



National campaign to celebrate HM's Accession Day

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) has announced the launch of a national promotional campaign marking the fifth anniversary of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik's accession to power.

The campaign, which will run from January 11 to February 11, 2025 will offer a wide range of discounts and special deals across the sultanate to celebrate the occasion under the theme 'Oman is celebrating.'

Confirming the campaign, a ministry official encouraged all commercial establishments in Oman to actively participate in the celebration by offering special deals and promotions during the period. By doing so, businesses will contribute to a unified national celebration while taking part in an initiative designed to stimulate economic and commercial activity across the country. The campaign is also aimed at enhancing partnership between the public and private sectors and encouraging more robust economic interactions throughout the sultanate.

The primary objective of the campaign is to increase economic activity, support local businesses and boost sales during the celebra-

tion period. One of the key goals is to provide consumers access to products at affordable prices, benefiting a wide range of people across various social segments. Additionally, it aims to raise commercial movement in Oman by encouraging both local and international brands to participate, while also making essential goods more accessible to the public.

The MoCIIP official informed that the campaign's promotional offers would give consumers a



chance to win prizes. Participating businesses are encouraged to offer instant prizes, coupons, raffles and scratch-and-win options, besides discounts on goods and services.

Details of prizes, including the type, quantity and duration of the offer, will be specified by each participating entity. These offers could be available daily or weekly, depending on the participating entity's decision.

In addition to instant prizes, par-

ticipating businesses are encouraged to run coupon and raffle-based offers in which consumers receive numbered coupons upon making a purchase. Coupons will include their details in both Arabic and English. The coupons will be placed in a raffle box; consumers will retain a part of the coupon allowing them to claim their prize if they win.

Scratch-and-win offers will provide another chance for consumers to win instant prizes.

MoCIIP also outlined the process for businesses to participate in the campaign. Commercial establishments must submit a request letter along with a list of the products or services they plan to include in the campaign. The request should be sent via email to the ministry at cld@tejarah.gov.om. Once the request is received, the ministry will review it and provide a response with approval. A copy of the approval will be forwarded to Consumer Protection Authority for further processing. Once approval is granted, businesses can proceed with offering discounts and promotions during the campaign period.

The ministry is inviting all commercial establishments in the sultanate to actively participate in the national campaign and ensuring the celebrations are a grand success.



Sayyid Theyazin chairs Expo 2025 Osaka prep meeting

Muscat - H H Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth, chaired a meeting of the main committee tasked with the sultanate's participation in Expo 2025 in Osaka, Japan from April 13 to October 13, 2025.

At the meeting held in Muscat on Monday, the committee reviewed preparations for Oman's participation in the global forum, including readiness of pavilion, which is now in its final stages of construction, and starting activities on a trial basis.

H H Sayyid Theyazin stressed that Oman's participation in the global event should reflect the sultanate's unique status among the countries of the world.

Sixteen agreements were signed to support the sultanate's pavilion at the expo at the meeting.



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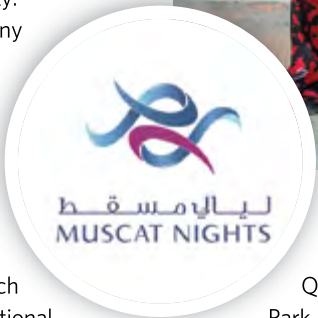
French troupe, Japanese drums, Muscat nights

Our Correspondent
Muscat

A week into Muscat Nights Festival 2024, its diverse offerings – colourful celebrations, spirited performances, cultural showcases, drone shows, culinary delights and more – are becoming the talk of the town. Families and friends can be seen at its seven locations in and around Muscat actively engaging in festival activities or just enjoying shows sipping kahwa on the grass under the starry sky.

Among the many attractions at the festival, one performance in particular has got much attention at Rose Garden in Qurum Natural Park – a French group playing traditional Japanese drums.

The Taiko Japanese Team's shows are an unforgettable experience for festival goers. Full of energy and passion, the performances leave attendees mesmerised prompting them to pose for selfies or create reels with the performers. They perform eight shows daily, each consistently drawing large crowds, making



them one of the highlights at Qurum Natural Park.

This is Taiko Japanese Team's second visit to Oman. In 2022, they performed at Salalah Festival, where they were a big hit. Considering the popularity on their debut in the country, the troupe is enthusiastic about this visit too.

The excitement on the festival grounds is palpable in the air as the drummers take their posi-

tions to start the show. Dressed in striking red and black outfits, their synchronised beats echo through the air, captivating spectators of all ages. As the rhythmic pounding of the drums slowly rise to a crescendo, festival goers are enraptured by the raw energy and precision of the performance.

Troupe leader Amir Mohammad informed that they rehearse intensely and improvise as per needs and audience response. "Before each performance, we

do a light workout and eat small, energy-boosting meals. Drumming requires not only rhythm but physical endurance. Our pre-show routine ensures we give our best every time."

The French drummers are also seen collaborating with other performers at the festival. On certain evenings, they join Russian dancers in a parade, creating a unique fusion of sound and movement. These collaborations embody the spirit of Muscat Nights Festival – a melting

pot of cultures coming together to celebrate art and performance.

"Muscat Nights Festival is a special event and we are thrilled to be part of it. These outdoor performances in this pleasant winter weather are an enjoyable experience. Our performances reflect the very essence of this festival – unity through diversity, celebration through culture, and joy through art and music which has no borders," Mohammad added.

Omani production feted for best documentary at Indian film awards

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Filmmaker Mohammed al Darwish has done Oman proud winning for the best documentary at the Indian International Film Festival Award, West Bengal in the online category. The competition saw participation of over 4,000 films from around the world, of which 494 were shortlisted.

Darwish's 60-minute documentary *Safnat* explores the deep connection between Omanis and horses, capturing how these animals are cared for and celebrated in Omani culture. Filming began in October 2023 and continued for three months. *Safnat* was released in May 2024.

Speaking about the film and the award, Darwish said, "Horses and camels are an integral part of Omani culture. For the shoot, we often started early in the morning and continued filming through the day. Sometimes, we had to stop because of the heat. I am very happy to receive this award at one of India's best film festivals. It motivates me



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MOHAMMED AL DARWISH

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He added that *Safnat* highlights Oman's rich equestrian heritage, offering audiences a glimpse into the relationship between humans, horses and culture.

Safnat was filmed using six high-end cameras ensuring the highest quality visuals.



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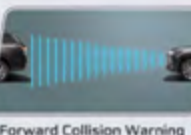
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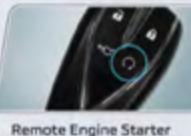
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Arabwood, Oman Film Society announce movie anthology project - R Factor

Our Correspondent
Muscat

A unique movie project - R Factor - that aims to showcase seven compelling stories inspired by the culture, lifestyle and diversity of Oman and bring together over 200 Omani talents in various capacities is set to take place in January. The anthology will feature 100 Omani actors, capturing stories that range from football and fishermen to youth, music and cultural identity.

R Factor is an initiative of Arabwood by a group dedicated to creating, developing and establishing a thriving film industry in Oman in collaboration with Oman Film Society (OFS). Practical Productions will combine a 'learn and shoot with masters' programme to R Factor making it the first-ever live shooting and training experience of its kind in Oman.

Preparations for R Factor commenced with an acting course and audition preparation led by Jijoy Rajagopal, professor of cinematic acting at Film and Television Institute of India, Pune and Director of KR Narayanan Film Institute, Kerala.



The training took place last week for four days from where selected participants will be cast in the seven films.

"I believe that we are witnessing the rise of a new wave in the Arab film industry, and it is originating right here in Oman. Arabwood is at the forefront of this movement, and I am delighted to extend my full support and collaboration to their ventures. Together, we can nurture talent, build bridges and create stories that resonate globally," Rajagopal said.

The auditions aimed to cast 35 characters in the seven films with two of these featuring child leads. Over 50 talented Omani children

participated, impressing the judges with their remarkable performances.

The anthology includes *The Two Kids*, *Table 5*, *Laylatul Qadr*, *Symphony*, *A Piece of Sky*, *The Journey to Planet X* and *Blue Tick*.

Sudha Sha, organiser of the initiative said, "This once-in-a-lifetime opportunity will allow aspiring filmmakers and actors from Oman to work alongside renowned industry professionals. Esteemed filmmakers Chandan Arora, Ashima Chebbar, Vineeth Kumar, Zakariya Mohammed, Nilanjana Sha and Antonio Rui Rubairo from the UK, and celebrated cinematographers Nimish Ravi, Prakash Kutty and Hari Nair

will lend their expertise to this venture. National Award-winning art director Santosh Raman, make-up artist NG Roshan and sound designer Arun Rama Varma Thampuran will provide specialised training, while acclaimed filmmaker Mahesh Narayan will mentor and groom technicians."

Omani filmmaker Muzna al Musafir will lead the project alongside Sudha and OFS team leader Dr Jinan al Eisa.

Sudha said, "This anthology is more than just a film project. Arabwood invites Omani filmmakers and talents to register for this golden opportunity and contribute to this historic venture."

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman will face Saudi Arabia today in the semi-finals of the 26th Gulf Cup in Kuwait. A large number of sports analysts and fans of the Red Warriors are rallying behind the team under the slogan 'We are all with you.'

The highly anticipated match will take place at Jaber al Mubarak Stadium at 6:30pm (Muscat time) on Tuesday, followed by the second semi-final featuring Kuwait and Bahrain at Jaber al Ahmad International Stadium at 9:45pm.

Oman qualified for the semi-finals after an impressive performance in the group stage, drawing 1-1 with Kuwait, defeating Qatar 2-1 and drawing 1-1 with the UAE, securing the top spot in Group A with 5 points.

Muscat Daily spoke with sports analysts and Red Warriors' fans to gauge their expectations ahead of the semi-final clash.

OMANI FANS RALLY BEHIND RED WARRIORS



Ismail al Ajmi, sports analyst and a former player of the Omani national team, acknowledged

the challenge Oman faces against Saudi Arabia. "The Saudis have a wealth of experience and their football league is strong," he said. "The Omani players need to stay focused and prepare both physically and mentally. They must remain calm, capitalise on scoring opportunities and minimise mistakes."

He emphasised that the key to win would be teamwork and determination. "Both teams have vulnerabilities in defence; so team cohesion and desire to win



Both Oman and Saudi Arabia have vulnerabilities in defence; so team cohesion and desire to win will be crucial

ISMAIL AL AJMI



We are counting on the confidence and enthusiasm of our players, especially after securing a place in the semi-finals

YOUSUF AL SHEYADI



The Saudi team has good technical and tactical qualities but it has weaknesses, particularly in the depth of its defence

ABDUL RAHIM AL RAWAHI

will be crucial," Ajmi added.

"I hope a large number of fans will attend the match and provide the team the energy they need to reach the final and fulfil their

dream of winning the Gulf Cup."

Ali Hamad Sheyadi, former goalkeeper of Al Suwaiq Club, is optimistic despite the tough opposition. "There is a strong sen-

se of optimism surrounding the Red Warriors' ability to overcome this and secure a spot in the final. Our team needs to focus on playing an attacking

game and put pressure on Saudi defence. Taking advantage of mistakes is key to winning. Such matches are often decided by who can capitalise on their oppo-

nent's errors."

Ali urged coach Rashid Jaber to avoid a defensive strategy, instead opting for an aggressive approach.



See also Page 14

Bids invited for Al Bar waterfront, Tahayim Winter Festival

Our Correspondent
Sur

South Sharqiyah Governor's Office has invited bids for the development of a waterfront in Al Bar in Sur, as well as for preparation of a site for the Tahayim Winter Festival in Jalan Bani Bu Hassan.

An official from the office stated that development of the waterfront aims to enhance the governorate's tourism infrastructure.

Named after the desert village known for shifting sands, Tahayim Winter Festival will serve as a platform to showcase the governorate's rich cultural heritage, diverse landscapes and historical landmarks.

"The festival is set to become a key attraction for both tourism and entertainment, offering a unique experience for visitors of all ages. The waterfront and winter festival initiatives are designed to create job opportunities for local residents, stimulate economic activity and support domestic tourism," the official added.

As of December 2022, 25 heritage and tourism projects have been identified in the governorate, with planned investments totalling RO90.51mn by



2025. In recent years, South Sharqiyah has invested heavily in development projects, spending RO13.336mn in 2021 and 2022, and RO4.347mn in 2023. These efforts align with Oman Vision 2040 objectives, which emphasise sustainable and balanced development

across all governorates.

"With its favourable climate and average summer temperatures remaining below 30°C, South Sharqiyah is positioned as an all-year-round tourist destination, offering opportunities for growth in the tourism sector," the official said.

Low-pressure system to affect from Jan 2 to 5

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) has announced that a trough of low pressure will affect the sultanate from January 2 to 5.

According to the CAA, this weather system is expected to bring scattered rain showers, primarily impacting Musandam and coastal areas along the Sea of Oman. Residents in these areas can expect a significant drop in temperatures, along with formation of fog over mountainous re-



gions. Winds will intensify, creating conditions that could raise

dust and reduce visibility.

CAA also reported that the

lowest temperature recorded in the last 24 hours was 6.5°C in Saia. Other areas recording low temperatures include Al Mazyouna (10.9°C), Yanqul (11.5°C), Nizwa (11.8°C) and Al Qabil (12.1°C).

The National Multi-Hazard Early Warning Centre urged residents to remain vigilant, stay informed through official channels, and take precautionary measures to protect themselves and their property. Motorists are advised to exercise extreme caution.

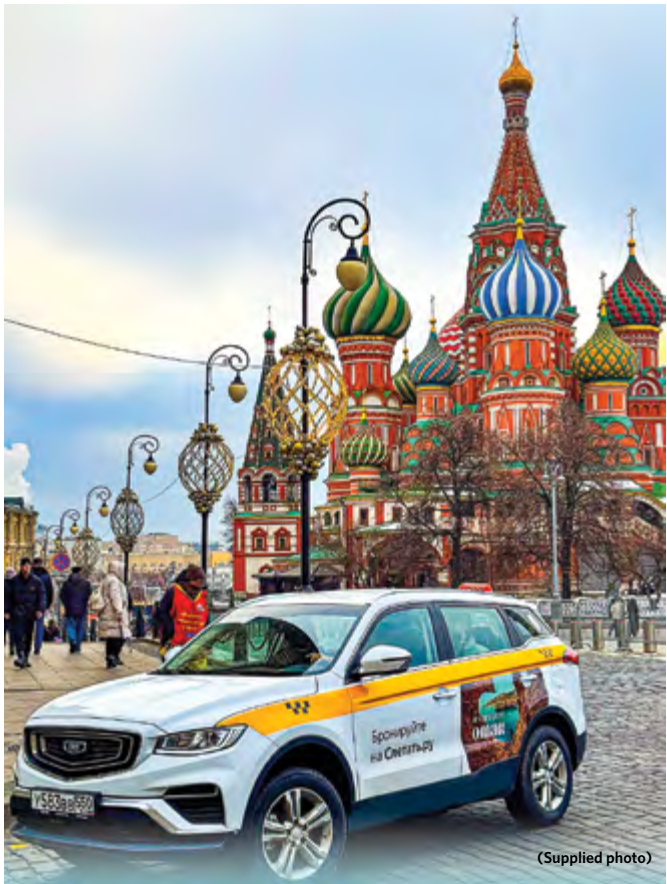
MHT launches promotional campaign in Russia

Our Correspondent
Muscat

In its ongoing efforts to attract tourists from various countries, Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MHT) is currently running a promotional campaign in the Russian Federation. An official from the ministry informed that the campaign is designed to increase the number of tourists from the Russian market and promote Oman's unique heritage, diverse tourism sites and the exceptional experiences the sultanate has to offer. The campaign is set to run till March 2025.

The official also highlighted the ministry's ongoing archaeological initiatives. In collaboration with Sultan Qaboos University, MHT is continuing its fourth consecutive season of excavations at the Al Ghurayyin site in the wilayat of Mudhaibi.

Preliminary findings from



2024 excavations suggest that the site was home to two ancient civilisations during the early Bronze Age, dating back between 2000-3500 BC. These findings point to a historical timeline associated with the Hafit and Umm Al Nar civilisations, separated by a significant settlement hiatus.

Key discoveries at the site include a settlement with a tower, multi-room dwellings and mass graves, as well as various artefacts that offer insight into the site's vibrant cultural and economic life.

Evidence suggests that inhabitants of Al Ghurayyin engaged in activities such as agriculture, copper smelting and trade with neighbouring communities. These discoveries further enrich the understanding of Oman's ancient heritage, emphasising the sultanate's historical significance as a hub of trade and cultural exchange.

MARKET WATCH	
MSX30	4,544.958
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FOREX RATES (RO1 equals)	
India	222.00
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Bangladesh	310.13
Philippines	150.25
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*Rates as on December 30 Source: xe.com	

BRIEFS

Japan imports 38% of its oil from UAE

Japan's oil imports from the UAE amounted to 27.16mn barrels, representing 38.2% of total imports in November 2024, according to data from the Agency for Natural Resources and Energy under Japan's Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry.

In the same month, Japan imported approximately 71.18mn barrels of oil, with Arab oil accounting for 95%, or 67.72mn barrels, sourced from three Arab countries.

Japan imported 31.49mn barrels from Saudi Arabia, accounting for 44.3% of total imports, followed by approximately 5.19mn barrels from Kuwait at 7.3%, and 3.42mn barrels from Qatar at 4.8%.

Notably, imports from the UAE and Saudi Arabia accounted for 82.5% of Japan's total oil imports in November 2024.

Oman's Lasail mine project starts copper exports after 30-year break

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Minerals Development Oman (MDO), the sultanate's flagship mining company, marked a major milestone on Monday with the first shipment of copper concentrates exported from the Lasail mine in Sohar.

This achievement signals the revival of Oman's copper mining industry after a 30-year gap and highlights the country's commitment to developing this important sector.

'Reviving the legacy of copper mining after a 30-year pause, MDO announces the export of the first shipment of copper concentrates from the Lasail mine in Sohar. This milestone reflects MDO's dedication to advancing Oman's mining sector and promoting sustainable growth,' MDO said in a post on X (formerly Twitter).

The Lasail and Al-Baydha mines together hold 2.78mn tonnes of copper ore reserves, producing copper concentrates with a concentration of 18% to 22%.

According to MDO, the Lasail mine produces nearly 500,000 tonnes of copper ore each year. Preparations are also underway to start operations at the Al-Bay-



Lasail mine produces nearly 500,000 tonnes of copper ore each year. Preparations are also underway to start operations at the Al-Baydha mine in Liwa by 2025-2026

dha mine in Liwa by 2025-2026, the company added.

'This project is a key part of MDO's ambitious development plan and reflects its commitment

to advancing Oman's mining sector,' MDO noted.

Earlier this year, in February, MDO marked the beginning of the redevelopment project for the Lasail and Al-Baydha copper mines, located in Block 4 of the Sohar and Liwa.

The redevelopment of these mines is MDO's first copper project, following an extensive exploration programme in 2022 that revealed commercial reserves of copper ore, estimated at around 2.78mn tonnes in Block 4, part of the Oman Mining Company's assets.

The joint project aims to pro-

duce approximately 800,000 tonnes of copper ore per year. The first phase of the project is expected to last four years, based on the current reserves. However, MDO is continuing exploration in the surrounding areas to potentially find new reserves and extend the production period.

In a statement on February 26, 2024, during the groundbreaking ceremony for the rede-

velopment project, Eng Nasser Saif al Moqbali, CEO of MDO, said, "The redevelopment of the Lasail and Al-Baydha copper mines marks the beginning of a significant journey for a series of mining projects and a crucial step in reviving Oman's copper mining industry. This will help meet global demand and support local industries."

The Lasail and Al-Baydha mines project aims to increase local value-added activities and optimise value chains in partnership with the private sector.

MDO had awarded the mining contract to a national contractor and the processing contract to Mawarid Mining Company, which will process the copper ore at their concentrator in Wadi Al Jizzi, Sohar. This collaboration showcases the company's commitment to developing Oman's mining sector through a successful public-private partnership.

The redevelopment of the Lasail and Al-Baydha copper mines is a major achievement of MDO's turnaround strategy. This strategy aims to improve the company's financial performance, utilise its human resources and technical expertise, and restore its leading position in the global copper market.



CBO issues treasury bills worth over RO49mn

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Central Bank of Oman (CBO) this week issued government treasury bills worth RO49.1mn through three separate tenders.

In the first tender, RO3.1mn of treasury bills were allocated with a 28-day maturity. The average accepted price was RO99.685 per RO100, with the minimum price also at RO99.685. The discount rate was 4.1062%, while the yield stood at 4.1192%.

