - 64) This puzzle's theme
  - 65)\_two punch

NOTE PAD



YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE

**ARIES** MARCH 21-APRIL 19

You're an impulsive sign, so it's really not hard to distract you, especially when you're doing something that you'd really rather not be doing. At the moment, however, you will only stop working if you're dragged, kicking and screaming, from your workplace. Try to keep in mind that even though you're obsessed with your current project, there are people who'd love to see you just for a little while.

**LEO** JULY 23-AUGUST 22

You've been working hard, diligently putting your nose to the grindstone for some time now. And now the stars are setting up such an amazing set of influences, let's just say you're geared up for far more than a casual congratulatory pat on the back. It's time to make arrangements, discreetly, of course, for celebrations with you as the guest of honor. Congrats!

**SAGITTARIUS** NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

The stars are urging one and all to rebel, revolt, mutiny, and at the very least question authority. You, however, are especially susceptible to this influence right now. About that well-deserved reputation you've acquired for being considerate and cooperative? Let's just say it might temporarily be in danger. That doesn't mean you should shut down the urge to fight city hall.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

1. In what country was the "Red Cross" founded?
- A. England
  - B. Germany
  - C. France
  - D. Switzerland
2. In 1954, the US Department of Defence established what song as the official musical tribute to the president of the USA?
- A. Hail to the Chief
  - B. I Think It's Gonna Work Out Fine
  - C. Imagine
  - D. Smoke Gets In Your Eyes
3. Although an annual Thanksgiving Day had been observed in several colonies throughout what became the USA, who proclaimed USA's first national Thanksgiving Day?
- A. Abraham Lincoln
  - B. George Washington
  - C. Theodore Roosevelt
  - D. Harry S. Truman

Answers: 1. D 2. A 3. B

**TAURUS** APRIL 20-MAY 20

Your financial situation seems to be a bit shaky at the moment, or is it only that you're worried about it because you've been pleasantly distracted by other matters? Regardless of how or why it's happened, return your attention to numbers just for a while. If the emotional situation is for real, it won't go anywhere, and definitely not in the time it takes to balance the accounts, sort through credit card receipts and get your financial house in order.

**VIRGO** AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

Sometime, you'll need to make a decision whether to let a secret finally see the light of day or keep it under wraps. Use that famous intuition of yours to make your decision. Remember to consider the future of all parties concerned. Don't feel guilty if your ultimate decision is to open up and let the truth be told. Every now and then clearing the air is really the best tactic for everyone.

**CAPRICORN** DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

You've spent a good amount of time staring intently in the mirror, wondering if there might not be something tattooed on your forehead that's visible only to shiftless types. For some reason, individuals of that kind seem to be gravitating toward you with sad stories, pleas for redemption, and promises to do better next time, even if you've never set eyes on them before. Relax.

**GEMINI** MAY 21-JUNE 21

In your own intellectual and articulate way, you've never taken the issue of closeness lightly, regardless of whether it's physical, emotional, or intellectual. You see getting to know someone as a commitment. Right now, you're even more intently focused on being faithful, true, and honest with the ones you love. How nice! Use this mood to convince others to do the right thing with your wonderful gift of gab.

**LIBRA** SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

There's nothing like the company of kindred spirits, as you well know. Thanks to the heavens playing up your permanence-loving side and your friendships, you'll be reminded of that now, via an insatiable urge to connect with like-minded others. You're after something that you instinctively know you can only get from them: camaraderie.

**AQUARIUS** JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

Right now, you're amply endowed with sensuality, charisma, and an absolutely illegal amount of allure. This is not a surprise to anyone who knows you. Thanks to the stars you're doubly lethal at the moment, and you really should be careful where you aim this stuff. You know how potent your charm is. Now increase that by a hundredfold.

**CANCER** JUNE 22-JULY 22

The next couple of days could be extremely stressful or extremely romantic. Since you of all signs know that what's in your heart often ends up as what happens around you, it's obviously time for you to make a choice. It's all about communication in relationships of all types. Ready for an innovative way to make a new path for yourself? Better be, because it's about to be offered.

**SCORPIO** OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

You may not have exactly exercised perfect judgment when it came to making a recent financial decision, but now you can rest easy. The stars are on your side and revving up to let you know that you can depend on your dear ones, and vice versa, and you'll be only too happy to share your questions (and answers) with them. If you're wondering about a financial issue, there's really no one better to ask.