In the second tender, RO30mn of treasury bills were

allotted with a 91-day maturity. The average accepted price was RO98.922 per RO100, and the minimum price was RO98.920. The discount rate reached 4.3238%, with the yield at 4.3709%.

The third tender saw RO16mn of treasury bills allocated with a 182-day maturity. The average accepted price was RO97.790 per RO100, with the minimum price also at RO97.790. The discount rate was 4.4321%, while the yield came in at 4.5323%.

The Central Bank of Oman's interest rate for repo operations is 5.00%, while the discount rate on the Treasury Bills Discounting

Facility is 5.50%.

Treasury bills are short-term, highly secure financial instruments issued by the sultanate's Ministry of Finance. They offer licensed commercial banks an opportunity to invest surplus funds. The CBO acts as the issue manager and provides liquidity through its discounting and repurchase (repo) facilities.

In addition, treasury bills help develop the local money market by creating a benchmark yield curve for short-term interest rates. The government may also use these instruments to finance its recurrent expenditure when required.

Al Buraimi Industrial City signs 16 new investment contracts in H2 2024

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Al Buraimi Industrial City, a key component of the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn), has successfully signed 16 investment contracts during the second half of 2024, with a total investment value amounting to RO7.97mn.

According to a press statement issued by Madayn, these agreements will pave the way for new projects covering a combined area of more than 165,000 square metres.

The newly signed projects span a diverse range of industries, underscoring the industrial city's appeal as a dynamic and multifaceted business hub. The range of projects includes automotive oil manufacturing, wood impregnation, carton production, production line manufacturing, water tank production, food packaging facilities, storage for new car spare parts, water production and bottling plants, medical supplies factories, as well as a commercial showroom.

In the first half of 2024, Al Buraimi Industrial City attracted in-



The new investment agreements will pave the way for new projects covering a combined area of more than 165,000sqm

vestments totalling over RO19mn, with the overall investment value in the city reaching

an impressive RO277mn as of June 2024. Additionally, the workforce within the city has grown to 1,674 employees, while the leased area has expanded to 1,879,101 square metres.

During the first half of 2024, as many as 15 new projects were launched, covering approximately 87,000 square metres. These projects span a wide variety of sectors, including industrial, commercial, and service industries, demonstrat-

ing the city's diverse project portfolio.

Al Buraimi Industrial City is committed to continuously improving its investment environment, providing enhanced and streamlined facilities for businesses. By attracting a broad spectrum of investments, the city plays a crucial role in contributing to Oman's economic development and in supporting the achievement of the nation's strategic objectives.

ADNOC's ICV programme to drive AED200bn into UAE economy

Abu Dhabi, UAE - Abu Dhabi National Oil Company (ADNOC) is set to drive AED200bn into the UAE's economy over the next five years through its In-Country Value (ICV) programme. This strategic initiative will boost economic growth and diversification, reinforcing ADNOC's commitment to supporting the UAE's long-term prosperity.

This new target unlocks significant opportunities for local and international companies to engage with ADNOC's procurement pipeline, fostering invest-

ment in the UAE's manufacturing and industrial sectors while driving job creation for Emiratis.

In 2024, ADNOC's ICV programme reinvested AED55bn into the UAE economy and facilitated the creation of 5,500 private-sector jobs for UAE nationals in collaboration with the Emirati Talent Competitiveness Council (Nafis).

Since its launch in 2018, the programme has delivered AED242bn in economic value and enabled the employment of 17,000 Emiratis in the private sector, underscoring ADNOC's



commitment to sustainable economic growth and national talent development.

Yaser Saeed Almazrouei, ADNOC Executive Director of People, Commercial and Corporate Support, stated, "In line with the UAE leadership's vision, ADNOC continues to serve as a key driver of the nation's economic diversification and growth through our highly successful In-Country Value programme.

"Building on this momentum, we are expanding private sector job opportunities for UAE nationals and offering compelling

prospects for the private sector to contribute to the UAE's industrial expansion. We invite local and international companies to leverage our ICV programme to create sustainable value and foster mutual success."

ADNOC's ICV programme continues to strengthen the UAE's industrial sector, driving local manufacturing and economic diversification. Since 2022, ADNOC has signed agreements with UAE and international companies worth AED72bn to locally manufacture critical industrial products, ad-

vancing its target of producing AED90bn worth of products in the UAE by 2030. This initiative supports the UAE's 'Make it in the Emirates' campaign, supporting industrial growth and innovation.

ADNOC is fostering growth and diversification in the UAE's food industry through its ICV programme by prioritising the procurement of high-quality local food products.

At the recent Global Food Week in Abu Dhabi, ADNOC's catering contractors - including Apex, Kelvin, Royal, NCTH,

NCC, and ADNH - signed agreements worth over AED540mn with 55 UAE-based sub-suppliers. These agreements build on prior contracts exceeding AED1bn signed with four of these contractors to deliver food catering services across ADNOC Group companies from 2022 to 2027.

ADNOC also recently awarded contracts worth AED720mn to 11 companies for the production of a diverse range of products across its value chain.

WAM

Gold likely to continue bull run in 2025 on strong demand

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Gold prices soared to all-time highs in 2024, hitting a record \$2,790 per ounce in October, with strong demand for the precious metal expected to continue next year as one of the main safe-haven assets, led by geopolitical risks, central bank purchases and the US Federal Reserve's rate cut cycle.

Gold ended last year around \$2,062 and was trading at \$2,620 as of Tuesday, an increase of 27%, while the performance of these prices marked the best return on gold since 2010.

Gold broke records 40 times on an annual basis as total gold demand exceeded \$100bn for the first time in the third quarter of 2024.

Having risen to an all-time high in October, the ounce price ended the month at \$2,743, up 4.15%.

The ongoing wars in Ukraine and Palestine as well as tensions with Iran caused an upward trend in gold demand. Political uncertainties before and after the US presidential election in November also pushed gold prices upwards, while strong demand in Asia contributed to the price hikes.

Geopolitical and political uncertainties and turmoil give rise



Gold broke records 40 times on an annual basis as total gold demand exceeded \$100bn for the first time in the third quarter of 2024

to gold prices, experts say.

A recent report by the World Gold Council said that demand for gold rose on risks and volatility.

Ewa Manthey, commodities strategist at ING, told Anadolu that the general bull market outlook and safe-haven feature of gold and central bank purchases will carry gold to even higher

records in 2025.

"The inflationary impact of (US President-elect Donald) Trump's policies could lead to fewer (interest) rate cuts than previously expected," she noted.

Manthey said that central banks continued to increase their gold reserves despite a slowdown in the third quarter.

"It is now looking likely that

the full-year total will fall short of that seen over the previous two years. Looking ahead into next year, we expect central banks to remain buyers due to geopolitical tensions and the economic climate," she said.

Manthey highlighted that she expects the positive momentum of gold to continue in the short and medium term.

"The macro backdrop will likely remain favorable for the precious metal as interest rates decline and foreign-reserve diversification continues amid geopolitical tensions, creating a perfect storm for gold," she said.

She emphasised that Trump's protectionist policies, tariffs and immigration control could create further inflationary pressure, limiting the Federal Reserve's rate cuts, while a stronger dollar and tighter monetary policy could provide some resistance to gold, estimating an average price of \$2,760 per ounce next year.

Juan Carlos Artigas, global head of research at the World Gold Council, told Anadolu that global geopolitical uncertainties could provide the environment for gold to rise further next year.

"For gold, 2025 will be a tale of two halves. First, we may experience more risk-on appetite as we wait for strategic and tactical drivers to unravel, leading to more clarity and direction for gold's performance later in the year," he said.

"This could really ring true if there is a significant drop in interest rates or a marked increase in market volatility to further fuel investor interest. We also expect global central bank demand and Asian markets to continue playing a pivotal role," he added.

Anadolu Agency



India's IPO market set for solid growth in 2025: Report

New Delhi, India – India's IPO market achieved a historic milestone, with proceeds doubling from \$5.5bn in 2023 to \$11.2bn in 2024 says Global Data report.

Murthy Grandhi, Company Profiles Analyst at GlobalData, says 2025 promises even bigger fireworks. He said, "India's IPO market hit a bull run in 2024, with proceeds skyrocketing to \$11.2bn – more than doubling the \$5.5bn raised in 2023. The pipeline for 2025 promises even bigger fireworks, fueled by skyrocketing retail participation, hefty domestic inflows, and FPIs flexing their muscles despite being net sellers in the secondary market."

He added, "This blockbuster year reflects issuer confidence and investors' insatiable appetite for listing-day pops and long-term growth plays."

The government's emphasis on infrastructure and core sector development, combined with increased private capital expenditure, played a pivotal role in

enhancing market dynamism.

Grandhi emphasised that India's IPO boom is more than just a numerical achievement – it signifies the evolution and resilience of the country's financial ecosystem, establishing India as a global hub for capital fundraising.

India's key IPOs in 2024 included Hyundai Motor's \$3.3bn issue, Swiggy's \$1.3bn offering, and NTPC Green Energy's \$1.2bn IPO.

Other Asia-Pacific (APAC) nations also reported significant IPO activity. Japan experienced a phenomenal 275.1% growth, with 69 IPOs generating \$12.6bn, while Malaysia recorded a 145.9% increase, with 36 IPOs raising \$1.1bn.

However, China saw a substantial decline in IPO numbers, with a 51.3% drop attributed to tightened regulations. The country had 64 IPOs, raising just over \$5.2bn.

ANI

What's ahead for Fed in 2025?

Diccon Hyatt

No one knows quite what to expect from the US Federal Reserve in 2025, least of all officials at the Fed itself.

After cutting interest rates three times in as many meetings, the Fed is entering a new phase in its fight against inflation as it goes into 2025. The Fed is waiting to see what will happen with inflation, whether incoming President Donald Trump will impose heavy tariffs, and what effect those tariffs will have on the economy. That's not to mention changes to tax policy, regulations, and many other factors that might change as the government switches over to Republican control in January.

Fed Chair Jerome Powell used the words "uncertain" or "uncertainty" 14 times during a press conference following the Fed's most recent policy announcement in December.

"The uncertainty is just a function of the fact that we expect significant policy changes," he said. "There's nothing really unusual about that. I think we need to see what they are and see what the effects they will have."



Uncertainty is just a function of the fact that we expect significant policy changes. There is nothing really unusual about that

JEROME POWELL

At least one thing is still certain: inflation remains above the Federal Reserve's annual goal of 2%, rising by 2.4% by the Fed's preferred measure. Next year, the Fed will try to bring that down while preventing a severe unemployment rise.

Accomplishing both of those goals is a balancing act because the Fed's main tool is manipulating the federal funds rate, which

influences borrowing costs on all kinds of loans. A higher fed funds rate can slow the economy and reduce inflation but it could also damage the job market.

The Fed lowered the fed funds rate from a two-decade high in September and, over the course of three meetings, reduced it by an entire percentage point. Central bankers expect more cuts next year but at a much slower

pace. According to Fed officials' latest round of economic projections, they anticipate lowering their benchmark rate by just three-quarters of a percentage point all year.

Of all the potential changes brought by the new presidential administration, the Fed has paid special attention to tariffs. Trump said he would impose high import taxes on US trading partners, but the details of the plan are unclear.

Economists said tariffs could stoke inflation as merchants pass costs along to their customers. It could also slow the economy and reduce employment, complicating the Fed's goal of stabilizing both price increases and unemployment.

The new year may also bring a political clash between the Fed and the White House.

Trump frequently criticised Powell during his first presidency, attacking him for keeping interest rates higher than Trump would like. Although Trump has said he would not try to fire Powell before his term ends in 2026, he has said he would like to have more influence over the central bank's policy decisions.

(Source: Investopedia.com)



How Google proved it 'still has its mojo' in 2024

Hamza Shaban

Under the weight of sweeping antitrust enforcement and intense competition for AI turf, Alphabet stock is enjoying a December resurgence. No Big Tech platform has risen so much this late in the year. And aside from Tesla, shares of the Google parent are outshining the rest of the Magnificent Seven, rising 14% this month.

Back-to-back catalysts – from a quantum computing breakthrough to the demise of a chief rival in the robotaxi market – lifted shares in the final weeks of 2024. They punctuated a year defined not so much by transformation but rediscovery.

"The stock market rewards mystery and open-ended opportunities and Alphabet still has its mojo – the recent announcements were a reminder of that," said Michael Smith, senior portfolio manager at Allspring Global Investments.

Google's end-of-year rally also highlights changing perceptions of the company. Where earlier this year Google was still seen as playing catch-up to Microsoft and OpenAI in

the burgeoning market for AI tools, Mountain View has since worked to even the playing field.

"People have been worried about the innovator's dilemma affecting Google's commitment to staying on the right side of change," said Smith. "More recently, it is clear that Google has the capabilities to stay at

And aside from Tesla, shares of Google parent are outshining rest of Magnificent Seven, rising 14% this month

the front of the industry."

Google's AI Overviews, the company's most public-facing AI offering, represented an overhaul of its core search product. And while questions still remain about how well the company can monetize AI-in-flected search without cannibalizing its proven business model, CEO Sundar Pichai has

said that AI Overviews has led to increased user engagement.

"If we get more confirmation that AI accelerates search growth, that would represent a major change to consensus thinking and lead to more upside for Google shares," said Smith.

OpenAI might still have a first-mover advantage in generative AI, said Hanna Howard, a portfolio manager at Gabelli Funds. But maintaining that edge over a longer period is challenging as large-scale, well-capitalized players like Google spend meaningfully to develop their own AI capabilities.

On the heels of General Motors (GM) pulling the plug on its Cruise robotaxi business, a boon to Google's sister company Waymo, Google released its Gemini 2.0 large language model, offering further improvements.

"After being viewed more as an AI laggard after the last one to two years, Google's narrative perception is changing," Howard said.

But it isn't just AI excitement that has driven the stock higher. (Source: Yahoo Finance)

China to cut import tariffs on certain goods

Our Correspondent
Muscat

China will reduce import tariffs on a large number of goods next year in its latest move to expand domestic demand and advance high-standard opening up, authorities announced Saturday.

Provisional import tariffs, lower than the most-favored-nation rates, will be applied to 935 commodities as part of an annual tariff adjustment plan effective on Jan. 1, 2025. This plan "will help increase the imports of quality products," according to a statement from the Customs Tariff Commission of the State Council.

This tariff reduction aligns



with the need to foster new quality productive forces through scientific and technological innovation, enhance people's well-being, and promote green

and low-carbon development, the commission said.

For instance, lower provisional tariffs will be implemented for some raw materials, including

ethane, cycloolefin polymers and ethylene-vinyl alcohol copolymers, which are important basic materials for the petrochemical industry.

"These tariff cuts will effectively reduce the production costs of enterprises, promote their technological innovation and facilitate the green development of the petrochemical industry," said Fan Min, deputy head of the information and market department at China Petroleum and Chemical Industry Federation.

Some recycled copper and aluminium raw materials will also see their import tariffs reduced, according to the commission.

Xinhua

Saudi export development delegation meets MoH officials in Muscat

A delegation from the Saudi Export Development Authority and several private sector companies from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia along with officials from the Ministry of Health (MoH) convened a meeting at the Intercity Hotel in Al Khuwair on Monday to enhance cooperation and partnerships and explore investment opportunities in the healthcare sector.

H E Dr Ahmed Salem al Mandhari, Undersecretary for Planning and Health Regulation in the Ministry of Health, and Saud al Gublan, Vice President of Services Exports at the Saudi Export Development Authority on the Saudi side, led the meeting.

A number of officials from the Ministry of Health, specialists from the Saudi Export Development Authority, and representatives from private sector companies in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia also attended the meeting.

In his welcoming speech, H E Dr Mandhari welcomed the Saudi delegation and stressed that the Ministry of Health looked forward to fruitful discus-



sions. He highlighted the ministry's interest in drawing on the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's expertise in various sectors, particularly in healthcare. Key areas of focus include the automation of health systems, the reconstruction, design, and engineering of

the healthcare sector, pharmaceutical industries, and the regulation of healthcare services.

Several private sector companies from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia presented visual presentations highlighting their key services. Lean Business Services

presents its efforts in digital transformation within the healthcare sector, featuring three platforms: 'Ana' for healthcare practitioners, 'Sihati' for individuals, and 'Saha' for healthcare facilities.

Meanwhile, CC by STC out-

lined its main areas of expertise, including customer services, patient experience, and human resources.

As for Tahakom Company, it presented an overview of its services in the fields of information technology and cybersecurity. In

addition, ARRC Al-Arrab for Consulting and Digital Solutions highlighted its expertise in digital management, consulting services, digital solutions, and information technology.

Al-Dawaa Medical Company presented its services in logistics

and the transportation of medicines. Furthermore, Pure Consulting Company highlighted its key services through five subsidiaries: Pure Sports, Pure Research, Pure Digital, Pure International, and Pure Academy.



Bestune Oman unveils all new versatile T90 crossover

Bestune Oman, represented by Gulf Great Sands (GGS) LLC, has unveiled the all new Bestune T90 crossover, a family SUV designed to meet diverse needs. The vehicle is available in three distinct variants, catering to a range of preferences and requirements.

A spokesperson for Bestune Oman said, "The new T90 exemplifies innovation, comfort, and safety, making it a standout choice for families and individuals. With its comprehensive safety features, and luxurious interiors, the T90 is a crossover that excels in every aspect. We are thrilled to bring a vehicle that

seamlessly combines performance with modern luxury."

Each T90 model offers a unique mix of specifications, features, and cutting-edge technologies, emphasising performance, comfort, and safety. The entry-level Bestune T90 Premium 1.5L Turbo balances practicality and performance. It features a 1.5L turbocharged engine delivering 158hp and 258Nm of torque through a dual-clutch transmission. Key highlights include a panoramic sunroof, LED headlamps, and alloy wheels.

Inside, six-way power driver & manual pass seat, a leather-wrapped multifunctional steering

wheel, and dual-zone automatic air conditioning. Safety features include blind-spot monitoring, S-ACC premium cruise control, dynamic park assist and multiple airbags. The infotainment system boasts an LCD display and a six-speaker audio setup.

Building on the Premium 1.5L Turbo, the Bestune T90 Limousine 2.0L Turbo includes all its features with additional enhancements. These include a more powerful 2.0L turbocharged engine delivering 240hp and 380 Nm of torque.

An upgraded eight-speaker audio system enriches cabin entertainment.

Bank Muscat, MoE organise workshop on financial literacy

Financial literacy is one of the basic skills that individuals need in their daily lives, especially in light of increasing economic challenges and rapid changes in financial markets.

Bank Muscat, in partnership with the Ministry of Education (MoE), recently organised a two-day training workshop on the concepts of financial literacy, as part of the bank's Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Maliyat Academy initiative.

It targeted a group of life skills teachers, vocational guidance specialists and a number of members of the Khazna project team. The workshop aimed train the trainers and provide participants with the necessary knowledge and skills to learn basic financial concepts, such as making smart choices, learning to earn, spending and saving, growing your money, and giving back to community.

Dr Mohammed bin Hilal al Siyabi, supervisor of Life Skills Subject in MoE at Dakhliya governorate, stressed that promoting financial literacy in schools is a strategic step towards building a strong and solid society.

"Through this workshop, I



L-R: Dr Mohammed al Siyabi, Khalid al Siyabi, Rahab al Sinaniya and Raja al Yazidiya

Bank Muscat, in partnership with the Ministry of Education, recently organised a training workshop on the concepts of financial literacy

learned more about the importance of teaching students how to plan for their financial future, and we will seek to transfer this knowledge to students through dedicated workshops where they learn how to prepare a budget, the importance of saving, and how to invest wisely," he said.

Raja bint Rashid al Yazidiya, Vocational Guidance Specialist at Wadi Al Hayoul School in Buraimi governorate, said, "Firstly, I would like to thank Bank Muscat and MoE represented in the Khazna project team for giving me the opportunity to present my experience in spreading the financial culture to the school's students. This programme contributes to the development of financial competencies and the skills of dealing with money such as saving, investing and giving."

Rahab bint Awadh al Sinaniya, Vocational Guidance Specialist at Bahr Oman School for Basic Education in South Sharqiya governorate, confirmed that her participation in the training workshop of Maliyat Academy

has given her many skills in the correct way of budget management and financial planning.

Khalid bin Saeed al Siyabi, Vocational Guidance Supervisor in MoE at Dakhliya governorate, explained that this workshop comes as a complement to the first workshop, which was held last year to train supervisors and specialists on the basics of financial literacy. "We transferred the knowledge from the previous workshop to the guidance specialists from different schools in the governorate, who in turn held training seminars for tenth grade students from various schools in the governorate. Students really showed their enthusiasm and passion to learn these knowledge and financial concepts.