**PISCES** FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

You won't be in the mood for any recreational activity that doesn't automatically include structure, rules, and a set leader. Oddly enough, you may actually want to be the leader this time out, and why not? You're not ordinarily fond of taking the reins, but with your natural intuition even more finely honed at the moment, you're the perfect person for the job. Just don't take it too seriously. Remember, you're supposed to be having fun too.

KIDS COLOURING



BOGGLER

|   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|
| N | G | O | I |
| I | R | I | U |
| O | S | O | T |
| D | N | W | S |

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

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

DO YOU SUDOKU?

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

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

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

# Amad rescues Red Devils

Diallo’s late goal helps Man Utd hold Liverpool in Anfield thriller

Liverpool, England - Amad Diallo struck a late equaliser as Manchester United made a mockery of their recent form to hold Premier League leaders Liverpool to a thrilling 2-2 draw at Anfield on Sunday.

It looked as though Ruben Amorim’s United would go home empty-handed despite a vastly-improved display but Diallo swept in a shot in the 80th minute to earn his side a draw and prevent Liverpool from opening an eight-point lead at the top.

United went ahead in the 52nd minute when Lisandro Martinez powered home a ferocious shot from a tight angle.

But an off-key Liverpool responded seven minutes later with Cody Gakpo curling home a stunning equaliser before Mohamed Salah put the hosts ahead from the penalty spot.

After Diallo’s leveller both sides had chances to win in a frantic finale with United’s Harry Maguire spooning a glorious chance over the crossbar with the last kick of the game.

As the fans made for the exits on a freezing afternoon it was United’s who were happiest after watching a display that offered hope of better things to come in 2025.

Liverpool remain in control of the title race with 46 points from



Manchester United’s Amad Diallo scores against Liverpool on Sunday

19 games, six ahead of Arsenal with a game in hand as they seek to equal United’s 20 English crowns.

United moved up a place to 13th with 23 points.

“I’m pretty upset. If we show this level at Liverpool, first in the league, why can’t we do this everywhere?” United skipper Bruno Fernandes, asking the same question as everyone else, said.

“Today we put in a real effort, playing with some passion and heart is what is going to give you

something from the game.”

Liverpool skipper Virgil van Dijk admitted it had been an off-day for the leaders.

“It could have been a lot worse if we are absolutely honest with ourselves,” he said.

Based on the form and confidence levels of the two teams, many United fans making the short trip on a grim afternoon might have feared a mauling similar to March 2023 when a rampant Liverpool scored seven goals.

*I’m pretty upset. If we show this level at Liverpool, first in the league, why can’t we do this everywhere? Today we put in a real effort, playing with some passion and heart*

**BRUNO FERNANDES**

United had lost five of their last six league games with relegation being aired as a possibility while Liverpool won their last three games, scoring 14 goals in the process. But Amorim’s side produced a courageous display as they went toe to toe with a strangely ragged Liverpool.

The hosts did start well with Luis Diaz firing over and Alexis Mac Allister’s volley being stopped by United keeper Andre Onana. Ryan Gravenberch was also a whisker away from giving Liverpool the lead with a shot that skimmed off the saturated surface and flew past the post.



Ruben Amorim

## ‘Today we were a different team’, but Amorim still upset

Liverpool, England - Manchester United boss Ruben Amorim was delighted with the intensity his side showed in their breathless 2-2 draw with Premier League leaders Liverpool on Sunday, but said his team’s performance left him wanting more.

A week after Amorim said his reeling team could face the threat of relegation, Lisandro Martinez and Amad Diallo scored United’s first goals in the cauldron of Anfield since 2018, going toe-to-toe with the league’s best team in a well-deserved draw.

“Today I’m allowed to be the only guy upset with the team,” Amorim told reporters. “But today we were a team.

“I want to see my team play so much better, but I think the most important thing to address today is the mentality. That is the key for everything. Today, we were a different team, not because of the sys-

tem, not because of the technical aspect of the game, the tactical aspect of the game.

“We faced the competition in the way that we are supposed to face every day, training and match. It doesn’t matter the place... we need to face every day like that.”

The draw saw United climb a spot to 13th in the table, but it felt like a win for the delighted travelling United fans who had braved the wintery drive.

United captain Bruno Fernandes, one of their best players on the day, was left frustrated by the game.