New book on archaeology sheds light on Bronze Age Towers of Oman

The newly released book *Landmarks of Identity: Bronze Age Towers of the Oman Peninsula*, authored by Stephanie Döpfer and published by the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MHT), offers an unprecedented exploration of one of Oman's most iconic archaeological features: the Bronze Age towers.

This comprehensive and richly illustrated volume presents a detailed catalogue of nearly 100 towers from the 3rd millennium BCE, located across the Oman Peninsula. Through her extensive research, Döpfer provides fresh insights into the history, function, and cultural significance of these monumental structures.

Traditionally thought to be simple watchtowers or fortifications, these towers have been re-

vealed to serve a variety of purposes in the ancient world, as shown through recent archaeological investigations. Döpfer meticulously examines the construction and evolution of these towers, many of which have been repurposed over centuries of human activity.

The book also contextualises these towers within the broader developments of the Bronze Age, such as long-distance trade networks, large-scale copper production, and the rise of monumental architecture.

The publication is not only a scholarly resource but also a guide for visitors and researchers, featuring maps, illustrations, and photographs that document each tower site in detail. By gathering and analysing the latest data, 'Landmarks of



Identity' updates and enriches our understanding of the region's cultural traditions and its connection to wider historical processes.

Stephanie Döpfer, an esteemed archaeologist with a specialization in the Arabian Peninsula, has devoted years to the study of Bronze Age architecture and cultural landscapes.

Her academic career includes numerous excavations and studies in Oman, making her a leading authority on the subject. This book is the culmination of her extensive work in the field, offering a comprehensive view of one of the most important archaeological phenomena in the region.

He book is a significant contribution to the fields of archaeology and history and is set to become an essential reference

for both specialists and general readers interested in Oman's past. Published by Archaeopress, this work is a testament to the rich cultural heritage of the Sultanate of Oman and the enduring importance of its Bronze Age towers.

MHT played a pivotal role in supporting this project, from providing access to sites and resources to contributing valuable expertise and collaboration. Their commitment to preserving Oman's rich cultural heritage is reflected in this partnership, furthering our knowledge of the ancient civilizations that once thrived in this part of the world. The book not only highlights the ministry's efforts but also positions Oman as a key player in the study of Bronze Age archaeology in the Arabian Peninsula.

Muscat governorate honours winners of ‘Muscat Inspires Us’ film competition

The Muscat Governorate celebrated the closing ceremony of the ‘Muscat Inspires Us’ short film competition at the Jumeirah Muscat Bay Resort on Sunday, under the sponsorship of H E Sayyid Saud bin Hilal al Busaidi, Governor of Muscat, in the presence of a number of their Excellencies and officials, film specialists and participants in the competition.

The ceremony was started with an introductory speech from Muscat Governorate, which introduced the competition's purposes to promote artistic creativity and highlight the achievements of the governorate innovatively. Selected videos from the participating films, showing various ideas and artistic creativity, were also reviewed. The jury also praised the high standard of the participating films, confirming that the winning films were finally selected on precise standards that focused on originality, creativity, artistic quality, and presenting unique promotional messages.

Mohammed bin Abdullah al Ajmi, head of the Oman Film Society and the jury member, mentioned, “The jury received 34 remarkable short films that presented a bright vision of Muscat as a global tourist destination that unites originality and modernity. The evaluation was conducted on standards of creativity and artistic quality. For example, film photography, directing and montage, and the clear promotional message in terms of the film’s appropriateness with the competition’s slogan. Besides, the emotional influence and visual attractiveness, regarding the film’s ability to inspire the audiences and tourism.”

“The jury faced a challenge to choose the award-winning works because of the submitted films’ quality, as each participation was featured with its special style and creative narration,” added Ajmi. The jury is proud of the participating talents who submitted works that reflects a spirit of innovation and dedication.

The jury finally expressed de-



veloping ideas and looking for the new and unfamiliar to increase the viewers’ interests in the film. They also recommended increasing the geographical coverage of Muscat Governorate through creating promotional films that express the people and places and cover all the wilayats, from beaches to mountains, from traditional markets to modern land-

marks. While showing the lively life in the capital city and the attractiveness of Muscat during the evening.

The jury also recommended a deep concept to the topic, and not to stay on the apparent idea, by providing the right questions and the imagery that reflects the film’s essence. As well as, the consideration of an initiative to

create a sub-competition ‘Muscat through the visitors’ eyes’.

The Muscat Governorate praised the jury’s role in choosing the best participating works contributing their experiences, confirming that the competition included the participation of directors, producers, students, amateurs and local companies specialising in filmmaking, pho-

tographers, artists, educational institutions and local community members. This, the competition reflects that the creative arts enhance visual content to promote Muscat Governorate.

‘Muscat Inspires Us’ initiative will enable innovators to introduce innovative films that develop the filming and directing sectors, and promote a sustain-

HIGHLIGHTS

Sara al Balushiya’s film *Muscat is the Essence of Inspiration* took first place and *Eye of the Sky* came second

34 films presented a bright vision of Muscat as a tourist destination that combines authenticity and modernity

winner was Mahmoud bin Hamdan bin Sulaiman al Fazzari for his film *Constructing Throughout Time*, while Nasser bin Abdullah bin Nasser al Hashimi’s film *Discover Muscat* won the fifth rank. The film *I am Muscat* by Al Muhannad bin Mohammed al Riyami was awarded sixth place, while the film *Doors of Muscat* by Mohammed bin Hilal al Ghafri was ranked seventh. The film *Past Civilisation and Future Vision* by Saud bin Mohammed al Fulaiti was ranked eighth. Other competitors were honoured with participation certificates to appreciate their efforts in the competition.

The competition included topics such as tourism, community involvement, sustainable development, history and culture, architectural identity, and sustainable education. A jury of professionals from the Oman Film Society, the Ministry of Information and Muscat Governorate evaluated the films. The closing ceremony highlighted Omani youth’s contributions to inspirational visual works that reflect Oman’s history and culture.



Zubair EDC joins Majan varsity to promote entrepreneurship

The Zubair Enterprises Development Centre (Zubair EDC), the social initiative of The Zubair Corporation focused on supporting Small and Medium Enterprises, recently conducted a two-day educational programme in partnership with Majan University College.

The initiative engaged male and female students as well as faculty members, fostering a culture of entrepreneurship, technical knowledge, and practical expertise while facilitating knowledge exchange.

The programme commenced with a visit to the Oman Oasis Water Factory, a subsidiary of

The Zubair Corporation, where students were introduced to the production stages and quality assurance processes involved in manufacturing drinking water. The tour provided a practical understanding of operational workflows and demonstrated the application of costing methodologies in production management.

On the second day, students visited the headquarters of Oman Oasis, where they attended a presentation showcasing the company’s achievements and initiatives over its 30-year history.

The presentation emphasised

Oman Oasis’s contributions to innovation and sustainable business development in alignment with Oman Vision 2040, highlighting key aspects of fostering an entrepreneurial mindset.

The initiative aimed to deepen participants’ understanding of decision-making processes essential for optimising production efficiency, managing costs, and enhancing profitability. By connecting academic learning with real-world applications, the program bridged the gap between theoretical knowledge and industry practices, enriching the participants’ educational experience.

Lincoln Nautilus makes statement with design

The Lincoln Nautilus makes an unforgettable statement with its bold, sophisticated exterior design. Featuring the striking Lincoln signature grille, refreshed tail lamps, an elegant applique light bar and a redesigned spoiler and upper rear fascia, the Nautilus radiates modern luxury.

Enhancing its commanding presence, the Reserve trim offers all-new 20” bright machined aluminium wheels with premium painted pockets, giving the vehicle a refined and dynamic stance.

Inside the Nautilus, every journey becomes a calming, comfortable experience. Illuminated by ambient lighting both outside and within, the cabin creates a serene environment for drivers and passengers alike. Acoustic side glass minimises wind noise for rear passengers, while advanced engineering reduces road vibrations, offering a whisper-quiet ride.

The meticulously crafted seats are soft to the touch and highly customisable. With ventilating, massaging and adjustable features, they deliver a soothing and supportive experience. Controls are thoughtfully placed within



easy reach for added convenience.

Unique to Lincoln, the steering wheel elevates the driving experience with its increased rim circumference for a sporty, comfortable grip. Wrapped in premium, supple Wollsdorf leather with chic European-style stitching, it exudes refinement. The leather-wrapped, hand-stitched wheel sits ahead of a crisp, 12.3-inch fully configurable digital instrument cluster, ensuring driver information is always clear and accessible.

The cabin’s sleek center con-

sole is uninterrupted by a traditional shifter. Instead, Lincoln has introduced a vertically-oriented Push-Button Shifter mounted on the instrument panel. Each button is uniquely sized and textured for easy differentiation, making gear selection intuitive and effortless.

For ultimate comfort, available Ultra Comfort seats for the driver and front passenger, developed with input from orthopedic specialists, offer up to 22-way adjustments. Designed to reduce fatigue, these seats include lumbar massage, making long drives

or traffic-laden commutes far more enjoyable. Heated and cooled seat options are also available for clients who opt for the Lincoln Reserve model.

Under the hood, the Nautilus offers a robust and efficient powertrain line-up. The 2.7-litre twin-turbo V6 engine delivers a remarkable 335 horsepower and 515 Nm of torque.

Paired with an AWD drivetrain, adaptive suspension and all-wheel-drive disconnect, this engine ensures smooth, confident performance across various road conditions.

Every cigarette steals 20 minutes of life from smokers: Report

London, UK - A newly published study on Monday warned that smoking is more harmful than previously thought with a single cigarette takes approximately 20 minutes off life expectancy.

Authorities yet again urged smokers to quit in 2025 as a new study revealed that harms of smoking are more dangerous than health experts thought.

Researchers from University College London (UCL) found that every cigarette stealing on average approximately 20 minutes of life from smokers, equals that a regular pack of 20 cigarettes can shorten a person's life by nearly seven hours.

According to the study, if a person, smoking 10 cigarettes a day, quits on January 1, then they could prevent the loss of a full day of life by January 8.

If a smoker quits on New Year's Day, smokers could get a week of their life back by 20 February, and by the end of the year, they could have avoided losing 50 days of life.

The research comes after the introduction of the landmark Tobacco and Vapes Bill, which recently passed Second Reading



If a person, smoking 10 cigarettes a day, quits on January 1, then the smoker could prevent loss of full day of life by January 8

in the UK's House of Commons. The bill includes measures to create the first smoke-free generation, phasing

out the sale of tobacco products across the UK to anyone born after January 1, 2009.

It also has powers to extend the indoor smoking ban to certain outdoor settings to reduce the harms of second-hand smoking.

"Smoking is an expensive and deadly habit, and these findings reveal the shocking reality of this addiction, highlighting how important it is to quit," Public Health Minister Andrew Gwynne said in a statement released by the Department of Health and Social Care.

Separately, new research conducted by Censuswide showed that more than half (53%) of smokers are planning on quitting smoking as a new year's resolution in 2025.

Smoking is the number one preventable cause of death, disability and ill health in the UK, according to the authorities.

Britain's Department of Health said smoking causes around 80,000 deaths a year in the UK and 1-in-4 of all cancer deaths in England and kills up to two-thirds of its long-term users.

"It is vital that people understand just how harmful smoking is and how much quitting can improve their health and life expectancy," said Sarah Jackson from UCL Alcohol and Tobacco Research Group.

She added: "The evidence suggests people lose, on average, around 20 minutes of life for each cigarette they smoke. The sooner a person stops smoking, the longer they live. Quitting at any age substantially improves health and the benefits start almost immediately."

Anadolu Agency

South Korea orders safety probe after one of worst plane crashes

Seoul, South Korea - Acting South Korean President Choi Sang-mok has ordered an emergency safety probe of the country's entire airline operation system after 179 people were killed in one of the worst plane crashes in South Korea's history.

"As soon as the accident recovery is conducted, the Transport Ministry is requested to conduct an emergency safety inspection of the entire aircraft operation system to prevent recurrence of aircraft accidents," Choi said at a disaster management meeting in Seoul.

Jeju Air flight 7C2216 was carrying 181 people from Thailand to South Korea on Sunday when it made a mayday call and belly-landed before skidding off the runway at Muan International Airport. It then crashed into a wall and burst into flames.

All passengers and four of the six crew were killed in the crash. Two crew members were pulled from the wreckage alive and taken to hospital.

It was the deadliest aviation crash involving a domestic carrier Jeju Air plane in South Korea since 1997, when a Korean Air plane crashed in Guam, killing 225.

Officials initially cited a bird strike as the likely cause of the crash.

The Jeju Air pilot reportedly told the air traffic control that the passenger plane "suffered a bird



South Korea's acting President Choi Sang-mok honours the crash victims at a memorial in Muan

All 175 passengers and four of the crew died when the Jeju Air Boeing 737-800 skidded off the runway at Muan Airport and burst into flames

strike before it crashed".

It was also reported that 'only one person was working on bird strike prevention duties' when the accident happened.

Seoul said it would conduct a special inspection of all 101 Boeing 737-800s operating in the country. It added that US investigators - possibly including from plane manufacturer Boeing - will

join the investigation.

The flight data recorder may be sent to the US for decryption by the National Transportation Safety Board, officials in Seoul said.

While the initial probe pointed to the failure of all three landing gears, according to the daily *Korea Herald*, a government-commissioned report in 2020 had

'warned the government of bird strike issues' for Muan International Airport.

There is 'substantial danger of bird strike when an airplane takes off or lands' at the airport, said the report, calling for measures to reduce such risks.

On Monday, a second Jeju Air flight returned to the airport after departure 'due to the same landing gear issue', while all are safe.

"We are reviewing plans to conduct a special inspection on B737-800 aircraft," Joo Jong-wan, head of the aviation policy bureau at South Korea's Transport Ministry, said on Monday.

South Korea mourns crash victims

Flags in the country flew half-mast on Monday as the nation began seven days of mourning following the disaster.

Meanwhile, investigators were trying to identify some of the last remaining victims as grieving families camped inside the Muan airport terminal.

According to authorities, investigators have identified 141 of the 179 dead with the help of DNA analysis or fingerprint collection. Most of the victims, 157 out of 179, were from the Gwangju metropolitan and South

Jeolla province, while two were from Thailand, from where the plane had flown to South Korea.

Acting President Choi said the foremost priority was to identify the victims, support their families and treat the two survivors.

"Even before the final results are out, we ask that officials transparently disclose the accident investigation process and promptly inform the bereaved families," he said.

The Muan International Airport will remain shut through Wednesday, but the rest of the country's airports are continuing operations as scheduled.

South Korea seeks arrest of Yoon

Seoul, South Korea - South Korea's joint investigation unit on Monday sought an arrest warrant to detain impeached President Yoon Suk Yeol over his short-lived imposition of martial law earlier this month.

"The Joint Investigation Headquarters filed an arrest warrant for President Yoon Suk Yeol with the Seoul Western District Court," said the probe team.

The prosecutors' application for a warrant is believed to be the first attempt to forcibly detain a sitting president in the country's constitutional history. A court will decide whether to issue the warrant.

Yoon has circumvented several requests to appear for questioning by the joint investigation team and public prosecutors. He has also blocked searches of his office related to the investigation. Investigators are planning to question Yoon on charges of abuse of authority and orchestrating a rebellion.

The martial law declaration, on December 3, drew immediate opposition from politicians, with lawmakers having quickly passed a resolution demanding Yoon lift his order. On December 14, lawmakers voted to impeach the president over his failed attempt to impose military rule, suspending his presidential powers.

DW

Bangkok hotel fire kills 3 tourists

Bangkok, Thailand - A fire at a hotel in Bangkok has left at least three foreigners dead, according to authorities in Thailand.

Newspaper *Khaosod* cited local police as saying that seven other tourists, including two Germans, had been injured, mainly due to smoke inhalation.

Police Colonel Sanong Saengmanee told The Associated Press that all of the dead were foreign tourists. One of was found dead at the scene, while the other two victims died after being taken to hospital.

What we know about the blaze

The fire broke out on Sunday evening on the 5th floor of the six-story Ember Hotel in Bangkok's Khao San area, emergency services said.

Khao San Road is a popular spot for backpackers and is known for its vibrant atmosphere. Local officials said 75 people had been staying at the hotel and that firefighters deployed three ladder trucks to rescue guests who were trapped inside the building or on the hotel



Thai police said that all three of the deceased were foreign nationals

roof-top.

Firefighters managed to contain the blaze after around an hour and an investigation into the cause has been launched.

Thai state broadcaster NBT reported that Bangkok Governor Chadchart Sittipunt had ordered the temporary closure of the hotel. Crowds expected in Khao

San Road for New Year's Eve

Bangkok is gearing up for New Year celebrations, with 20,000 people expected at a New Year's Eve countdown event on Tuesday night, according to Sanga Ruangwattanakul, the president of the Khao San Road Business Association.

"Now everybody's scared

about what happened and they're scared it will affect the event tomorrow. But definitely there's no worry because we already had a meeting with the police station and we have over 150 police and district staff to cover on Khao San Road for security," he told The Associated Press.

DW

Milanovic leads Croatian polls

Zagreb, Croatia - Croatian President Zoran Milanovic on Sunday won just under 50% of votes in the first round of presidential elections, according to official results.

The result means that Milanovic is set to face off against conservative rival Dragan Primorac in an election run-off in two weeks. Croatia's president commands the country's armed forces and has a say in foreign policy, but most executive powers are in the hands of the prime minister elected by parliament.

The results in the first round

Milanovic came in as the frontrunner with 49.11% of the vote in the first round, official results said.

The announcement came after an exit poll showed Milanovic, who is backed by the opposition Social Democrats (SDP), could win a little over 50% in the first round of votes and avoid a January 12 run-off.

Primorac, who is supported by the ruling conservative Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ), won



Croatian President Zoran Milanovic

Zoran Milanovic managed to position himself as the frontrunner but did not win enough votes to avoid a run-off

19.37% in the first round.

Independent centre-right lawmaker Marija Selak Raspudic and Ivana Kekin of the left-wing Mozemo party each won around 9% of the vote, coming in third and fourth place.

Barbs over NATO, Russia

Milanovic has been an outspoken critic of Western military support for Ukraine amid Russia's invasion. He has also been fiercely critical of Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic of the HDZ.

Before becoming president, Milanovic also served as prime minister from 2011 to 2016.

During the election campaign, Plenkovic labelled Milanovic as 'pro-Russian' and portrayed the presidential election as a vote on Croatia's future in the European Union and the NATO military alliance.

DW



Carter who wished to be remembered for peacebuilding

Houston, US - Jimmy Carter made an improbable political rise from a Georgia peanut farmer to the state's governor's mansion and eventually to the White House in Washington, D.C. as the 39th American president in the 1976 presidential election.

Carter, a Democrat, was 52 when he was elected president and served four chaotic years in the Oval Office which were marred by the Iran hostage crisis, crude oil shortages and high inflation.

Considered a Washington outsider, he struggled to build the proper political relationships on Capitol Hill with both lawmakers and lobbyists, and that struggle to find common ground continued to worsen as the American economy tanked due to rising inflation, high unemployment and an oil shortage which led to soaring gas prices due to US dependence on foreign oil and overconsumption.

Even though Carter's critics viewed his presidency as mostly a failure, he oversaw several important international events that added favourably to his legacy.

Carter negotiated an historic Middle East peace treaty between Egypt and Israel with then-Egyptian President Anwar Sadat and then-Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin on September 17, 1978 known as the Camp David Accords because the signing of

the agreement took place at the US presidential retreat at Camp David, Maryland. Sadat and Begin were awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for their contributions to the peace treaty.

Carter was also responsible for the treaty to transfer control of the Panama Canal from US hands to Panama on September 7, 1977 which placed a date for the full handover to occur on December 31, 1999 and guaranteed the neutrality of the 50-mile long and 10-mile wide Isthmus of Panama that had been under American control since 1903. The Panama Canal Treaty avoided what could have been a long-term military conflict between the US and Central America.

In addition, Carter negotiated a nuclear arms control agreement known as the Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty II (SALT II) with Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev that they signed in Vienna on June 18, 1979, which was seen as a major breakthrough in stabilising world peace during the Cold War when military tensions between the US and the Soviet Union were at a boiling point.

Carter also received an abundance of praise for pressing fellow world leaders to be held accountable for overlooking human rights abuses in various nations.