“I’m pretty upset,” he said. “If we show this level at Liverpool, first in the league, why can’t we do this everywhere?”

Amorim agreed. “It’s really clear,” he said. “We lost three games in a row at home, some of the games we suffered two goals without doing nothing (defensively).”



Pep Guardiola with Jack Grealish

## Grealish must fight for his place, says Guardiola

Manchester, England - Jack Grealish must fight for his place in Manchester City’s starting line-up, manager Pep Guardiola said.

The 29-year-old made 50 appearances in City’s 2022-23 campaign, scoring five goals and registering 11 assists to help his side win the Champions League, Premier League and FA Cup.

However he has failed to impress this season and was dropped to the bench in Saturday’s 4-1 league win over West Ham, with Brazilian Savinho starting instead. “Savinho is in

better shape and everything than Jack, and that’s why I played Savinho,” Guardiola told reporters.

“Do I want the Jack that won the treble? Yeah, I want it, but I try to be honest with myself for that. They have to fight. You can say it’s unfair.

“If you think that, then it’s fine, but you have to prove (to me), ‘Okay, I’m going to fight with Savinho, to deserve to play in that position’, every single day, every single week and every single month.”

## Jimenez penalties help Fulham draw with Ipswich

London, England - Raul Jimenez scored two equalisers from the penalty spot in a dramatic second half as Fulham held Ipswich Town to a 2-2 draw at Craven Cottage in the Premier League on Sunday, extending the hosts’ unbeaten streak to eight league matches.

Both teams converted penalties within two minutes as Jimenez cancelled out Sammie Szmodics’ first-half strike in the 69th minute, before Liam Delap restored the visitors’ lead after Timothy Castagne brought him down.

But Jimenez got a second crack at restoring parity when Leif Davis fouled him in the 90th minute, denying 18th-placed Ipswich a chance to climb out of the relegation zone for the first time since November.

“It’s really bad for us. I think we did everything to win the game... this is two lost points,” Jimenez, who has never missed a Premier League penalty in 10 attempts, told Sky Sports.

Ninth-placed Fulham domi-



Raul Jimenez celebrates with teammates after slotting home Fulham’s equaliser against Ipswich Town

nated possession in the first half but struggled to create chances and conceded against the run of play as failed clearances from Antonee Robinson and Calvin Bassey led to Szmodics’s strike in the 38th minute.

When Sam Morsy brought down Harry Wilson in the box shortly after the hour mark, referee Darren Bond initially denied the penalty, before changing his decision following a review prompted by the Video Assistant Referee.

Christian Walton, whose reflex save had kept out Jimenez’s header in the 20th minute, could not deny him from the spot as the Mexico forward tricked the keeper with a stop-start run up in the first penalty and sent him the wrong way in the second.

“He’s been doing that all his career. He’s our best penalty taker... the way he fought and made it hard for the defenders, he is in a really good moment,” Fulham manager Marco Silva told the BBC.

## Alexander-Arnold not distracted by contract chatter, says Arne Slot

Liverpool, England - Liverpool boss Arne Slot defended Trent Alexander-Arnold who drew scathing criticism from pundits after their 2-2 draw with mid-table Manchester United on Sunday, a result that felt like “two points lost” for the Premier League leaders.

United’s Bruno Fernandes and Diogo Dalot left the Liverpool defender -- who has been linked this week with a move to Spanish giants Real Madrid -- chasing shadows for much of the game, and former United captain Roy Keane pulled no punches.

“We talk about how brilliant Trent is going forward, but

Trent’s defending today, my goodness it’s like schoolboy stuff,” Keane said on the Sky Sports broadcast.

“There’s talk about him going to Real Madrid, the way he’s defending he’s going to Tranmere Rovers after this. He’s got to do better.”

Asked if Alexander-Arnold was distracted by the chatter about his contract, which is set to expire at the season’s end, Slot said: “I don’t believe in those things.

“I think nine out of 10 people will tell you that it affected him, but I’m one of the 10 that tells you that I don’t think that affected



Trent Alexander-Arnold

*What affected him is that he had to play Bruno Fernandes and Diogo Dalot, two starters for Portugal, great, great, great players*

ARNE SLOT

him. What affected him is that he had to play Bruno Fernandes and Diogo Dalot, two starters for Portugal, great, great, great players,” Slot said.