Anadolu Agency

Jimmy Carter, former US President, dies aged 100

Washington, D.C., US - Jimmy Carter, the 39th president of the United States and winner of the 2002 Nobel Peace Prize, died on Sunday at the age of 100 at his home in Plains, Georgia, the Carter Center said.

"My father was a hero, not only to me but to everyone who believes in peace, human rights and unselfish love," said Chip Carter, the former president's son. "My brothers, sister and I shared him with the rest of the world through these common beliefs. The world is our family because of the way he brought people together, and we thank you for honouring his memory by continuing to live these shared beliefs."

The longest-lived American president served from January 1977 to January 1981.

Carter is survived by four children, 11 grandchildren and 14 great-grandchildren. His wife Rosalynn died in 2023.

Funeral to be held in Washington

President Joe Biden said America and the world lost an 'extraordinary' leader, statesman and humanitarian.

"With his compassion and moral clarity, he worked to eradicate disease, forge peace, advance civil rights and human rights, promote free and fair elections, house the homeless, and always advocate for the least among us. He saved, lifted, and changed the lives of people all across the globe," he said in a statement.

Biden said he will be ordering an official state funeral to be held in Washington, D.C. to honour Carter.

Biden also declared January 9, 2025, a national day of mourning to honour the passing of Carter.

"I call on the American people to assemble on that day in their respective places of worship, there to pay homage to the memory of President James Earl Carter, Jr. I invite the people of the world who share our grief to join us in this solemn obser-



Longest-lived American President Jimmy Carter served from January 1977 to January 1981

vance," Biden said in the statement. The president also ordered that the US flag be flown at half-staff at the White House and on all public buildings, grounds, and embassies abroad for 30 days from the day of Carter's death.

President-elect Donald Trump said the challenges Carter faced as president came at a 'pivotal time' for the US and he did everything in his power to improve the lives of all Americans.

"For that, we all owe him a debt of gratitude," he said on his Truth Social platform.

"Melania and I are thinking warmly of the Carter Family and their loved ones during this difficult time. We urge everyone to keep them in their hearts and prayers."

World leaders hail Carter's legacy

United Nations' Secretary General Antonio Guterres said Carter had 'contributed significantly to international peace and security', remembering in particular his role in seeing through the Middle

East Camp David Accords, the Salt II Treaty and the Panama Canal Treaties.

Guterres also noted that Carter's contributions did not cease after his term at the White House.

"He played a key role in conflict mediation, election monitoring,

pour in from all corners of the world.

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz said the US has lost 'a committed fighter for democracy'. "We join our American friends in mourning the loss of their former President Jimmy Carter," Scholz said in a post on X.

fender of peace', remembering his role in pressuring Brazil's dictatorship to release political prisoners.

French President Emmanuel Macron praised Carter, calling him an advocate for the most vulnerable who fought for peace.

"Throughout his life, Jimmy Carter has been a steadfast advocate for the rights of the most vulnerable and has tirelessly fought for peace," Macron said in a post on the platform X.

British Prime Minister Keir Starmer also mourned the late US president, remembering his 'decades of selfless public service'. Starmer said Carter's presidency will be remembered for the historic Camp David Accords between Israel and Egypt.

Egypt's President Abdel Fattah el-Sissi described Carter as 'a symbol of humanitarian efforts and diplomacy', while Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau hailed Carter's legacy of 'compassion, kindness, empathy and hard work'.

Agencies

the promotion of democracy, and disease prevention and eradication," Guterres said, adding that such work not only earned him the Nobel Peace Prize, but also helped advance the UN's work.

"President Carter will be remembered for his solidarity with the vulnerable, his abiding grace, and his unrelenting faith in the common good and our common humanity."

Condolences continued to

"The world has lost a great mediator for peace in the Middle East and for human rights," he added.

Leaders of several Central and South American countries mourned Carter, with Cuba's leader Miguel Diaz-Canel saying Cubans will remember the former president 'with gratitude'.

Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva described Carter as a 'lover of democracy and de-

Jimmy Carter's turbulent term in the White House was followed by more than three decades as an international envoy of peacemaking and democracy



Germany's Interior Minister Nancy Faeser

Germany to extend border controls to curb migration

Berlin, Germany - Germany announced on Monday plans to extend border controls beyond March 2025 as part of efforts to combat illegal migration.

"Our comprehensive measures to limit irregular migration and combat smuggling crime are working," Interior Minister Nancy Faeser told the Augsburg Allgemeine newspaper.

"We need these controls until the protection of the EU's external borders is significantly increased," she added.

In September, Germany expanded border controls in the east and south to include the west and north for six months, citing irregular migration, cross-border crime, and terrorist threats.

Border checks were already in place with France due to the Paris Olympic Games and at borders with Poland, the Czech Republic, and Switzerland since mid-October last year. Controls at the German-Austrian land border have been ongoing since 2015.

Germany's neighbours, including Denmark, the Netherlands, Belgium, and Luxembourg, are all part of the Schengen area, where border-free travel is the

norm.

Temporary border controls within the Schengen area are permitted only during exceptional circumstances, such as major international events or significant threats to public order.

Pressure on Germany to address irregular migration intensified after a stabbing attack in Solingen last August.

A rejected Syrian asylum seeker, who arrived in 2022 and was slated for deportation to

Bulgaria, killed three people and injured eight others. The Daesh/ISIS terrorist group later claimed responsibility for the attack.

Germany, Europe's largest economy, remains a leading destination for irregular migrants and asylum seekers. Last year, authorities recorded 266,224 cases of illegal entry and residence, with most migrants coming from Syria and Afghanistan.

Anadolu Agency



Thick fog, severe weather cause prolonged disruption at UK's busiest airports

London, UK - Travelers at some of the UK's busiest airports are facing ongoing disruption as thick fog continues to wreak havoc on flight schedules during the busy holiday travel period.

London Gatwick Airport remains particularly affected, with cancellations and delays extending into a fourth consecutive day.

The persistent low visibility has led to airfield restrictions, with Gatwick Airport confirming that the measures will remain in place until conditions improve.

EasyJet, one of Gatwick's largest airline operators, reported significant delays and

flight cancellations, citing the ripple effect caused by the adverse weather.

Passengers are urged to check directly with airlines for updates on their travel plans.

The disruption at Gatwick comes as part of a wider pattern of delays seen over the past three days at other major UK airports, including Heathrow, Stansted, Luton, and Manchester.

The Met Office has warned that visibility in some areas could drop to as low as 100 metres, as patches of thick fog blanket the country.

Adding to the chaos, the Met Office has issued yellow weather warnings for the entire UK, forecasting a mix of heavy rain, snow, and strong winds over the New Year period.

The severe weather is expected to start in Scotland before moving southwards between December 31 and January 1, further complicating travel plans for holidaymakers.

Travelers are advised to prepare for potential delays and cancellations and to monitor weather updates closely as conditions continue to evolve.

Anadolu Agency

Ethiopia: Truck plunges into river killing 71

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia - Authorities in Ethiopia said on Monday that the death toll following a road accident in the country's south had risen to at least 71.

Wosenyeleh Simion, spokesperson for the Sidama regional government, told the Reuters news agency that the dead included 68 men and three women. "Five are in a critical condition and taking treatment at Bona General Hospital," he said.

He added that many of the passengers were returning from a wedding ceremony and that some families had lost multiple members.

The crash occurred in Sidama state - some 300km (180 miles) south of the Ethiopian capital, Addis Ababa.

Local police said the truck left the road at about 5:30pm local time (1430 GMT/UTC) and plunged into a river.

DW

Cold wave, rains worsen misery of civilians in Gaza: Authorities

The Gaza Municipality appealed to international aid groups to intervene to provide Gaza’s civilians with shelter amid the cold weather

Gaza City, Palestine - Cold weather, rainfall and storms are worsening the already tragic living conditions for Palestinian civilians in Gaza City, municipal authorities said on Monday.

“Displaced civilians are suffering very tragic conditions due to rains and storms and there are not enough capabilities to help them,” Gaza Municipality said in a statement.

“(The current cold wave) poses a danger to the worn-out tents of the displaced,” it warned.

The authorities said municipal teams are facing major difficulties discharging the rainwater and sewage due to the massive damage caused by Israeli attacks on the sewage discharge network.

The Gaza Municipality ap-



Forcibly displaced Palestinians struggle with harsh winter conditions in Gaza City

pealed to international aid groups to intervene to provide Gaza’s civilians with shelter amid the cold weather.

The Palestinian enclave has been hit by a cold wave and torrential rains since Sunday, bringing more misery to the territory’s 2.3mn population.

7 frozen to death

Meanwhile, seven displaced civilians, including six children, have frozen to death in Gaza due to extreme winter cold after being forced to live in unhealthy conditions in tents amid the ongoing Israeli onslaught, a local official told Anadolu

“Six children and a nurse lost their lives due to the cold wave in the past days,” Ismail Thawabteh, who heads Gaza’s government media office, said on Monday.

He warned that the death toll may rise due to the current tragic conditions in the enclave amid relentless Israeli attacks.

“The lives of displaced Palestinians are in a real danger amid heavy rainfall and cold waves as their tents are worn out and don’t protect them,” Thawabteh said.

Many displaced civilians are living in makeshift tents amid worsening living conditions as temperatures drop. Families lack

basic necessities such as clothing, bedding, and blankets, leaving many infants vulnerable to the cold.

The UN says that nine out of every 10 people in Gaza have been displaced due to the ongoing Israeli onslaught.

Thawabteh held the US, Israel

and their backers responsible for the deteriorating humanitarian conditions in the Palestinian territory.

He called on the international community and aid groups to urgently intervene to pressure Israel ‘to stop its war on Gaza and save the lives of civilians’.

27 more killed

At least 27 more Palestinians were killed in Israeli attacks in the Gaza Strip, bringing the overall death toll since last year to 45,541, the Health Ministry in the enclave said on Monday.

A ministry statement added that some 108,338 others were injured in the ongoing assault.

“Israeli forces killed 27 people and injured 149 others in three massacres of families in the last 24 hours,” the ministry said.

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

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

The second year of genocide 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

Top Ukrainian diplomat meets new Syrian leader

Damascus, Syria - Ukraine’s top diplomat met with Ahmed al-Sharaa, leader of Syria’s new administration, during an unannounced visit to the country’s capital Damascus, local media reported on Monday.

Syrian state news agency SANA reported on X that al-Sharaa hosted a high-level Ukrainian delegation led by Foreign Minister Andrii Sybiha, without providing further details on the meeting’s agenda.

Ukrainian authorities have not disclosed the details of Sybiha’s visit to the country in advance.

“Today in Damascus, I met with the leader of the Syrian administration Ahmed Al-Sharaa and personally conveyed the message of Ukraine’s President @ZelenskyyUa to the Syrian people: we are with you and ready to assist in restoring normal life, stability, and food security,” Sybiha posted on X following the meeting.

“We rely on the new Syria respecting international law, including Ukraine’s sovereignty



Ukrainian FM Andrii Sybiha

and territorial integrity. This will pave the way to fully restoring our diplomatic ties, political dialogue, and diplomatic presence. We are ready to develop cooperation in a number of areas,” he added. His visit to Syria came three days after Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky announced that Kyiv sent 500 tonnes of wheat flour to the country as part of Kyiv’s Grain From Ukraine initiative.

“The wheat flour is planned to be distributed to 33,250 families

or 167,000 people, in the coming weeks. Each package weighs 15kg (33 pounds) and can feed a family of five for one month,” Zelensky said on X.

Last Monday, Zelensky said he instructed the Ukrainian Foreign Ministry to put in more effort to establish ‘all necessary contacts’ with the new administration in Syria.

Meanwhile, a Turkish delegation arrived in Damascus to evaluate Syria’s energy infrastructure, said Turkey’s Energy and Natural Resources Minister Alparslan Bayraktar on Sunday.

Turkey currently provides electricity and energy services to some regions in Syria, Bayraktar told reporters in the country’s southeastern Sanliurfa province.

Bayraktar also highlighted Turkey’s readiness to supply electricity to Syria and Lebanon.

“Of course, we’ll have a clearer picture once we assess the situation in the transmission grid,” he added.

Anadolu Agency

South Africa tightens security, patrol along Mozambique border

Johannesburg, SA - South Africa has increased security and patrol along its border with Mozambique to prevent and combat any opportunistic crime that may arise as a result of the neighbouring country’s ongoing protests, said a statement.

Mozambique has been gripped by weeks of violent protests since late October, when the electoral authority declared 47-year-old Daniel Chapo of the ruling Frelimo the winner of the presidential elections with 71% of the vote, defeating opposition candidate Venancio Mondlane with 20%.

The opposition rejected the results, claiming the vote had been rigged. The Constitutional Council was then tasked with overseeing the case, and last week it affirmed that Chapo had won the vote but reduced his percentage to 65%. This caused fresh and more violent protests.

“The government of South Africa is actively engaging the government of Mozambique at a



bilateral level to explore these concerns and explore sustainable solutions,” South Africa’s National Joint Operations and Intelligence Structure (NATJOINTS) said on Sunday.

It said both nations are leveraging their strong diplomatic ties to ensure that appropriate measures are implemented to restore order and enhance security in af-

fectured regions.

“These engagements reflect a spirit of cooperation and mutual respect that underpins the relationship between South Africa and Mozambique,” it said.

Last month, South Africa temporarily closed its busy border crossing with Mozambique due to the ongoing post-election violence in the neighbouring coun-

try. Protesters torched vehicles on the Mozambican side of the Lebombo Port of entry.

On the weekend, local media reported that President Cyril Ramaphosa had sent Sydney Mufamadi as his special envoy to Mozambique to discuss escalating post-election violence that threatens regional stability.

Anadolu Agency

WHO chief calls on Israel to stop attacks on hospitals in Gaza Strip

Ankara, Turkey - World Health Organization (WHO) director-general on Monday called on Israel to stop attacks on hospitals in the Gaza Strip.

Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus wrote on X that ‘Hospitals in #Gaza have once again become battlegrounds and the health system is under severe threat’.

He stressed that the Kamal Adwan Hospital in northern Gaza was ‘out of service’, and its director doctor Hussam Abu Safiya’s ‘whereabouts are unknown’ since he was detained

two days ago.

“The critical patients were moved to Indonesian Hospital, which is itself out of function,” the WHO chief added.

He noted that some patients were detained during hospital transfers, and urged ‘Israel to ensure their health care needs and rights are upheld’.

“Al-Ahli Hospital and Al-Wafa Rehabilitation Hospital in Gaza City also faced attacks today and both are damaged,” Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus added. “We repeat: stop attacks

Independent Commission for Human Rights (ICHR) strongly condemned Israel for burning Kamal Adwan Hospital, rendering it inoperative and crippling the healthcare system



WHO director-general Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus

on hospitals. People in Gaza need access to health care. Humanitarians need access to provide health aid. Ceasefire!,” he concluded.

Meanwhile, the Independent Commission for Human Rights (ICHR) strongly condemned Israel on Sunday for burning Kamal Adwan Hospital, rendering it inoperative and further crippling the health care system in northern Gaza. The assault, marked by forced evacuations, arrests of medical staff and the destruction of critical facilities,

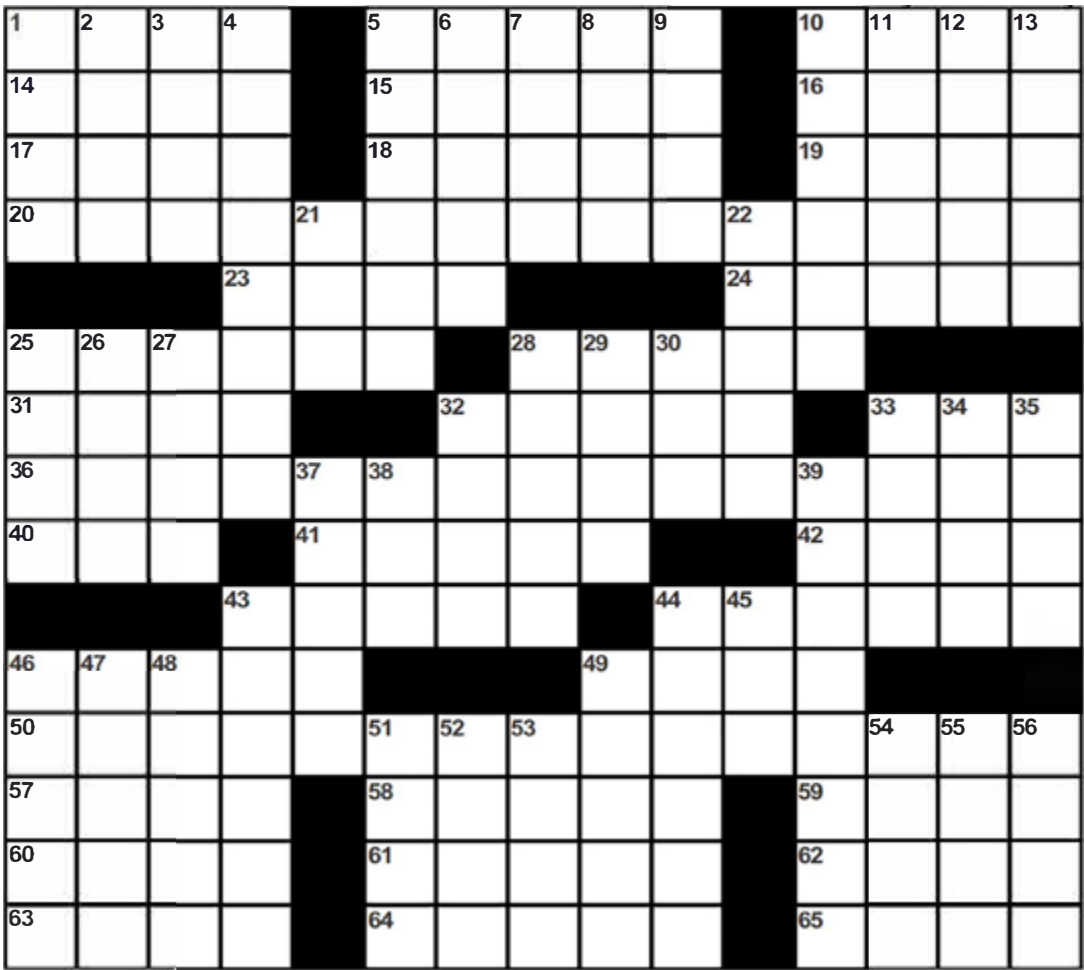
has left the region without functioning hospitals.

Israeli forces besieged Kamal Adwan Hospital on December 27, forcing patients and medical teams to evacuate under artillery fire, according to ICHR documentation.

Critically ill patients were sent to the Indonesian Hospital, which was already out of service, while others were interrogated and searched after being forced to walk to the Al-Fakhoura area, the statement said.

Anadolu Agency

DAILY CROSSWORD



- ACROSS**
- 1) Not merely impressed
 - 5) Mosey
 - 10) Butts
 - 14) Shankar of sitar fame
 - 15) Emergency supply
 - 16) Class distribution
 - 17) Bad day for Caesar
 - 18) Half of Hispaniola
 - 19) Centers of activity
 - 20) Place with many gates
 - 23) Like the out-of-town team
 - 24) Any Time
 - 25) What a crook tries to beat
 - 28) Do a doggie trick
 - 31) Common powder
 - 32) Contents of some cartridges
 - 33) Place to be pampered
 - 36) Part of a beloved Christmas poem
 - 40) Eligible for some deductions
 - 41) Flock
 - 42) Not even once, poetically
 - 43) Steering apparatuses
 - 44) Area needing urban renewal
 - 46) Stiff-upper-lip type
 - 49) Gum-producing plant
 - 50) What a prince is
 - 57) Auscultative sound
 - 58) Sleep on it
 - 59) Surefooted goat
 - 60) Computer devotee
 - 61) Car dealer's offering
 - 62) Close victory margin
 - 63) Resting places
 - 64) Propelled a boat
 - 65) Acquires
- DOWN**
- 1) Opera specialty
 - 2) Often dry stream bed
 - 3) Anon's partner
 - 4) Military message
 - 5) Hindu community
 - 6) Substantial
 - 7) Gent from London
 - 8) Guitar's ancestor
 - 9) Independent chieftain
 - 10) Gusto
 - 11) Neural transmitters
 - 12) Former Portuguese territory in China
 - 13) Photographer's request
 - 21) "L you one"
 - 22) Prefix with "surgery" or "transmitter"
 - 25) Simmer slowly
 - 26) Agile, lively
 - 27) Coaster
 - 28) Pays, as the bill
 - 29) Jealousy
 - 30) Casual attire
 - 32) Tend to a hedge
 - 33) "Let it stand" editorially
 - 34) Rhyme master
 - 35) Big hairstyle
 - 37) Campaign word
 - 38) TX metropolis
 - 39) Dead accurate
 - 43) Personnel departments, often
 - 44) Obviously ready to be remodeled
 - 45) "A likely story!"
 - 46) Hydrangea, e.g.
 - 47) Annoy persistently
 - 48) Lubricated
 - 49) Birds that make a gaggle
 - 51) It's in Norway
 - 52) "...Team" (Mr. T's old squad)
 - 53) Try, as a case
 - 54) Instrument in a wind quintet
 - 55) It makes a bluebird happy?
 - 56) Divorcees

NOTE PAD

TANG ROMAN DYES
ALOE ELENA IOWA
JERRY LEWIS CREW
MAI STALKERS
HASSLES ALEC
ORT EVAN SALAAM
BLOC ERAS DANTE
BELA RAFTS RTES
INERT STAT KEAS
TESLA ABRA USE
LITH SERAPES
HOTELIER AUS
AVOW CLARK GABLE
RANI KLINE BAIT
ELKS SONAR CASA

YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE

ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

It's time to relax and have some fun, but certainly not alone. Get ready to focus on partners and relationships today. The stars are urging you to have some fun and spend some time with just one quality person, perhaps someone you've been anxious to get to know. So instead of dragging yourself out and pretending to have a good time with a crowd when you know you're not in the mood, snuggle up, kick back.

LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

When you least expect it, a touch of anger could enter a conversation that started out sane, respectable, and civil. Your mission is to temper the rhetoric of all parties concerned with a bit of tact by translating. You know, the "what they really meant to say was" kind of thing. Fortunately, you'll have some very valuable help. The stars are bumping up your conversational and diplomatic skills now.

SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

Does this sound familiar? Someone you know and love gets ticked off by something that you say quite off the cuff and in an entirely playful way, something that you meant as a joke. Calm down. Don't hurt a friend inadvertently. They will undoubtedly forgive you. Think before speaking, just for a second, and think about how you'd feel if the tables were turned.

TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

There are many ways to connect with others, but the most effective method is the one that puts you in the most comfortable frame of mind. You need to feel relaxed in order to make other people feel the same way. If you don't like noisy, crowded bars, don't go to them. You'll only feel anxious the entire time, not to mention the fact that you'll meet people who like what you don't like.

VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

If others are misinterpreting what you say, you'll have to accept part of the blame. Giving an unclear explanation of what you're feeling or thinking and then getting annoyed when they don't understand you isn't productive or fair. Get more specific in your communication and people will know what you want and work hard to give it to you. This is especially true in romantic relationships.

CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

There is a fullness to the day that will bring you a great deal of satisfaction and entertainment. Suddenly you'll fully comprehend something that has been vexing you for months. The answer, it appears, was right in front of you all along. Luckily, your sense of humor will enjoy this irony and you'll get a real kick out of yourself. A person in your daily life is experiencing a similar type of epiphany.

GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

While your focus has been on other people in your life lately, thinking completely about your current relationships isn't going to be possible today. But that's a good thing. It's time to refocus on who you are as an individual. You may be running the risk of losing yourself in the noise of socializing. Ask yourself honestly if you're working so hard on friendships and relationships with other people to avoid working hard on yourself.

LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

A simple statement could unlock an unsolved mystery for you and a friend today. It seems like things are a lot less complicated than you thought. Now that you both know how to move forward, the going can get a lot easier, and you two can reach your destination or accomplish your common goal a lot more quickly than you anticipated. If you end up having extra free time today.

AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

You could be the recipient of many truths today. People are in the mood to tell you how they feel, and while not all of the reviews will be glowing, you'll end your day with closer, more meaningful relationships. Someone you desperately want to impress is already raving about your ways, so relax and realize that the two of you are equals. Your reputation is on the upswing. Congratulations!

CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

Family matters could be tricky now, but that won't keep you from getting involved and possibly being able to solve an issue that's been ignored for far too long. This ability will come to you courtesy of the stars, which are big on home and family right now. You're equipped to talk anyone into anything at the moment, so why not use it to help heal an age-old wound? You know you want to.

SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

Plans could be shifting out of place today, but don't waste your good energy trying to figure out why, because the reason is probably out of your control. Instead, direct all of your good energy toward formulating the most effective reaction to the new situation. You can't afford to have a "whatever" attitude about any surprises throughout the day. If something bothers or frustrates you, take charge and fix it. You can put things back on track.

PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

The stars are all about peace and cooperation, inspiring one and all to make amends and deliver or accept apologies. If you've been feeling the need to try to put an end to a dispute between dear ones, rest assured that you can do it with just a tiny bit of effort. Since you're famous for having very sensitive antennae, you're a shoo-in for the position, especially since you'll probably offer anyway.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

1. Which of these fought to unify Italy in the 19th century?
- A. Joachim Murat
 - B. Benito Mussolini
 - C. Giuseppe Garibaldi
 - D. Canaletto
2. What is the national anthem of the UK?
- A. Land of Hope and Glory
 - B. God Save the Queen
 - C. Rule Britannia
 - D. Jerusalem
3. The filings of wood or metal are referred to as ...?
- A. Shavings
 - B. Swarf
 - C. Shavetails
 - D. Sweals

Answers: 1. C 2. B 3. B

KIDS COLOURING



BOGGLER

A	U	K	T
A	C	C	M
O	R	B	A
E	M	A	R

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

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

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

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

HEARTBREAK IN MELBOURNE

India lose seven wickets in final session as Australia win fourth Test

Melbourne, Australia - Australia took seven wickets after tea on day five to win a classic fourth Test against India by 184 runs and snatch a 2-1 series lead heading into the final match in Sydney.

India were coasting on the back of Yashasvi Jaiswal and Rishabh Pant's partnership through the entire middle session at the Melbourne Cricket Ground but lost 7-34 to be all out for 155 in front of a mammoth crowd of 74,362.

Australia captain Pat Cummins and fellow pacer Scott Boland finished with three wickets apiece, with spinner Nathan Lyon chipping in two on a dramatic final day which was tinged with controversy over the use of the Decision Review System (DRS).

"It was an amazing test match. I reckon that's one of the best to be part of," said Cummins, named Player of the Match after scoring 100 tail-end runs and taking six wickets.

"All week the crowd's been ridiculous, and the cricket's been just as good. Happy at the moment, happy to contribute."

The big day-five crowd brought the total attendance in Melbourne to 373,691, a record for a test match in Australia.



Australia's Nathan Lyon successfully appeals for the wicket on India's Mohammed Siraj on Monday

All week the crowd's been ridiculous, and the cricket's been just as good. Happy at the moment, happy to contribute

PAT CUMMINS

India were 112 for three when they resumed after tea with Jaiswal and Pant well set, looking to bat the tourists to safety, if not take a record 340 runs for victory.

However, after showing unusual restraint early on, Pant threw away his wicket with a hard pull at part-time spinner Travis Head to be caught for 30 by a sprinting Mitchell Marsh in the deep.

The wicket ended an 88-run partnership and turned the match.

Boland had number six Ravindra Jadeja caught behind for two with a steepening delivery before Steve Smith lunged for a brilliant

catch at slip to remove Nitish Kumar Reddy, who nicked Lyon to be out for one.

Controversy erupted when Jaiswal pulled at a short Cummins ball, prompting a big appeal for caught-behind, and the Australia skipper reviewed immediately when it was turned down.

Replays showed a clear deviation high off the bat but no evidence of a nick on the "Ultra Edge" technology. The TV umpire decided the deviation was

enough, though, and overturned the decision.

Jaiswal, out for 84, remonstrated with the on-field umpires and sections of the crowd chanted, "Cheater! Cheater!"

Akash Deep was then dismissed for seven, again on review, caught by Head off the bowling of Boland with a thin edge pinging off his pads. Australia referred the not-out decision and this time "Ultra Edge" showed a healthy nick.



Rishabh Pant

Pant must work out when to rein in his aggression: Rohit

Melbourne, Australia - India captain Rohit Sharma said Rishabh Pant must learn to temper his aggression with the bat after yet another reckless dismissal triggered a collapse that culminated in defeat by Australia.

Wicketkeeper-batter Pant has produced several match-defining knocks with his take-no-prisoners approach, which has also made the 27-year-old a fan favourite. However, his aggression has also been his undoing at times.

The left-hander made 28 runs in the first innings at Melbourne Cricket Ground before losing his wicket to an ill-advised scoop shot against Scott Boland. It was a shot which let former India great Sunil Gavaskar screaming "Stupid, stupid, stupid!" into his microphone during his radio stint on

ABC Sport.

In the second innings, with the match in the balance, Pant was out trying to pull part-time spinner Travis Head from outside the off-stump.

India had been cruising at 121-3 at the time, but lurched to all out for 155.

"It's about him understanding and figuring out what is the right way to go about it," Rohit said after India's loss.

"In the past, he's given us a lot of success doing what he does. So as a captain there is a kind of mixed reaction to that.

"It's about (match) situation as well. If there is a risk percentage in certain situation of the game, do you want to take that risk? Do you want to let the opposition come back into the game? Those are the things he needs to figure out himself."

We need to be ruthless, says Pakistan captain Masood after bitter defeat

Pretoria, South Africa - Pakistan will have to become more ruthless to improve their winning record in test cricket after letting slip a chance for a rare success away in South Africa, captain Shan Masood said on Sunday

Pakistan had the home side floundering at 99-8, chasing a modest 148-run target in the first test at Centurion after a fiery bowling display from Mohammad Abbas on his return to the line-up for the first time in three years.

But despite needing only two more wickets for first win in South Africa in 18 years, victory slipped from their grasp as the home side won in dramatic fashion.

"We had the game in our hand," Masood told reporters.

"I'm extremely proud of the efforts, but going forward as a team we need to be ruthless.

"We can only look at ourselves. You're going to make mistakes over several days, but you need to have a cushion. I don't



Shan Masood

You're going to make mistakes over several days, but you need to have a cushion. I don't think it's a quality issue. The quality is there, and we've seen it at various points.

SHAN MASOOD

think it's a quality issue. The quality is there, and we've seen it at various points," he added.

Pakistan had success in their last test series at home against

England in October, but earlier this year lost in Australia and were then beaten in two home tests by Bangladesh.

"Sometimes you learn the

hard way. You can't use it as an excuse but the more we play test cricket, the more people get into sync," Masood added.

"A lot of the players were playing for the first time in these conditions. It can be a really hard lesson where you feel like you've got the other team under pressure, but you still need to finish the job."

Pakistan get another chance against South Africa when the second test starts in Cape Town on Friday.

It's all in the jeans: Carlsen to return to World Blitz in favourite attire

New York, US - Chess great Magnus Carlsen will return to the World Rapid and Blitz Chess Championships in New York after initially quitting following governing body FIDE's decision to bar him from a round for wearing jeans.

Carlsen, world champion between 2013 and 2023, decided to leave the tournament on Friday when FIDE barred the Norwegian from participating in a round at the tournament due to his breach of dress code regulations.

In an interview to the YouTube channel of the Take Take app on Sunday, the 34-year-old confirmed he would be returning.

"To make a long story short: I'll be playing at least one more day here in New York. If I do well, another day after that," Carlsen said.

He added he had talks with FIDE President Arkady Dvorkovich after the incident.

"Speaking to Dvorkovich and the main sponsor Turlov, it did feel we could have some fruitful discussions and in the end of the day I decided to play," he said.

"In addition, I love playing blitz



Magnus Carlsen

chess. I want to give the fans the chance to see me play it. It could be the last time, who knows."

Dvorkovich expressed regret in a post on FIDE's X account later on Sunday over the situation escalating and acknowledged Carlsen's vital role in elevating the sport.

"It is unfortunate that the implementation of dress-code rules, while being legally sound and consistent, has left some feeling this is disproportionate

and caused the situation everyone would have preferred to avoid," he said.

Dvorkovich added that he approved a trial of a more flexible approach to attire during the World Blitz Championships that would allow minor deviations from the official dress code.

Carlsen pointed out that he would definitely not leave his preferred clothes at home.

"As a principle, I will definitely play in jeans tomorrow," he said.

Rybakina shines as Kazakhstan reach United Cup quarterfinals

Perth, Australia - Kazakhstan reached the quarter-finals of the United Cup mixed team tournament with a comfortable win over Greece on Monday as Elena Rybakina defeated Maria Sakkari 6-4 6-3 after Alexander Shevchenko stunned Stefanos Tsitsipas.

Former Wimbledon champion Rybakina, who is using the 18-nation tournament to prepare for next month's Australian Open, edged a tight opening set against Sakkari before powering ahead 5-0 in the next.

She was broken late on but stayed composed to close out the contest on serve, leaving her new coach Goran Ivanisevic beaming in the dugout.

"We've just been working a couple weeks together. This is our first official tournament," Rybakina said.

"We're still getting to know each other a bit. He's a fun guy. He gives some experience from when he played and also as a coach. I'm just happy to work with him.

"Hopefully we'll have some good results together."



Kazakhstan's Elena Rybakina serves to Maria Sakkari of Greece

Shevchenko pulled off a major upset earlier when he downed an ill and error-prone world number 11 Tsitsipas 6-4 7-6(0) to put Kazakhstan on course for victory in the Group C tie in Perth.

"It will definitely go in my record as one of my best wins," Shevchenko said.

"He wasn't at his best today but still I played really well and I found the moments to win the match."

Britain win

In Sydney, Katie Boulter and Charles Broom guided Britain to a 2-1 win over Argentina in Group F, winning their mixed doubles rubber against Maria Lourdes Carle and Tomas Martin Etcheverry 7-6(4) 7-5.

Boulter put Britain up 1-0 with a 6-2 6-3 win over Nadia Podoroska but Argentina fought back immediately as Etcheverry overcame a stomach issue to down Billy Harris 3-6 6-3 6-2.

World number two Iga Swiatek will be in action when Poland face Norway in Group B, while defending champions Germany meet China in Group E.

Onslaught continues

Liverpool crush West Ham to open up eight-point lead at top

London, England - Liverpool thrashed West Ham United 5-0 at the London Stadium to stretch their Premier League lead to eight points on Sunday with Mohamed Salah once again in irrepresible form.

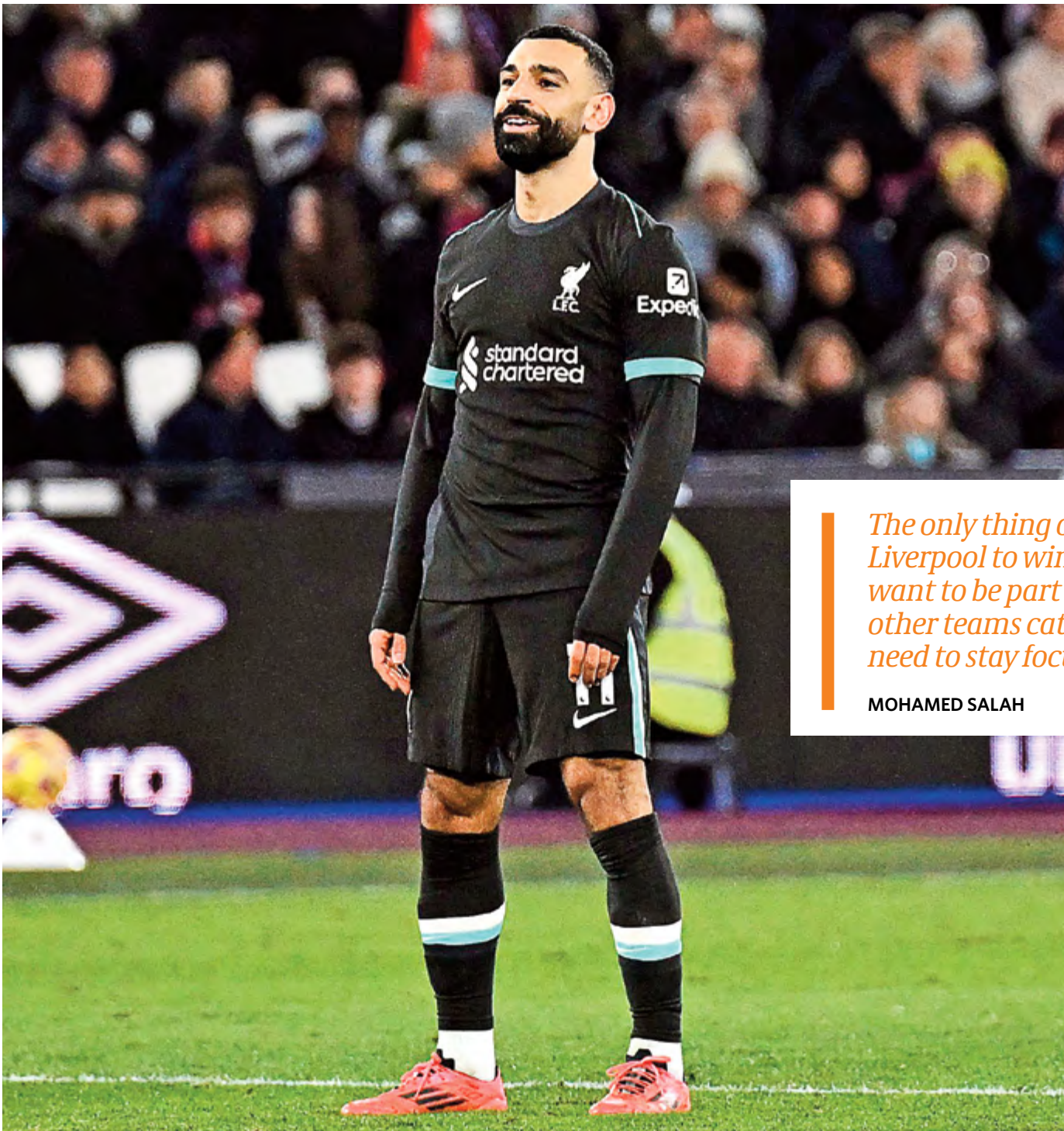
The Egyptian has been enjoying a vintage season despite uncertainty over a new contract and scored once and provided two assists as Liverpool dismantled their outclassed hosts.

He now has 20 goals in all competitions this season, has scored and assisted in eight Premier League games and appears to be firing Liverpool towards a 20th league title in Dutchman Arne Slot's first season in charge.

Liverpool have 45 points from 18 games with surprise package Nottingham Forest their closest pursuers with 37 points having played a game more. Fourth-placed Chelsea could cut the gap to seven on Sunday when they take on struggling Ipswich Town.

"The only thing on my mind is I want Liverpool to win the league and I want to be part of that," Salah told Sky Sports.

"I will do my best for the team to win the trophy. There is a few other teams catching up with us and we need to stay focused and humble and go again. I am almost



Liverpool's Mohamed Salah celebrates his goal against West Ham United on Sunday

hungry for more." Asked if there was any breakthrough in extending his contract beyond this season, Salah added: "No we are far away from that and I don't want to put anything in the media."

While that impasse will concern Liverpool's fans, they are enjoying watching Salah reach new levels every week, as is his appreciative manager Slot who has lost only one match this calendar year, including his results with former club Feyenoord.

"If you look at his number you can't argue with that," Slot said when asked if Salah was currently the best in the world.

The only thing on my mind is I want Liverpool to win the league and I want to be part of it. There are few other teams catching up and we need to stay focused and humble

MOHAMED SALAH

"Mo is definitely up there at the moment."

Liverpool had scored nine goals in their last two league games and the only surprise on Sunday was that they could not make their superiority tell in the opening stages at West Ham. But once Luis Diaz swept a shot past home keeper Alphonse Areola after the ball rebounded kindly into his path after 30 minutes there was no stopping Slot's men.

West Ham might point to a Mohammed Kudus shot that rattled the post when it was 1-0 but they were never really in it.



Pep Guardiola

Not the ideal performance, but Guardiola relieved after win in his 500th game

Leicester, England - Manchester City celebrated Pep Guardiola's 500th game as boss with a 2-0 victory over lowly Leicester City, but the manager was more relieved than rapturous at what has of late become the rare taste of victory.

Guardiola's struggling team won for the first time in five league games to climb to a provisional fifth in the Premier League, but are still way off leaders Liverpool, who have 11 points and two games in hand over the reigning champions.

"Just relief, that is the word to express how all of us feel. We have done incredible things and now we struggle to win games so now it's just relief," Guardiola said. "We needed it. All of us. It was not the ideal performance but hopefully the victories will give our mood a better position."