“We have a fantastic player

here with Diogo Jota, and he’s not even playing for Portugal. So that tells you how much quality United has. Probably everybody’s going to tell you that it had to do with the rumours. But my opinion is different.”

League Two’s Tranmere Rovers responded to Keane’s comments with a tongue-in-cheek post on social media platform X, writing: “Trent to Tranmere, Roy? Nah, we’re alright thanks.”

Cody Gakpo and Mohamed Salah scored for the Reds, who remained top of the table with 46 points, six ahead of second-placed Arsenal with a game in

hand. Slot said the draw felt like their 1-0 loss to Nottingham Forest in mid-September, their only defeat this season.

“Of course, it feels for us as two points dropped,” the Dutchman said. “It was a difficult game, bit similar to maybe the Nottingham Forest game, where playing style of both teams were quite similar. Defending in the low block with a lot of bodies, and if they had the ball, not to risk to build up, but play it long.

“That is not always easy to play against that style of football, and that’s what showed against Forest, and it showed again today as well.”



Eddie Howe

‘We need to be at our absolute best in League Cup clash with Arsenal’

London, England - Newcastle United must make the most of their strong form when they take on Arsenal in the League Cup semi-finals, coach Eddie Howe said on Monday as he urged his team not to be complacent.

Newcastle have won their last six games across all competitions, including impressive victories over Aston Villa, Manchester United and Tottenham Hotspur.

“This is an important game for us. We need to be at our absolute best, a high-level game. There is a lot at stake for us,” Howe told re-

*We just need to get that mix right. Let's try and continue the good performances we've given recently and try and win the game*

EDDIE HOWE

porters ahead of the first leg trip to Arsenal on Tuesday.

“We've got to be really good off the ball and solid defensively. We've got to cause Arsenal problems the other way.

“I don't think we should overthink it, we just need to get that mix right. Let's try and continue the good performances we've given recently and try and win the game.”

The English manager hailed striker Alexander Isak, who scored for a seventh successive Premier League game in their 2-1 win over Spurs, but said the Swede's goalscoring run was down to the team's collective effort.

“Alex will naturally (feel like scoring), when you are on the run of goalscoring games that he is,” Howe added.

# Ousmane, the main man

## Last-gasp Dembele goal hands PSG French Super Cup

Doha, Qatar - A stoppage-time goal by forward Ousmane Dembele earned Paris St Germain a 1-0 win over AS Monaco in the French Super Cup on Sunday as the Ligue 1 champions lifted the trophy for the third consecutive season.

Record 13-time winners PSG, who faced last season's Ligue 1 runners-up Monaco after the Parisians had won both the league and the French Cup, won the competition for the 11th time in the last 12 years.

In a lively encounter at Doha's Stadium 974, made from 974 recycled shipping containers for the 2022 World Cup, PSG had 27 chances - nine of them on target - without breaking the deadlock.

But Dembele ensured the game did not go to penalties when he sealed the win for the French champions two minutes into injury time, netting inside the far post after Fabian Ruiz fed him with a neat pass across the face of the goal.

Summer signing Desire Doue was close to giving PSG the lead in the ninth minute but hit the bar while Lee Kang-In was denied by Monaco goalkeeper Philipp Koehn with an effort from distance in first-half stoppage time.

Dembele and Vitinha also



Paris St Germain players celebrate with the French Super Cup on Sunday; (below) Ousmane Dembele celebrates his goal



*Dembele ensured the game did not go to penalties when he sealed the win for the French champions two minutes into injury time, netting inside the far post after Fabian Ruiz fed him with a neat pass across the face of the goal*

tested Koehn in the opening 45 minutes while Monaco's Maghnes Aklouch and Takumi Minamino forced Gianluigi Donnarumma into saves, with the PSG keeper returning to the side after recovering from a face injury.

No goals were scored in the first half of a French Super Cup

for the first time since 2010 when Olympique de Marseille beat PSG 5-4 on penalties after the match ended goalless.

PSG, who beat Nantes and Toulouse in the previous two editions, won 4-2 at Monaco last month in Ligue 1 with Dembele scoring a second-half brace.

## Vietnam edge 10-man Thailand to win Asean Championship

Bangkok, Thailand - Vietnam won the Asean Championship for the third time in their history on Sunday as a 3-2 win over 10-man defending champions Thailand in the second leg of the final in Bangkok sealed a 5-3 aggregate victory for Kim Sang-sik's side.

Pansa Hemviboon's 82nd minute own goal and a stoppage time effort from Nguyen Hai Long secured Vietnam's first success since 2018 as the Golden Star Warriors avenged their loss to the Thais in the previous final in 2022.

Vietnam led 2-1 following Thursday's first leg in Viet Tri and added to their advantage in the eighth minute through Pham Tuan Hai, who lifted the ball home after Pham Xuan Manh's free kick was allowed to bounce in the area by the Thai defence.

Twenty minutes later the home side levelled when Doan Ngoc Tan gave possession away



Vietnam players celebrate with the Asean Championship trophy

25 yards from goal and Ben Davis bent a first-time strike around Nguyen Dinh Trieu into the bottom corner.

Supachok Sarachat then gave Thailand the lead on the night and levelled the overall score with a blistering strike in the 64th minute, the ball flying into the top corner from more than 25 yards.

Tensions flared after Supachok's goal and, in the 74th minute, the game turned again as Weerathep Pomphun was dismissed for a second bookable offence as he committed a cynical foul on Vu Van Thanh on the halfway line.

The Vietnamese made their numerical superiority count soon after, substitute Nguyen Quang Hai feeding possession to Tuan Hai and his shot towards the bottom corner was redirected under goalkeeper Patiwat Khammai by the unfortunate Pansa.



Luis Enrique

## We must continue to grow as a team, says Luis Enrique

Doha, Qatar - Paris St Germain coach Luis Enrique praised his team for starting the year on the right foot and said their 1-0 win over AS Monaco in the French Super Cup on Sunday thanks to Ousmane Dembele's last-gasp goal was well-deserved.

Dembele sealed the win for the French champions two minutes into injury time after PSG created 27 chances, nine of them on target, without breaking the deadlock.

“Today it was a very difficult game, against an opponent with very high quality players and a lot of attacking ones,” Luis Enrique told PSG TV.

“We had... moments of domination and moments of defensive suffering, but I think that in the end the goal did justice to a team that never stops fighting, that continues to attack, that does not stop running, that does not stop defending.

“I think it is something very positive and that we must continue to value.”

PSG won a record-extending 13th domestic Super Cup, having faced last season's Ligue 1 runners-up Monaco after the Parisians had won both the league and the French Cup.

“Winning a title is always a source of joy,” the Spanish coach added.

“Starting 2025 this way, in an almost full stadium, with a lot of Parisian supporters in it... it gives us confidence, it's important for morale, and we have to enjoy it before thinking about the future.

“With the game idea that we have and the profile of our players, we must continue to grow as a team, to improve in any situation.”

The French champions, who alongside Serie A side Juventus are the only unbeaten teams remaining in Europe's top five leagues this season, have not lost any domestic game since May last year.

Their three defeats so far in the campaign came in the Champions League.

## Al Rajhi wins Dakar second stage, Sainz rules out chances of title defence

Riyadh, Saudi Arabia - Carlos Sainz wrote off his chances of defending the Dakar Rally title on Monday after ending the 48-hour second stage in Saudi Arabia more than an hour and half behind new leader Henk Lategan.

The 62-year-old Spaniard flipped his Ford Raptor onto its roof in the desert dunes on Sunday and then lost more time when the stage resumed on Monday with a puncture and problems in finding the route.

The father of Formula One driver Carlos Sainz Jr. ended the day 20th overall.

“There's a still a long way to go but clearly my chances of winning have disappeared,” the four-times Dakar winner told



Saudi Arabia's Yazeed al Rajhi won the 967km Chrono stage despite a two-minute penalty for speeding

reporters, saying everything had gone wrong.

“If I can help the team, if I can learn and test some things then so much the better.”

Saudi Arabia's Yazeed al Rajhi won the 967km Chrono stage, despite a two minute penalty for speeding, in a non-works Toyota and was second overall behind South African Lategan, who drives for the factory Toyota team. Qatar's five-times winner Nasser al Attiyah, in third place for Dacia, picked up a four-minute penalty for the same offence as Al-Rajhi.

That left Lategan and co-driver Brett Cummings, winners of Friday's prologue to the two-week event, four minutes and 45 sec-

onds clear.

“Towards the end of the really long dunes section, I got sick, had to stop and get out of the car for a bit,” said Lategan, who took over at the top from American teammate Seth Quintero.

“After the dunes cleared, I started enjoying it a bit again. “It's actually a big surprise to be first because we haven't been really focusing on it. But I'm happy with that. We've been playing a more strategic game over these two days.”