"For the result we have to do something. If you don't perform, the results

Now, in the position we are in, the results are the most important thing, to get points and help our minds

PEP GUARDIOLA

won't come. Now, in the position we are in, the results are the most important thing, to get points and help our minds. We have another game at home next and many good things happened today."

Brazilian Savinho netted his first goal in a City shirt in the first half, and then City narrowly staved off several Leicester chances before Erling Haaland scored to give the visitors some breathing space.

The goal was a confidence boost for Haaland as well, as he has found the back of the net just twice in his last eight league games in the roughest stretch of his Premier League career.

"Sometimes Erling has been judged badly but it's part of football," Guardiola said. "He's tired, he's played a lot of minutes. He's become a father for the first time in the last few days, a lot of emotions and an exciting few days for him."

Haaland pointed out that his team do not have a game now until Saturday when they host West Ham United, making for a rare few days off in what has been a gruelling stretch of games.

"It has been a difficult time. Things happen and we have to keep going, we have to stay positive and focus on the right things."

High-flying Forest wants more after moving to second with win at Everton

Liverpool, England - High-flying Nottingham Forest secured a smash-and-grab 2-0 win over Everton at Goodison Park on Sunday based on a speedy attack and a rock-solid defence in a game between two teams who often prefer to concede possession to opponents.

Forest's Chris Wood got the all-important first goal in the 15th minute, and that allowed the visitors to do what they, like Everton, tend to do best: sit back, soak up the pressure and then attack on the break. It proved a winning formula.

Morgan Gibbs-White added a second goal on the hour mark, but it was Wood's opener that set the tone for the game, and though Sean Dyche's men enjoyed plenty of possession, they could not breach the Forest rear-guard.

"They have done that to other teams this season. We didn't deliver it anywhere near in the first half and they did," a rueful Dyche said.

"It is hard to break down a packed defence when they get



Nottingham Forest's Chris Wood (R) celebrates his goal against Everton on Sunday

their noses in front. I don't think they had too many chances ... We didn't ask enough questions overall against a team that is good at seeing a game out."

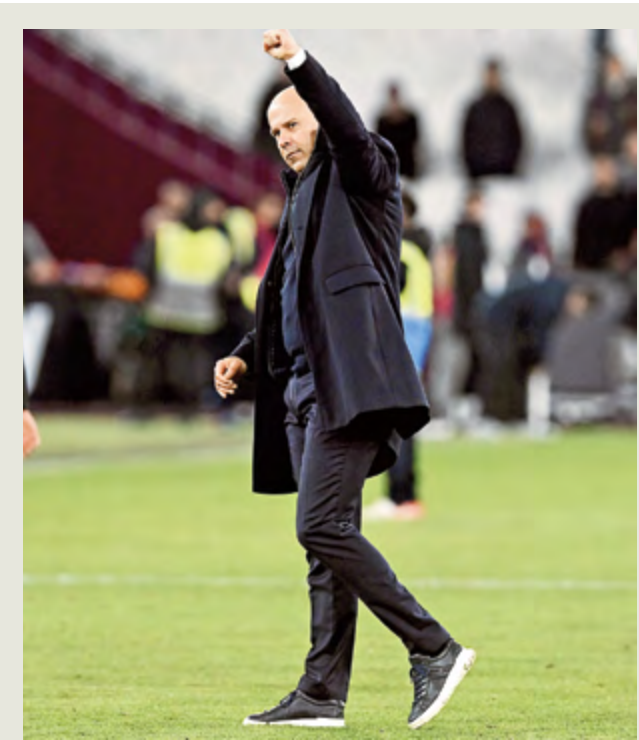
For Forest boss Nuno Espirito Santo, the game-plan worked perfectly as his side took their chances before shutting up shop.

"We were organised and really committed to help each other. We then exploited well the space Everton gave," the Portuguese coach told the BBC.

"It is confidence, the belief and the knowledge that, in the final third, you need composure. They scored beautiful goals."

After avoiding relegation last season, his side are now a scarcely-believable second in the table, but Forest will not be resting on their laurels as the intense Christmas schedule continues.

"It (being second) doesn't mean anything. We haven't achieved anything yet," he said.



Arne Slot

Golden Dutch: Liverpool coach Slot enjoys perfect end to stunning year

London, England - Replacing Kop idol Juergen Klopp at Anfield looked to many like mission impossible for Dutchman Arne Slot when he was named as the German's successor in May.

Now the appointment looks like a masterstroke halfway through his maiden Premier League campaign.

They have lost only once in all competitions this season and Slot can look back on an almost perfect 2024.

His Feyenoord side were unbeaten from the turn of the year to when he left as they finished runners-up to PSV Eindhoven.

The only side to get the better of Liverpool this season are Nottingham Forest and the way Slot's side have ended the year, a 20th title for the club now looks in their grasp.

"Compliments to Notting-

ham Forest. They were the one," Slot said after his side's rout of West Ham at the London Stadium.

While Slot inherited a high-quality squad and has not had to instigate a major rebuild, the tweaks he has made to Liverpool's style have put them in total control of the table.

They are a little more pragmatic than they were under Klopp's high-octane pressing game, but Slot has still retained Liverpool's attacking verve, evidenced by the fact they have scored 45 goals in 18 games including 14 in the last three.

The 46-year-old has benefited hugely from Mohamed Salah having what promises to be his best-ever season at Liverpool despite the ongoing saga of the Egyptian's contract talks.

Wolves hold stuttering Tottenham to 2-2 draw

London, England - Struggling Tottenham Hotspur had to settle for a 2-2 home draw against a revived Wolverhampton Wanderers side after a late strike by Norwegian substitute Jorgen Strand Larsen in an entertaining Premier League clash on Sunday.

Having suffered four defeats in their previous five league games, injury-hit Spurs were aiming for a convincing performance to take the pressure off manager Ange Postecoglou but it was the visitors under new boss Vitor Pereira who came



Jorgen Strand Larsen of Wolverhampton Wanderers scores against Tottenham Hotspur on Sunday

away the happier.

Wolves had taken the lead after seven minutes through Hwang Hee-Chan who fired a low shot that went in off the post after a short free kick, but Spurs equalised five minutes later when Rodrigo Bentancur's header beat keeper Jose Sa from a corner.

Tottenham spurned the chance to go in front when Son Heung-Min's spot kick was saved but they did go in ahead at the break after Brennan Johnson struck from close range.

DYBALA MAGIC RESCUES ROMA

Argentinian forward scores equaliser against Milan

Milan, Italy - AC Milan played out a 1-1 draw at home against AS Roma in a hard-fought and heated Serie A clash on Sunday, where an early goal from Tijjani Reijnders was equalised shortly after by a stunning volley from Paulo Dybala.

The result put Milan eighth with 27 points, 14 behind Atalanta and Napoli at the joint top, while Roma are 10th with 20 points.

The atmosphere at San Siro was intense, with eight yellow cards issued as the two teams played out the final match of the year.

Artem Dovbyk tested Milan and goalkeeper Mike Maignan in the opening minutes, firing a low shot that struck the base of the post.

Milan broke the deadlock



AS Roma's Paulo Dybala celebrates his goal against AS Roma

after 16 minutes when Youssouf Fofana advanced into the box and played the ball across to Reijnders, who fired it in with a first-time shot.

Seven minutes later, Roma responded with a moment of football magic inside the box when Dovbyk flicked the ball with a clever back-heel, lifting it into the air to set up Paulo Dybala who once again with a shot from a tight angle, but the French goalkeeper was quick to react and denied the effort.

The hosts then took control of the match, with Roma goalkeeper Mile Svilar making several key saves, including a stunning diving stop to deny Samuel Chukwueze just before the hour mark.

The result put Milan eighth with 27 points, 14 behind Atalanta and Napoli at the joint top, while Roma are 10th with 20 points.

In the final stages of the match, the momentum shifted back to Roma, with Stephan El Shaarawy seeing his effort saved by Maignan.

Eldor Shomurodov's header from a free kick was expertly tipped onto the crossbar by Maignan minutes before time, though the Roma substitute was already flagged offside.

Dybala missed the chance to be the hero for Roma in the final moments, blasting a shot just over the bar in stoppage time.



Oman will look to continue their impressive form when they take on Saudi Arabia in the semifinals on Tuesday

'WE CAN GO ALL THE WAY'

Muscat - The last time Kuwait hosted the Gulf Cup, in the December-January months of 2017-18, Oman lifted the trophy beating UAE in the final on penalties before overcoming Bahrain in the semifinals.

Seven years later, Oman are in another Gulf Cup semi-final, taking on Saudi Arabia in Kuwait City and coach Rasheed Jaber would be hoping for a repeat of history.

Oman have put up a steady show right from their first match in Kuwait City, in which they held the hosts to a 1-1 draw. Jaber's men announced their intentions with a stunning 2-1 comeback win against Qatar in their second match before securing their passage into the last four with a 1-1 draw against the UAE though they had to thank goalkeeper Ibrahim al Mukhaini for saving a penalty in stoppage time.

Jaber was confident ahead of their semifinal match

Coach Rasheed Jaber confident of Oman's chances ahead of their semifinal clash against Saudi Arabia

against Saudi Arabia, who had to settle for second spot in Group A because of their head-to-head result against Bahrain.

"We have a talented and capable group of players, and I'm confident we can go all the way in the tournament," said Jaber.

Saudi Arabia, one of the powerhouses of Asian football, would be keen to make amends after their lacklustre show in the opening two matches and will pose a tough challenge.

Sottit rocket helps Fiorentina snatch draw against Juventus



Fiorentina's Riccardo Sottit celebrates after scoring against Juventus on Sunday

Turin, Italy - Fiorentina snatched a 2-2 draw at Juventus in Serie A on Sunday thanks to a late stunner from forward Riccardo Sottit, condemning the hosts to yet another draw after Khephren Thuram scored twice for them.

Thuram put Juventus in front after 20 minutes, sending the ball low inside the near post after an impressive solo run, before Fiorentina's Moise Kean levelled ahead of the break with a header.

Thuram restored the lead for Juve three minutes into the second half, scoring into the far bottom corner from close range, but Sottit equalised for Fiorentina in the 87th minute with a powerful, close-range volley.

Juventus are sixth in the standings, level on 32 points with fifth-placed Fiorentina.

Juventus have now drawn five of their last six league games, winning once in that run at bottom side Monza last weekend.

The hosts started off strongly and Dusan Vlahovic had an early chance for an opener, but ended up sending his header just wide against his former side. The game was then briefly halted due to racist chants directed at the Serbian striker and the stadium screens displayed a message urging the fans to stop, otherwise risking suspension of the match.

Thuram helped silence the visiting supporters when he slalomed past Fiorentina's defence to break the deadlock.

But Juve's clear dominance decreased after finding the net

and Fiorentina, coming off consecutive league defeats against Udinese and Bologna, started to seek more chances.

Kean eventually found the leveller in the 38th minute, scoring his 11th goal of the season, but did not celebrate netting for the first time against his former employer.

Fiorentina goalkeeper David De Gea denied Vlahovic from restoring the lead for the hosts shortly before the break.

The Spanish keeper required medical assistance after stopping the shot with an outstretched arm. Thuram put Juventus back up when he scored his second goal of the night following half-time, after a low pass by Teun Koopmeiners was deflected off a Fiorentina player inside the box.



Sergio Conceicao

Milan appoint Sergio Conceicao as manager after sacking Fonseca

Milan, Italy - AC Milan have appointed Sergio Conceicao to become their new manager, the Serie A side said on Monday, after the Italian club parted ways with Paulo Fonseca.

The Portuguese coach has signed a deal until June 30, 2026, the club said in a statement.

Milan sacked Fonseca earlier on Monday after only six months in the job after an inconsistent run of form left the club eighth in the Italian top flight.

Milan, who drew 1-1 at home against struggling AS Roma on Sunday, have won only two of their last seven league games.

The 19-time Italian champions sit eight points off the top four with a game in hand, and 14 points behind leaders Atalanta.

"AC Milan announces that Paulo Fonseca has been relieved of his duties as head coach of the men's first team," Milan said in a statement.

Conceicao, 50, had been without a team since leaving Portuguese giants Porto in June despite signing a four-year contract extension only two months before.

In his seven-year tenure he became the club's most successful coach, guiding them to three championships, four Portuguese Cups, a League Cup, and three Super Cups.

Conceicao, who was a winger at Porto, Lazio and Inter Milan during his playing days, started his managerial career as an assistant at Belgian top-flight side Standard Liege in 2010. He then managed Portugal's Olhanense and Academica before taking charge of Braga in 2014, followed by stints at Vitoria Guimaraes and Ligue 1 club Nantes before signing with Porto in 2017.

Fonseca was appointed in June to replace Italian Stefano Pioli, who had helped Milan to a single league title in 2022 during his five-year tenure, finishing second and 19 points off champions Inter Milan in his last season.

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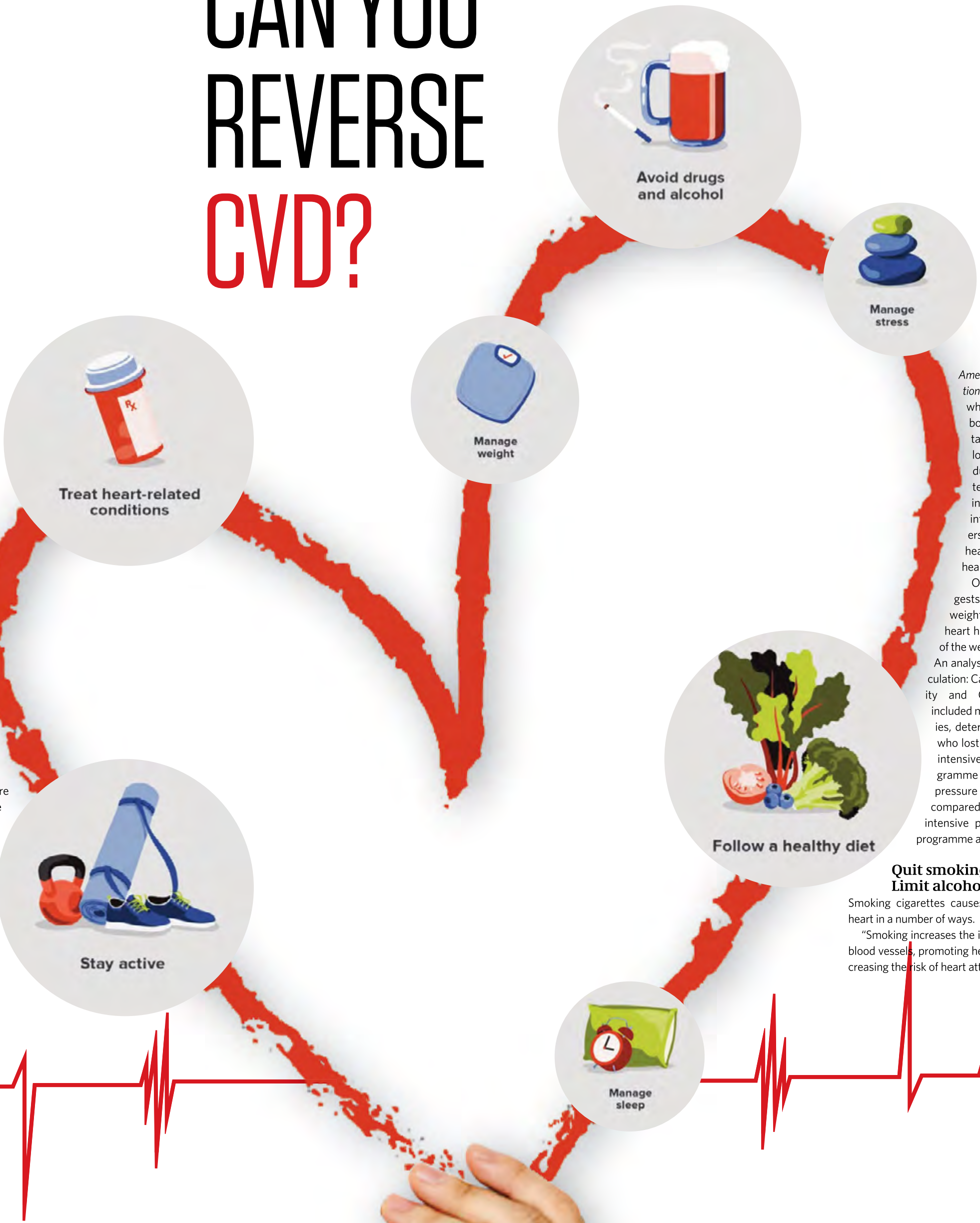
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CAN YOU REVERSE CVD?

Cardiovascular diseases (CVDs) are the leading cause of death globally, taking an estimated 17.9mn lives each year. While it's not possible to eliminate every type of heart disease, many can be fully or partially reversed.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), heart disease is the leading cause of death in the United States, killing nearly 700,000 Americans every year.

If left untreated, cardiovascular disease can lead to potentially fatal complications like heart attack and stroke. The good news is that there are plenty of ways to manage the condition, including medications and lifestyle changes like a healthy diet and exercise. And while it may not be possible to eliminate every type of heart disease, many can be fully or partially reversed.



American Heart Association found that women who lost 10% of their body weight and sustained that weight loss for two years reduced their cholesterol, triglycerides, insulin, glucose and inflammation markers - all risk factors for heart disease and heart attack.

Other research suggests that significant weight loss can improve heart health, even if some of the weight is gained back. An analysis published in Circulation: Cardiovascular Quality and Outcomes, which included more than 100 studies, determined that people who lost weight through an intensive weight loss programme had lower blood pressure and cholesterol compared with those in less intensive programmes or no programme at all.

Quit smoking Limit alcohol

Smoking cigarettes causes damage to your heart in a number of ways.

"Smoking increases the inflammation in our blood vessels, promoting heart disease and increasing the risk of heart attack," Basit says.

What are CVDs?

CVDs are a group of disorders of the heart and blood vessels and include coronary heart disease, cerebrovascular disease, rheumatic heart disease and other conditions.

More than four out of five CVD deaths are due to heart attacks and strokes, and one third of these deaths occur prematurely in people under 70 years of age. Most forms of heart disease are related to atherosclerosis, which occurs when deposits of fat and cholesterol build up in the walls of the arteries.

"Inflammation and high blood pressure can wear away at the lining of the blood vessels, causing the cholesterol and fat to ooze out into the bloodstream, leading to a heart attack," explains Majid Basit, MD, medical director of cardiology at Memorial Hermann Medical Group in Houston.

Once heart disease forms, it's very unlikely to completely eliminate it. "This is why prevention of heart disease at an early age pays dividends later in life," Dr. Basit says. "But it is possible to reverse some of the heart disease. By lowering the circulating cholesterol and fat to extremely low levels, we are able to shrink these deposits."

Lifestyle changes to reverse heart disease

Lifestyle changes, including a healthy diet, exercise, quitting smoking, and managing stress can help reverse heart disease and significantly reduce the risk of heart disease and heart attack.

Healthy Eating - What's the Best Diet for Heart Disease Reversal?

There is no single diet that is recommended for heart disease reversal, but the AHA advises sticking to a healthy dietary pattern that focuses on the following:

- A variety of fruits and vegetable
- Whole grains, such as whole wheat flour, brown rice, and oatmeal rather than refined grains like white flour, white rice, and white bread
- Healthy proteins like nuts, legumes, fish, non-fat dairy, and lean and unprocessed meat and poultry
- Nontropical vegetable oils

"We should avoid fried and processed foods and avoid simple starches as much as possible," Basit says. "Starches like rice and pasta raise blood sugar, triggering the release of insulin, which can promote the development of fat and cholesterol deposits."

The Mediterranean diet, which is high in fresh fruit and vegetables, beans, nuts, whole grains, and fish, and limits processed meats and foods, is often touted for its many health benefits, including heart health. A meta-analysis published in The BMJ found that adhering to the Mediterranean diet was associated with a 24% reduced risk of cardiovascular disease and a 23% reduced risk of death.

Of course, overhauling your diet is often no easy feat, but starting out with small changes can go a long way. Margie Junker, RDN, a registered dietitian specializing in cardiovascular nutrition at UC Davis Health, recommends establishing one goal at a time that focuses on the easiest change you know would best benefit your health. "For example, change evening

snacking to one preplanned snack at 8pm like apple and 1 teaspoon peanut butter or whole grain toast with avocado or hummus," she says.

Exercise

Getting regular physical activity is paramount to reversing heart disease.

"Exercise helps to burn fat, grow muscle, and improve lung and heart function," Basit says. "During exercise, our blood vessels stretch, which helps us regulate blood pressure better. It is essential to create routines that incorporate healthy eating and exercise."