Australian Toby Price and Britain's Sam Sunderland, both double winners in the motorcycle category and now teammates on four wheels, moved up to fourth overall with Overdrive Racing.

# BUMRAH-LESS, TOOTHLESS



Jasprit Bumrah

## Defeat Down Under exposes India's dependency on pace spearhead

New Delhi, India - India's 3-1 defeat in Australia exposed the fragility of their top order, but equally unmissable was how much they rely on pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah, who gave it all until he broke down in the series finale in Sydney.

The seam-bowling genius finished the five-Test series with 32 wickets at an average of 13.06 and was the obvious choice for the player-of-the-series award despite being on the losing side.

Bumrah, laid low by a back spasm, was not available to bowl in Australia's second innings in the low-scoring thriller in Sydney where the hosts prevailed by six wickets to reclaim the Border-Gavaskar Trophy after a decade.

"It's a little disappointing in the end because I probably missed out on the spiciest wicket of the series," a dejected Bumrah said after India lost the series even though his own stature grew.

Australia run-machine Travis Head said he could not think of a better individual display than Bumrah's superlative performance in the series.

Former India opener Wasim Jaffer said Bumrah alone kept alive India's hopes of levelling the series in Sydney until his injury.

"Every time Bumrah stood at the

top of his mark this series Aussie cricket fans held their breath and only released it after the ball was played out safely," Jaffer wrote on X.

"Have rarely seen a cricketer dominate the Aussie psyche so much..."

But there is a limit even for arguably the best all-format bowler of his generation, who was over-bowled with little support from the other end.

His new-ball partner Mohammed Siraj, who finished with 20 wickets, was inconsistent and expensive in the low-scoring series.

Aakash Deep bowled well in Brisbane and Melbourne before a back injury cut short his tour, while Prasidh Krishna claimed six wickets in the only Test he played in Sydney.

The difference between the bowling averages of Bumrah and his seam-bowling teammates stood at 21.76, suggesting Bumrah operated as India's one-man army with the ball.

He bowled 53.2 overs in Melbourne - the highest in his 45-test career - and skipper Rohit Sharma conceded they over-bowled Bumrah.

"If somebody is in such a great form, you want to try and maximise that form," Rohit said after the Melbourne Test.

| JASPRIT BUMRAH VS AUSTRALIA |       |
|-----------------------------|-------|
| OVERS                       | 151.2 |
| MAIDENS                     | 39    |
| AVERAGE                     | 13.06 |
| WICKETS                     | 32    |



Novak Djokovic

## Djokovic still feels Covid trauma at Melbourne

Sydney, Australia - Novak Djokovic has admitted to still getting stressed when he gets off a plane at Melbourne airport after he was deported from Australia three years ago.

The 24-time Grand Slam champion had his visa cancelled ahead of the 2022 Australian Open following days of drama over Australia's COVID entry rules and his unvaccinated status.

"I have to be quite frank," Djokovic said in an interview with Melbourne's Herald Sun newspaper.

"The last couple of times I landed in Australia, to go through passport control and immigration - I had a bit of trauma from three years ago. And some traces still stay there when I'm passing passport control, just checking out if someone from immigration zone is approaching."

## Masood leads from front as Pakistan battle against SA

Cape Town, South Africa - Captain Shan Masood scored a battling 145 as Pakistan continue to defy hosts South Africa at tea on the fourth day of the second and final Test as they reached 398 for five following on at Newlands, but still trail by 23 runs on Monday.

Pakistan are effectively six wickets down after batter Saim Ayub fractured his ankle while fielding on the first day and will hope to set some sort of target their bowlers can defend.

Mohammad Rizwan and Salman Agha are both unbeaten on 31 as they look to further frustrate their hosts in

the final session.

This is already the highest ever follow-on score by a visiting team in South Africa and it has been a hard slog for home bowlers on a flat wicket that is offering little assistance in terms of seam or turn.

After Pakistan started the day on 213 for one, South Africa picked up two wickets in the morning session, as Khurram Shahzad was caught by Keshav Maharaj at point off seamer Marco Jansen for 18.

Kagiso Rabada bowled Kamran Ghulam for 28, a delivery that nipped back off the wicket and crashed into the off-stump.