The AHA recommends getting at least at least 150 minutes per week of moderate-intensity aerobic activity or 75 minutes per week of vigorous aerobic activity (or a combination of both). Moderate physical activity includes brisk walking, gardening, dancing, water aerobics, and cycling slower than 10 miles per hour. Vigorous physical activity means exercises like running, swimming laps, hiking uphill, jumping rope, and cycling 10 miles per hour or faster.

In addition to aerobic activity, aim to add moderate- to high-intensity muscle-strengthening like resistance or weights at least twice a week.

Maintain a healthy weight

Weight management is one of the most important aspects of reversing heart disease, Basit says. "I have seen a dramatic improvement in blood pressure, blood sugar, and cholesterol levels after significant weight loss," he says.

One study published in the *Journal of the*

Smoking and secondhand smoke exposure contribute to more than 30 percent of coronary heart disease deaths, according to a review published in the *Journal of Thoracic Disease*.

If you don't smoke, don't start, and if you do smoke, talk to your doctor about strategies to quit. Excessive alcohol intake can also lead to increased blood pressure, irregular heartbeat, and alcoholic cardiomyopathy, per the Cleveland Clinic. To reduce alcohol-related health risks, the CDC advises abstinence from drinking or drinking in moderation, which is defined as up to two alcoholic drinks per day for men and up to one drink per day for women.

Focus on stress relief

"Stress is an underappreciated cause of heart disease," Basit says. "Stress raises blood pressure and can cause us to overeat unconsciously." Stress reduction techniques like counseling, exercise, and meditation can lead to a significant reduction in the risk of future cardiovascular events, he says.

The role of medications

When lifestyle changes alone aren't enough, medications can help manage heart disease and heart-related issues. These can include statins to lower cholesterol and blood pressure medications like diuretics, beta blockers, and ACE inhibitors.

If you've been prescribed any of these medications, it's important to take them exactly as directed by your doctor. However, for optimal health, the goal should be to reverse heart disease with lifestyle changes, Basit says.

Exercise is essential for maintaining cardiovascular health, reducing the risk of heart disease, and improving overall well-being. Expert explains how much is enough for a healthy heart?

A bit for the heart



We all know that staying active is good for our health, but when it comes to our hearts, the question of how much exercise is enough often lingers. Whether you're someone who enjoys a daily walk, an occasional run or struggles to find the time to exercise, the balance between activity and heart health is key. Cardiovascular disease remains one of the leading causes of death worldwide, yet regular movement can be a powerful way to reduce that risk. But how much exercise does your heart need to stay healthy? Dr Ravindranath Reddy DR, HoD and Senior Consultant-Interventional Cardiology, Gleneagles BGS Hospital, Kengeri, Bengaluru in the southern Indian state of Karnataka, elaborates on how much exercise is necessary to keep your heart in optimal shape.

Recommended exercise

"Leading health organisations recommend adults aim for at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic activity or 75 minutes of vigorous-intensity activity each week," said Dr Reddy. Exercises like brisk walking, cycling, swimming, or jogging are ideal for maintaining a healthy heart. Additionally, it's advisable to incorporate muscle-strengthening exercises at least twice a week.

According to the Frontiers in Cardiovascular Medicine, a sedentary lifestyle, marked by consistently low levels of physical activity, has become one of the primary risk factors for the development and progression of Cardiovascular Disease (CVD). On the other hand, engaging in regular exercise and staying physically active is linked to numerous health benefits and a significantly reduced risk of CVD.



Adults aim for at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic activity or 75 minutes of vigorous-intensity activity each week

Dr Ravindranath Reddy

Key benefits of regular exercise

Engaging in regular physical activity helps the heart in multiple ways

Here are some listed by Dr Reddy

- **Improved Circulation:** Exercise boosts blood flow, delivering oxygen more efficiently to tissues and reducing the heart's workload.
- **Lowered Blood Pressure:** Regular physical activity helps lower both systolic and diastolic blood pressure, a critical factor in preventing cardiovascular disease.
- **Cholesterol Management:** Exercise increases High-Density Lipoprotein (good cholesterol) while lowering Low-Density Lipoprotein (bad cholesterol), helping to maintain a healthy lipid profile.
- **Stronger Heart Muscle:** Like any muscle, the heart gets stronger with regular exercise, improving its efficiency in pumping blood.

Weight Control: Exercise helps burn calories and reduce body fat, crucial for preventing obesity-related heart risks.

Balancing exercise for heart health

"Consistency is key, but the right amount of exercise depends on individual factors like age, health status, and physical fitness. Even 30 minutes a day of moderate activity can reduce the risk of heart disease, stroke, and related conditions," added Dr Reddy. If you have pre-existing conditions, such as hypertension or diabetes, or have experienced heart problems, it's important to consult a cardiologist before starting a new exercise routine.

Types of exercise

- **Moderate-Intensity Activities:** Activities like brisk walking, water aerobics, or gardening allow you to maintain a conversation but not sing comfortably.
- **Vigorous-intensity activities:** Exercises like running or swimming laps

make speaking difficult without pausing to catch your breath.

Avoid Overexertion

"Though exercise is beneficial, overexertion can cause complications, especially for those with pre-existing heart conditions. If you experience chest pain, dizziness, or shortness of breath, stop exercising immediately and consult a doctor," said Dr Reddy.

Bottomline

Dr Reddy concluded, "Exercise is a powerful ally in heart health, but it's important to focus on moderation, consistency, and your body's signals. Gradually increasing activity levels is the safest approach for long-term benefits.

"Always consult with a healthcare provider if you have concerns about your exercise plan, particularly if you're managing cardiovascular risks. Incorporating regular exercise into your daily routine can not only enhance heart health but also improve your overall quality of life."



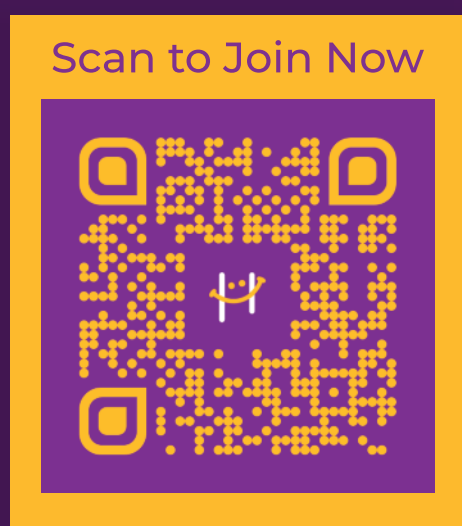
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DECEMBER 31, 2024

MUSCAT DAILY FLASH BACK

A year of fiscal consolidation, economic transformation and reiteration of Oman's role on the global stage, even as the forces of disarray grew stronger in several parts of the world and ongoing wars ground on. The sultanate powered on in a year of monumental elections and political change



JAN 22

H M lays foundation stone of Oman Cultural Complex



Muscat

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik presided over a ceremony to lay the foundation stone of the Oman Cultural Complex project and building of the National Records and Archives Authority (NRAA) at Airport Heights in Muscat on Sunday.

When His Majesty the Sultan arrived at the project site, he was received by Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth and Chairman of Founding Committee of Oman Cultural Complex, and Dr Hamad bin Mohammed al Dhoyani, Chairman of NRAA.

Then, His Majesty the Sultan

viewed the design and components of the complex project.

Oman Cultural Complex is considered an embodiment of the Royal vision of His Majesty the Sultan to establish a state-of-the-art cultural landmark, a civilisational accomplishment and a scholarly and institutional edifice of Oman's blessed renaissance.

Then, His Majesty watched a visual presentation on the project and listened to a briefing about the building's innovative model.

The project will house several institutions and facilities, including the National Library, the National Theatre, Children's Public Library, the House of Arts, the House of Cinema, and the Literary Forum, besides NRAA. It will also have restaurants,

cafeterias and a public park.

His Majesty then laid the cornerstone marking the start of construction of the complex - a building spread over 80,200sqm that will be constructed on a 400,000sqm plot of land, costing around RO147.8mn.

Oman Cultural Complex will promote cultural, literary, theatrical and research activities through the enhancement of relevant programmes aimed to expand the scope of engagement in highlighting Oman's cultural heritage and exploring the country's accomplishments.

The complex will provide services to scholars and researchers, and help organise cultural events and programmes to develop vistas of cultural action that will focus on Oman's history and cultural identity.

JAN 22

OCC to revolutionise art and culture scene

Muscat

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik on Sunday laid the foundation stone for the Oman Cultural Complex (OCC) at the Airport Heights in Muscat. The complex, to be developed at an estimated cost of RO147.8mn, will come up on 400,000sqm of land with a built-up area of 80,200sqm. It will be the address of three major national institutions - the National Theatre, the National Library, and the National Records and Archives Authority.

With eight additional buildings for various facilities, the complex will be the central hub for preserving, showcasing, and celebrating Oman's history, and contemporary arts and culture. The project is set to boost the cultural, literary, and theatrical activities in Oman, alongside research works in various fields. It will also contribute to the preservation of Oman's national heritage and achievements.

The complex will have diverse components such as the Children's Library, the House of Arts, the House of Cinema, and the Literary Forum, complemented by halls dedicated to fine arts, restaurants, cafés, and public gardens. One of the complex's core objectives is to advance cultural and literary work, supporting the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth's plans and the implementation of the cultural strategy for community service. It will oversee and aid in the development of both governmental and private cultural centres and institutions across Oman.

The National Library - 23,500sqm in area - will focus on acquiring literary and intellectual productions. The National Theatre, over an area of 16,500sqm, will have a 1,000-seat capacity auditorium. The Arts House, on 3,500sqm of land, will nurture young talents in drawing, fine arts and music. Lastly, the National Records and Archives Authority, on an area of 22,500sqm, will utilise documents to highlight Oman's cultural and historical aspects through ages.



JAN 31

Oman face Netherlands in FIH Hockey5s semis

Our Correspondent
Muscat

In a historic feat, the Omani men's team reached the semi-finals of the FIH Hockey5s World Cup 2024 where it battled the Netherlands, one of the best teams in the world. Oman was beaten 5-3 by the Dutch team, who advanced to the final.

Earlier on Tuesday, Oman beat Kenya 5-2 in the quarter-finals for a berth in the semis, with Khalid al Shaaibi scoring a hat-trick.

In post-match comments, a delighted Shaaibi said, "We are proud and we say thank you to the country, to the president of Oman



Hockey Association and to the sultanate... This did not come easy. We worked very hard before the

tournament. We trained very hard." The enthusiasm and pride among the hockey community in

Oman was evident in the reactions from players, fans and officials alike.

Speaking to *Muscat Daily*, former Seeb Hockey Club player Hamoud al Wahaibi congratulated the players and the entire technical and administrative staff for the outstanding accomplishment. "The support from the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports, as well as Oman Hockey Association, cannot be overstated for their role in preparing and facilitating the national team," said Wahaibi.

"The team showed great technical application in the decisive matches."

Wahaibi described the team's performance as a "historic achievement for Omani sports" in general and for hockey in particular. "The quarter-final victory will also be a motivation to perform better in other sports."

Sami Awad, captain of the national five-a-side hockey team, highlighted the squad's drive to reach the final stages of the tournament and expressed gratitude for the fact that it was achieved. "The determination and brilliance displayed in the matches against Malaysia, Fiji Islands, the USA and Kenya were essential in reaching the semi-finals," said Awad.

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FEB 14

Tragic Monday

6 dead, over 190 rescued as heavy rains lash Oman

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Hheavy rains in several governorates on Monday led to the tragic deaths of six individuals, including three children, while rescue operations saw more than 190 people saved from perilous conditions. The bad weather affecting many governorates, attributed to a low-pressure trough, is expected to continue on Wednesday.

The Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority (CDAA) led rescue efforts, responding to over 224 reports since the onset of adverse weather on Sunday. The authority rescued individuals stranded in overflowing wadis and inundated buildings.

Late Monday night, CDAA announced that three children who were swept away in the overflowing Wadi Bani Ghafir in Rustaq were found dead.



Rescue teams of CDAA in Dhahirah managed to save one of two persons trapped in a vehicle swept away in Wadi Ghayya in Yanqul on Monday. The body of the second person was found on Tuesday morning.

The authority also reported the death of a woman following a tragic accident involving a vehicle being swept away in a wadi in Izki on Tuesday.

A police aviation unit carried out an operation to transport the body of a French woman from Wadi al Manakhar in Jabal Akhdar. A search is underway for a French man with who she was when their car was swept away on Monday.

Speaking to *Muscat Daily*, Hamoud bin Mohammed al Mandhari, Coordinator of Relief and Shelter Sector of National Committee for Emergency Management, informed that there are a total of 229 shelters across the sultanate to provide relief in case of emergency. "All centres are ready to receive people at any time depending on the development of the weather situation."

Thirteen shelters have been activated in North Batinah and one in Buraimi. "So far, 136 citizens benefited from the shelters," Mandhari informed. At the shelters, basic services such as food, drinks, blankets and Internet are provided.

36 arrested for crossing wadis

Dakhliyah Governorate Police Command arrested 36 people for violating regulations issued to stay away from overflowing wadis. Royal Oman Police referred them to judicial authorities for legal action.

According to the Public Prosecution, a three-month imprisonment and a fine of RO500 will be imposed on those who deliberately cross flooded wadis.

CDAA rescued several people in different governorates who had ventured into overflowing wadis.

FEB 12

Oman to ban plastic shopping bags by 2027 in phases

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Environment Authority (EA) has issued a decision (No 8/2024) to ban the use of all kinds of plastic shopping bags by January 2027 in a phased manner.

The timeline drawn by EA targets specific sectors every six months, beginning with July 1, 2024 set for pharmacies, hospitals and clinics.

Speaking to *Muscat Daily*, Dr Mohammad Majid al Kasbi, Director of Department of Chemical Materials at EA, informed that the decision to eventually ban all kinds of plastic shopping bags in the country was in drafting since 2012 and involved the co-operation of competent authorities. "The authority has developed a plan to prevent the spread of plastic bags gradually and help people implement it easily."

The decision factors in aspects of establishing factories for environmentally friendly bags and plastic waste recycling, he added.

FEB 8

H M Sultan Haitham, Kuwait Emir open Duqm Refinery

Duqm

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik presided over the opening of Duqm Refinery and Petrochemical Industries Company (OQ8) in Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD) on Wednesday, in the presence of Sheikh Mishal al Ahmad al Jaber al Sabah, Emir of Kuwait.

Upon arrival at the project site, His Majesty the Sultan and the Emir of Kuwait watched an interactive visual presentation titled 'Journey of Energy' presented by a group of young Omanis.

The presentation focused on the



various stages of setting up OQ8, the largest joint investment project between Oman and Kuwait with

capital exceeding RO3.5bn. The presentation also highlighted the economic importance of the refin-

ery.

Abdulsalam bin Mohammed al Murshidi, President of Oman Investment Authority, delivered a speech in which he said the project reflects the deep-rooted and distinguished relations binding Oman and Kuwait.

The project is a result of collaborative efforts, Murshidi said, pointing out that it is the largest investment project between two countries in the refineries and petrochemicals sector. The foundation stone of the project was laid by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik in 2018.

Murshidi informed that the pro-

ject is the first Gulf refinery to rely on imported crude oil for its operations. It is expected to contribute to raising the total refining capacity of Oman to 500,000 barrels per day, an increase of 230,000 barrels per day.

"In conjunction with the opening of Duqm Refinery, two other projects were completed - the RO196mn investment Marafiq Company project, which supports the refinery in terms of energy and water, and Oman Tank Terminal Company, which supports the refinery's work in terms of storing oil in Ras Markaz, with an investment of RO200mn," Murshidi said.



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MAR 3

Omani doctor volunteers in Gaza, spreads hope amid destruction

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Dr Aiman al Salmi, a doctor from Khoula Hospital in Muscat, is currently visiting Gaza to provide much-needed medical assistance to the wounded amidst the ongoing conflict.

Dr Salmi's journey through the Rafah crossing into the heart of Rafah city was fraught with danger, but he was determined to help injured Palestinians with health-care facilities in the occupied territories on the brink of collapse.

Upon arrival in Rafah, Dr Salmi wasted no time in beginning his humanitarian work, focusing on delivering critical medical care, especially to the children affected by the violence.

Speaking from Gaza, Dr Salmi shared his mixed feelings of fulfillment on being able to help and sorrow over the catastrophic situation and the casualties he witnessed.

"I am glad to be here to assist the injured, particularly children,



but I am also deeply saddened by the significant number of casualties," he said.

He shed light on the calamitous conditions in Gaza, including food scarcity and the relentless threat posed by airstrikes, which have not spared even hospitals putting the lives of the displaced seeking refuge in jeopardy.

"The hospitals themselves face significant risks, shaking from bomb attacks multiple times a day. Missiles land near hospitals,

further intensifying the challenges.

"The people of Gaza know that Arab nations will not abandon them. Their joy and relief upon receiving support is immeasurable," he said, expressing his gratitude for the support that made his participation in this critical mission possible.

Dr Salmi's presence, alongside other aid workers from the GCC, is a beacon of hope for the people of Gaza, reinforcing their belief in the unwavering support of Arab na-

tions during their time of need.

He described entering Gaza as a complex process, requiring coordination with international organisations that are working on deployment of medical professionals where they are most needed.

Reactions in the sultanate to Dr Salmi's act of solidarity and humanity have been overwhelming.

Grand Mufti His Eminence Sheikh Ahmed bin Hamad al Khalili lauded Dr Salmi's bravery, hoping it inspires more medical professionals across the Islamic world to engage in similar initiatives of compassion and service. "Such individuals, motivated by their dedication to serving patients and addressing the consequences of this brutal aggression, are essential in times of crisis," the Grand Mufti said.

Khamis al Hashemi, a concerned citizen, echoed the sentiments of many and offered prayers for Dr Salmi's "safety and successful return", highlighting the collective desire to support those in the crisis.

MAR 12

\$1.3bn Al Khuwair waterfront project to give facelift to Muscat

Muscat

The Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning (MHUP) has revealed plans for a US\$1.3bn Al Khuwair Muscat Downtown and Waterfront Development project, which is likely to give a major facelift to the capital city.

Designed by Zaha Hadid Architects (ZHA), the project will come up on a 3.3mn sqm of land, officials informed.

The sustainability-led design prioritises the well-being of residents and visitors, redefining urban living in Oman as Muscat's population is anticipated to almost double from 1.5mn to 2.7mn by 2040.

Responding to this rapid growth, ZHA's design will transform this existing administrative and industrial area of Muscat into a vibrant new urban district with an expected population of 64,500.

The district will comprise five key areas: A marina, a recreational waterfront lined with beaches and sports facilities, a canal walkway, a cultural quarter and a Ministry campus.

Incorporating residential areas extensive mixed-use developments catering to government and commercial businesses, together with arts, culture, and leisure spaces, the district will be a thriving, environmentally resilient and sustainable development with a 24-hour community, a press release stated.

The development will include destination dining experiences, luxury retail outlets, health and wellness facilities, hotels, and residential spaces.

MAR 6

\$2.4bn mountaintop project in Jabal Akhdar to redefine luxury living

Our Correspondent
Muscat

In its efforts to stimulate a sustainable national economy, the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning (MHUP) recently unveiled plans for a groundbreaking US\$2.4bn mountain destination in Jabal Akhdar.

Situated at an altitude of 2,400m, the Omani Mountain Destination is poised to redefine luxury living. The development encompasses 2,527 residential homes, 2,000 hospitality rooms in avant-garde hotels, and a purpose-built health and wellness village.

AtkinsRéalis, a Canadian design, engineering and project management firm, was commissioned



by MHUP to develop a vision and multidisciplinary coordinated concept masterplan for the project.

'This mixed-use destination aims to provide residential, hospitality, entertainment and leisure experiences that sensitively bal-

ance the sultanate's socio-economic growth plan with the need to protect, preserve and enhance the natural environment,' AtkinsRéalis stated.

"The Omani Mountain Destination's masterplan is a story of con-

necting communities, enhancing beautiful places and imagining a new blueprint for Oman's future," Davide Minniti, Associate Director - Masterplanning/Urban Design of AtkinsRéalis, posted on LinkedIn.

Anticipated to draw over 8,000 residents, along with an average of 2,350 overnight visitors and 2,000 daily visitors, the project promises a harmonious blend of residential and recreational offerings.

A highlight of the project is the Wadi al Harbi Park, featuring a state-of-the-art bridge, engaging farming and agrotourism activities, family recreation facilities, mountain biking and extreme sports amenities like bungee jumping and rock climbing. The project will include a cable car.