Shan Masood

## Rashid stars as Afghanistan win Test series against Zimbabwe

Bulawayo, Zimbabwe - Afghanistan took only 15 balls to wrap up victory on the last day of the second Test against Zimbabwe at the Queens Sports Club on Monday, winning by 72 runs to take the two-match series.

Zimbabwe were dismissed for 205, failing to add to their overnight score but losing their last two wickets in only 13 minutes.

Richard Ngarava was run out in the second over of the day amid confusion with captain Craig Ervine, who went in the next over trapped leg before wicket by Rashid Khan, who finished with 7-66 in 27.3 overs.

It was Khan's leg spin on Sunday that saw Afghanistan move into a winning position after Zimbabwe initially looked victory-bound when they were 157-4, chasing a winning target of 278 runs.



Rashid Khan took seven wickets for 66 runs



Naomi Osaka

## Injured Osaka optimistic about Australian Open

Sydney, Australia - Naomi Osaka will undergo a scan on the injury that forced her to pull out of the Auckland Classic final but remains optimistic about playing at the Australian Open, the former world number one said on Monday.

Osaka, the 2019 and 2021 champion at Melbourne Park, was reduced to tears on Sunday when an abdominal injury forced her to quit while leading Clara Tauson 6-4 in her first WTA final in almost three years.

"I'm having an MRI today to assess," the 27-year-old said in a brief statement.

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MENTAL HEALTH

# Are you depressed?

Money worries, a difficult relationship or an illness — external circumstances are often thought to be the reason for depression. But why do some people develop depression and others don't?

People with depression often stigmatise themselves – mainly because of a misunderstanding of the illness. According to research, more than one in ten people in Germany were diagnosed with depression in 2022. In total, that's around 9.5 million people, and the trend is rising. This is the result of a study by the German-based AOK health insurance company, which concluded that women are more affected.

"You have to distinguish between stress, grief, and other normal reactions to difficult life circumstances on one hand and the illness of depression on the other. These are two different worlds," says Ulrich Hegerl, psychiatrist and chairman of the German Depression Aid Foundation and Suicide Prevention.

"Most people — and I used to think this too — believe that depression is a reaction to difficult life circumstances," says Hegerl. This assumption can become problematic.

A key factor in depressive illnesses is the predisposition for it, according to Hegerl. For those with such a predisposition, certain life circumstances could trigger a period of illness.

Such a predisposition could be genetic in nature. "The predisposition can also be acquired through traumatic events in childhood," says the psychiatrist. Studies support the idea that depression is much more than an uncomfortable, emotional downturn.

In one recent study, researchers were able to show that a specific network in the brain is more extensive in people with depression than in healthy individuals.

This salience network (attention network) functions like a

**Depression symptoms**  
During a depressive episode, a person experiences a depressed mood (feeling sad, irritable, empty). They may feel a loss of pleasure or interest in activities.

**Other symptoms may include:**

- Poor concentration
- Feelings of excessive guilt or low self-worth
- Hopelessness about the future
- Thoughts about dying or suicide
- Disrupted sleep
- Changes in appetite or weight
- Feeling very tired or low in energy

**Self-care**  
Self-care can play an important role in managing symptoms of depression and promoting overall well-being.

**What you can do:**

- Try to keep doing activities you used to enjoy
- Stay connected to friends and family
- Exercise regularly, even if it's just a short walk
- Stick to regular eating and sleeping habits
- Avoid or cut down on alcohol/illicit drugs
- Talk to someone you trust about your feelings
- Seek help from a healthcare provider

filter in the brain. It controls our attention and directs it to relevant external stimuli. And it is important for regulating our emotional response to these stimuli.

How exactly this works is still not entirely clear. According to the study, however, the size of the salience network correlates with certain symptoms of depression, such as the loss of joy and motivation.

The researchers suspect that the enlargement of the salience network could serve as an indicator of depression – even if the person has not yet experienced depressive symptoms.

"People affected should make an emergency plan," suggests the psychiatrist. "What are the first signs? What can I do then?" This may, however, also mean that those affected have to make their situation visible to others and talk about their depression.

"One of the biggest challenges in dealing with depression is the stigmatisation caused by a false understanding of the illness," says Hegerl.

World Health Organization (WHO) states that depressive disorder (also known as depression) is a common mental disorder. It involves a depressed mood or loss of pleasure or interest in activities for long periods of time.

Depression is different from regular mood changes and feelings about everyday life. It can affect all aspects of life, including relationships with family, friends and community. It can result from or lead to problems at school and at work.

Depression can happen to anyone. People who have lived through abuse, severe losses or other stressful events are more likely to develop depression. Women are more likely to have depression than men, WHO states.

(Inputs: DW, WHO)

Sometimes the cold weather and dark days have all of us craving a cozy blanket and our couch — not so much the gym. But movement is important all year long (with benefits spanning nearly every facet of health)

ANTIDOTE TO

# WINTER BLUES

During the winter months, if you're feeling low in energy or your mood is glum, exercise can be a helpful antidote to winter blues. So, change up your workout routine to add some activities that are ideal for this time of year and that you look forward to.

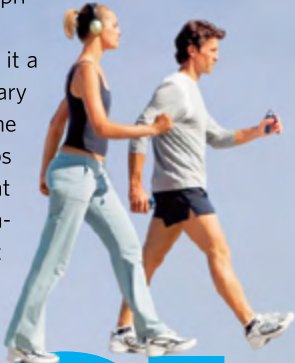
Workouts that elevate your heart rate will help you stay warm and work up a nice sweat. Use the winter elements to your advantage, say fitness coaches, asserting that exercise forces you to strengthen the muscles that help stabilise you and increase calorie burn.

Here are six winter-friendly workouts that are helpful when the cold weather blows in:

## BRISK WALKING

It's simple, but it can absolutely deliver on big fitness gains, says Evans. Walking works the muscles of the lower body and is lower impact on your joints. It improves cardiovascular fitness and promotes good bone health. Do it in nearly any weather by dressing appropriately.

Why not take it a step further and make it a group activity? Research published in January 2015 in the British Journal of Sports Medicine measured the health benefits of walking groups across 42 studies and found evidence that group walking benefited several health measures, from blood pressure to resting heart rate to body fat to cholesterol levels.



## SKIING

Skiing can be an intense or more moderate workout, depending on your skill level and the types of routes you do. Both downhill and cross-country skiing can improve flexibility, build up your core muscles, and of course, work those legs.

Research has concluded that downhill skiing increases leg muscle strength, promotes healthy aging, improves musculoskeletal and postural functioning, and supports emotional health, according to a review published in 2018 in the journal Frontiers in Physiology.

## SNOWBOARDING

Snowboarding comes with a lot of the same physical demands as skiing. But unlike skiing, for which your weight is balanced over two skis, snowboarding requires just a single board.

"It's an excellent workout, not only for strengthening your lower body but also for your core — if you are riding with proper technique," says Daniel Mastey, a snowboarding coach certified by the American Association of Snowboard Instructors.

## ICE-SKATING

You don't have to be pirouetting or jumping to get a workout on ice skates. Just doing laps around a rink requires balance and coordination, says former nationally ranked figure skater Anna Brodetsky-Lubischer, a National Association for Fitness Certification-certified personal trainer and co-owner of the gym Lubischer's Burn and Blast Training in West Long Branch, New Jersey.

"Skating also builds up two important muscle groups of your body - your legs and core," Brodetsky-Lubischer adds. So don't be surprised if you feel sore the next day!



## BOXING

If you want to skip the outdoor workout, find a boxing gym nearby or call up a virtual boxing workout. (Several gyms offer live or on-demand classes.) It's great for relieving stress and improving cardiovascular fitness because it gets your heart rate up, Evans says.

The benefits of boxing are similar to other cardiovascular workouts, with the added benefit that it's a really good upper body workout (unlike other popular cardio choices, like running and cycling, which require more from the lower body), according to Harvard Health Publishing.

## PILATES AND YOGA

If you notice tight hip flexor muscles or hamstrings, it could be because many of us tend to spend more time sitting inside during the colder months of the year compared with when the weather is more hospitable, says Jessica Roberts, a nationally certified Pilates teacher based in Reno, Nevada.

Practices like Pilates and yoga, which promote strength, mobility, and flexibility, can really help counteract all of that immobility, Roberts says. The gentle movements that involve a lot of stretching and lengthening of muscles can be a great cross-training option if you do other high-impact winter sports. The strengthening components of Pilates and yoga also help prep your body for unexpected jerks and twists that can happen with those winter sports.

(Courtesy: everydayhealth.com)



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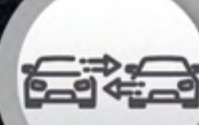
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