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APR 16

18 dead in rains, flash floods



Our Correspondent
Muscat

The death toll resulting from heavy rains and flash floods in the sultanate rose to 18, including ten children, on Monday.

In response to exceptional weather conditions expected, work has been suspended for government and private sector employees on Tuesday with a shift to remote work protocols. The directive applies to Musandam, Buraimi, Dhahirah, North Batinah and Dakhliyah.

The villages of Kamzar and Lima in Musandam have been evacuated as a precautionary measure.

Rescue teams of Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority (CDAA)

found the body of a missing child and another person in the Samad al Shaan area of Mudhaibi in North Sharqiyah on Monday afternoon.

Earlier in the day, the bodies of a woman and a man were found. Both were reported missing in North Sharqiyah on Sunday.

Two people lost their lives when a vehicle with four occupants was swept away in a wadi in Adam, Dakhliyah, on Monday. CDAA teams were able to recover bodies of the two, while a search and rescue operation continues for the remaining two individuals.

In Mahout, Al Wusta, a vehicle with four passengers got stuck in an overflowing wadi. While two passengers were rescued, two are still missing.

78 reports of stranding, outage

Authorities are making concerted efforts to contain the effects of the inclement weather currently hitting Oman. Lt Col Mohammed bin Salam al Hashimi, spokesperson of the Joint Media Committee of National Emergency Management Centre and National Multi Hazard Early Warning Centre, informed that a total of 78 reports related to the weather condition were addressed till Monday afternoon.

"We received reports about power and communications network outages, as well as incidents of individuals being trapped in their homes and wadis, mostly in North Sharqiyah and South Sharqiyah."

APR 21

Omani innovator wins top prize at Geneva inventions show

Muscat

Innovator Sumaiya bint Saeed al Siyabi has put the global spotlight on Oman's buzzing innovation scene. She won the Grand Prix at the 49th International Exhibition of Inventions Geneva on Friday, the highest distinction of the event presented to the most promising invention that addresses a global issue.

Started in 1972 by Jean-Luc Vincent, the International Exhibition of Inventions Geneva is the world's largest annual event devoted exclusively to inventions and the licensing market. Each year, more than 825 exhibitors from 45 countries present their inventions, research and new products, ready to be marketed.

Another participant from Oman, Razan Hamad al Kalbani won the silver award.

"I am so happy and proud to represent my country. I have no words to describe the feeling," said an emotional Sumaiya after receiving the award.

She informed that her innovation - called Ecosphere - addresses the environmental threat posed by microplastics through a novel integration of biology and nanotechnology.



APR 8

58-year-old Omani walks 3,000km to perform umrah

Muscat

In a quest to trace the legacy of his ancestors, Bakhit Salim Mohammed al Amri, a 58-year-old resident of Sadah in Dhofar, walked to Mecca and Medina from Salalah covering over 3,000km in three months. He arrived in Medina on April 4 after walking 500km from Mecca.

Amri embarked on this adventurous trip to perform umrah in Mecca and visit the tomb of Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) in Medina following in the footsteps of his forefathers.

Setting off from Sultan Qaboos Cultural Complex in Salalah on January 1, Amri's pilgrimage aimed to recreate the arduous trek his ancestors undertook to perform hajj and umrah. After months of walking, facing adverse weather conditions and physical pain, he reached Mecca on March 18. He performed umrah and continued his journey to Medina.

On March 28, Amri started the 500km walk to Medina, following the route of the Prophet and his companions' travel. His journey sheds light on the hardships faced by his ancestors during their pilgrimage.



APR 23

H M visits UAE fostering deeper ties

Abu Dhabi, UAE

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik arrived in Abu Dhabi on Monday on a two-day state visit to the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed al Nahyan, President of UAE, led the welcoming party for His Majesty the Sultan at the Presidential Airport in Abu Dhabi. Sheikh Mohamed wished His Majesty and his accompanying delegating a pleasant stay in the UAE.

When the Royal aircraft entered the UAE airspace, it was joined by a fleet of UAE military aircrafts that escorted it in a gesture of warm welcome until it landed at the Presiden-



tial Airport in Abu Dhabi.

After a short stay at the airport, His Majesty the Sultan, accompanied by the UAE President, mounted

a vehicle that took them to Qasr al Watan (Palace of the Nation) in Abu Dhabi where official and popular reception protocols were held.



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MAY 8

GCC unified visa next big thing for tourism sector

Our Correspondent
Muscat

A GCC ministerial panel has put the spotlight on the importance of inter-regional initiatives in elevating the GCC tourism industry to the next level. The planned GCC Unified Tourist Visa - called GCC Grand Tours visa - was cited as a key facilitator for the region in this direction.

Striking the right balance between collaboration and competition between destinations and nations was the key focal point of a panel discussion at 2024 Arabian Travel Market (ATM) in Dubai on Monday featuring H E Azzan al Busaidi, Undersecretary of Tourism in the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism in Oman; Khalid Jasim al Midfa, Chairman of Sharjah Commerce and Tourism Development Authority; Fahd Hamidaddin, CEO of Saudi Tourism Authority; and Sarah Buhijji, CEO of Bahrain Tourism and Exhibitions Authority.

During the in-depth discussion, the ministerial panellists cited the planned GCC Unified Tourist Visa as a key facilitator for the region, alongside factors such as sustainability, infrastructure and culture.

Panellists said the unified visa would allow member states to present the GCC as a connected



destination, boosting accessibility and driving key performance indicators such as length of stay, average spend and employment. Speakers noted that these would continue to ensure that the travel industry positively impacts local businesses, communities and ecosystems, contributing to the long-term sustainability of tourism across the region.

Panelists also explained that current and future infrastructure will complement the GCC Unified Tourist Visa by enhancing

accessibility within and between Gulf states. In addition to ongoing investment in new and existing airports and cruise terminals, the speakers highlighted the central role of the upcoming GCC Railway in facilitating and optimising region-wide access for both domestic and international visitors.

The GCC Unified Tourist Visa will allow travellers to visit all six GCC states, Abdulla bin Touq al Marri, UAE Minister of Economy, announced on the opening day of

ATM on Monday. "The GCC Grand Tours visa, which we are working on and aim to finalise soon, will allow tourists to spend more than 30 days in the region."

Tourism in the GCC is booming, with the Middle East being the only region in the world to surpass pre-pandemic levels last year. Oman, along with neighbours UAE and Saudi Arabia witnessed record international tourist arrivals, paving the way for 2024 to be another record year for tourism growth.

MAY 14

H M's visit to Kuwait begins a new chapter in ties

Kuwait City

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik received a warm welcome upon arrival in the State of Kuwait on Monday on a two-day state visit.

Sheikh Meshal al Ahmad al Jaber al Sabah, Emir of Kuwait, led the welcoming party for His Majesty the Sultan at Amiri Airport, wishing His Majesty and his accompanying delegation a pleasant stay in Kuwait.

Oman and Kuwait signed four memorandums of understanding aimed at enhancing cooperation across various sectors during His Majesty Sultan Haitham's state visit to Kuwait. These agreements span direct investment, metrology activities, and diplomatic studies and training, besides a strategic MoU between Oman Investment Authority and Kuwait Investment Authority.



MAY 23

H M greeted with ceremonial splendour at Jordan



His Majesty the Sultan and King Abdullah discuss furthering bilateral ties, key regional issues

Amman, Jordan

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik arrived in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan on a two-day state visit on Wednesday.

King Abdullah II Ibn al Hussein of Jordan led the welcoming party for His Majesty the Sultan. The Jordanian monarch received His Majesty

at the foot of the ramp at Marka Airport in Amman, wishing him a pleasant stay in Jordan.

His Majesty the Sultan was accorded an official reception upon his arrival in Amman.

The streets of Amman were adorned with the flags of Oman and Jordan, and a number of Jordanian students and citizens lined up on the

sides of the road, chanting welcoming phrases, expressing their delight at this historic visit of His Majesty the Sultan and the high-ranking official delegation accompanying him.

The first day of the visit ended with a state dinner hosted by King Abdullah in honour of His Majesty the Sultan at Al Hussein Palace.

JAC

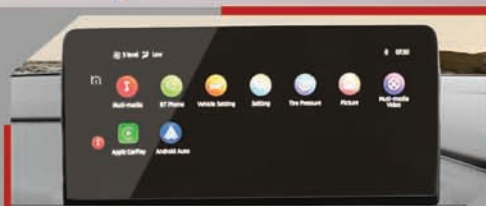
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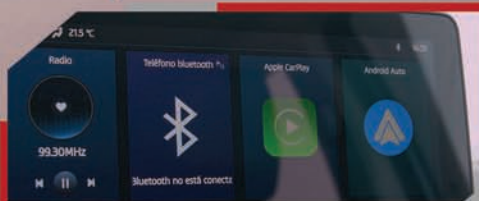
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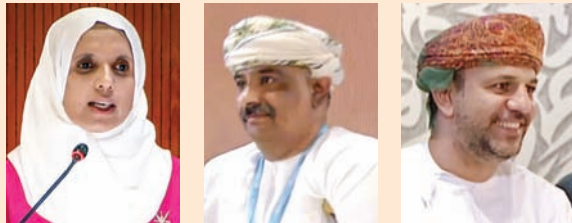
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JUN 2

WHO awards presented to three Omani doctors

Our Correspondent
Muscat



Dr Jamila al Abri

Ahmad al Wahabi

Badr al Rawahi

Eight medical professionals from around the world were feted for their unique roles and contributions to public health in their countries and the world at a special ceremony during the 77th World Health Assembly in Geneva on Friday.

Of the eight, four recipients are from the Eastern Mediterranean Region of which three are from Oman, a first for a country in the region.

The Dr Lee Jong-wook Memorial Prize for Public Health 2024 was presented to Dr Bader bin Saif al Rawahi, who leads a major public health programme as Director of Communicable Diseases and Control, and manager of the Expanded Programme on Immunisation at Ministry of Health (MoH).

Dr Rawahi has made considerable effort to leave no one behind in the immunisation programme, including migrants, displaced populations and underprivileged people.

Dr Ahmed Hamed Saif al Wahabi, head of Elderly Care Section in Primary Health Care Department of MoH, and the Chinese Geriatrics Society, China, were jointly awarded the Sheikh Sabah al Ahmad al Jaber al Sabah Prize for Research in Health Care for the Elderly and in Health Promotion.

Dr Wahabi is a family doctor who has made an important contribution to integrating high-quality care for older people within primary health care in Oman. He has also played a part in the development of a national programme for people aged 60 years and older that provides screening, assessment and early intervention as part of primary health care.

Dr Jamila Taiseer Yasser al Abri, a renowned obstetrician and gynaecologist with extensive experience and leadership in women's health, currently Director of Department of Woman and Child Health, was honoured with the Ihsan Dogramaci Family Health Foundation Prize.

JUN 2

Private-funded road in Rustaq cuts travel from 450km to just a few km



Our Correspondent
Muscat

In an extraordinary display of community spirit, residents of Rustaq have carved a 10km road through the mountains, significantly shortening the distance between villages in the wilayat and Jabal Shams from 450km to just a few kilometres.

This herculean task has also resulted in connecting the governorates of Dhahirah and Dakhliyah to South Batinah via Jabal Shams.

Speaking to *Muscat Daily*, Nasser al Hatemi, project financier and supervisor, said, "Though known for its rich history and natural beauty, Rustaq faced a challenge: the lack of direct access to the governorates of

Dhahirah and Dakhliyah. For many years, residents and visitors endured long, arduous journeys to travel between these regions. The solution lay in a daring vision - a 10km mountain road cutting through the formidable terrain."

Hatemi informed that the idea emerged at a community meeting where elders, local leaders and enthusiastic youth gathered to discuss the pressing need for better infrastructure. "The consensus was clear - building this road would not only reduce travel time but also boost trade, tourism and emergency response capabilities."

The project resulted in laying a 10km dirt road linking the villages of Al Marat and Karb in the wilayat of Rustaq to areas on Jabal Shams.

According to Hatemi, a proposal for the road was tabled as early as 1970. Over the years, demand for the road was raised repeatedly, resulting in an approval in the early 2000s. "The project was included in a tender along with several other mountain roads. However, after construction work commenced, the company responsible for the implementation stopped operations and subsequently withdrew from the project. We were back to square one."

"In May 2021, we committed to civil efforts, harnessing all available resources and capabilities. As a result, we successfully paved the way forward; the new road now serves as the only connection between these mountain villages and Rustaq."

JUN 12

66% of Oman's adult population obese

Muscat

Close to 66% of adults in the sultanate are overweight or obese, the Ministry of Health (MoH) stated on Tuesday.

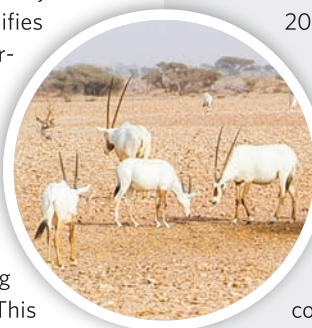
This was revealed at a workshop titled 'The Plan to Accelerate Obesity Prevention in the Sultanate of Oman' organised by MoH in collaboration with World Health Organization.

Held under the patronage of H E Dr Ahmed Salim Saif al Mandhari, Undersecretary for Planning in

MoH, the workshop saw participation of experts from Oman and international organisations with the objective of devising a comprehensive strategy to combat obesity. It aimed to offer insights into the sultanate's ongoing obesity crisis, assess existing programmes, identify best practices, and ultimately develop an expedited plan to curb obesity in Oman.

Salima Ali al Maamari, Director of MoH's Nutrition Department, highlighted the fact that over 1bn people worldwide, including chil-

dren and teenagers, are grappling with obesity. "The surge in obesity rates in recent decades signifies an imminent health crisis, burdening individuals, society and the healthcare sector." She cited alarming statistics from Oman's latest national survey of non-communicable diseases, including a staggering 66% of adults being overweight or obese. "This means, of every ten individuals, only three maintain a healthy weight."



JUN 4

Oman jumps 99 places in environmental index

Oman has leapfrogged 99 places to rank 50th in the 2024 Environmental Performance Index (EPI), a major recognition for the sultanate. It was ranked 149th in the 2022 index.

The sultanate is ranked second in the GCC and the Middle East in the index published by Yale Center for Environmental Law and Policy and Columbia University's Center for International Earth Science Information Network. Released on Monday, the index ranks 180 countries based on 58 performance indicators to track progress on mitigating climate change, promoting environmental health, and safeguarding ecosystem vitality.



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JULY 17

1 policeman among 9 killed in Wadi Kabir mosque attack

Our Correspondent
Muscat

In an unprecedented turn of events in Oman, six people lost their lives while three perpetrators were killed in a standoff that took place in the Wadi Kabir area of Muscat on Monday night.

In a statement, Royal Oman Police said that working alongside military and security services, it had successfully completed operations in the vicinity of the Imam Ali bin Abi Talib Mosque.

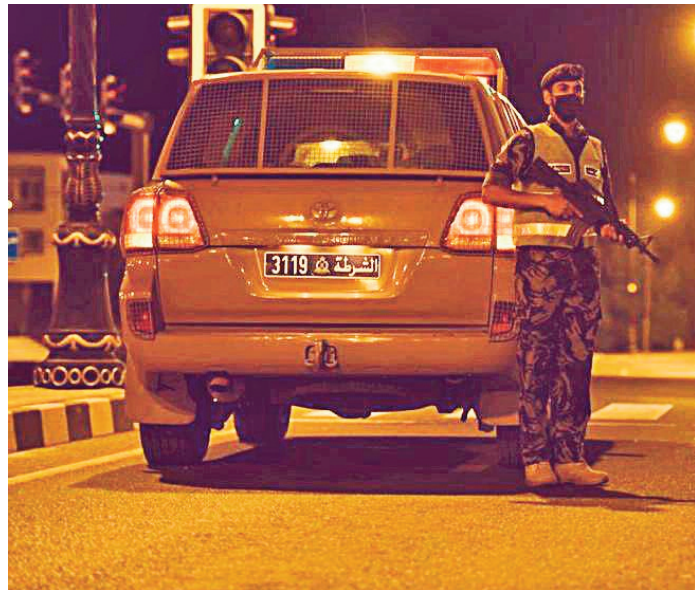
'The tragic incident resulted in the deaths of nine people, including five expatriates, a policeman and the three perpetrators.'

The Embassy of Pakistan in Oman said four of its nationals were killed and several injured in the attack.

Oman's Foreign Ministry informed that one Indian national lost his life, while another was injured.

Twenty-eight people of various nationalities were injured, among them four officers - policemen and members of Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority - while performing their national duty, ROP stated.

The injured were transported to



healthcare facilities for treatment, while investigations are ongoing into the circumstances of the attack, ROP added.

It extended its condolences and sympathy to families of the deceased and wished a speedy recovery for the injured, while thanking for the efforts and the co-operation of citizens and residents, which were crucial in containing the situation.

The Indian Embassy offered its sincere condolences to the family of its national who lost his life in the attack and stated that it stood

ready to offer all assistance to the families affected.

Ministry of Health activated the Emergency Management Centre and Medical Response and Public Health Sector following the attack. Khoula Hospital was designated to receive the injured and was supported by specialised medical teams from The Royal Hospital and University Medical City. More than 50 specialists were called into action.

No one has claimed responsibility for the attack and ROP stated no motive behind it.

4 Pakistan nationals killed; embassy condemns attack

Muscat

The Embassy of Pakistan in Oman has condemned the attack on the Imam Ali bin Abi Talib Mosque in the Wadi Kabir area of Muscat, which resulted in deaths of four Pakistani nationals.

The embassy confirmed the names of the deceased as Ghulam Abbas, Hasan Abbas, Sayyed Abbas and Sulaiman Nawaz. Over 20 Pakistani nationals were receiving treatment in hospitals for injuries sustained during the attack.

The Pakistani community, H E Imran Ali, Ambassador, urged patience and assured that the embassy was working closely with Omani authorities to repatriate the mortal remains of the deceased.

JULY 28

Oman pacer fastest to reach 100 ODI wickets

Muscat

Nearly three months after earning the distinction of being the fastest from an Associate nation to reach 100 T20I wickets, Oman's Bilal Khan has achieved yet another remarkable career milestone. This time around, he has set a world record by becoming the pace bowler to reach 100 One-Day International (ODI) wickets the fastest.

Bilal surpassed the previous record set by Pakistan's Shaheen Afridi by claiming his 100th wicket against Namibia during an ICC World Cricket League 2 game in Dundee, Scotland on July 24.

He reached the milestone in just 49 ODIs, dismissing Namibia's Jan Frylinck to achieve the feat. Bilal's effort bettered Afridi's 100-wicket haul in 51 ODIs, and also surpassed Australia's Mitchell Starc (52 ODIs) and New Zealand's Shane Bond (54 ODIs).

Overall, Bilal is the third fastest to 100 ODI wickets. The record is held by Nepal's leg-spinner Sandeep Lamichhane, who achieved the feat in just 42 ODIs, followed by Afghanistan's leg-spinner Rashid Khan, who took 100 ODI wickets in 44 games.



JULY 31

Muscat mosque among World's Greatest Places

Our Correspondent
Muscat

An Omani mosque has found a place in the prestigious 2024 World's Greatest Places list compiled by *Time* magazine. The Jisr Foundation funded Masjid Bab al Salam in Mabelah stands as a testament to the fusion of tradition and innovation, seamlessly blending spirituality, sustainability and monumentality into a harmonious architectural symphony, according to Altiqadum, the Omani design firm behind the mosque.

To compile the 2024 list, *Time* solicited nominations of places -



including hotels, cruises, restaurants, attractions, museums, parks and more - from its international network of correspondents and

contributors, as well as through an application process, with an eye towards those offering new and exciting experiences.

While last year's list featured 50 cities, this year the magazine decided to explore and include establishments that stand out in their field, and the world - resulting in 100 extraordinary destinations to visit and stay this year.

Describing the mosque, *Time* wrote, 'For years, the Middle East's cutting-edge skyscrapers have stood side by side with opulent mosques rooted in centuries of classical Islamic architecture. But lately, a wave of more contemporary houses of worship have emerged on the skylines of Gulf cities, often paying tribute to age-old design in fresh and unexpected ways.'

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2025

AUG 1

Region on the edge

Assassination of Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh in Tehran threatens to destabilise the region further

Tehran, Iran

The assassination of Hamas political leader Ismail Haniyeh in the Iranian capital Tehran has rocked the Middle East, threatening to further destabilise the region and jeopardise ceasefire negotiations between Israel and Hamas over the war in Gaza.

Haniyeh was in Iran for the inauguration of the country's new president. The attack came in the early hours of Wednesday morning.

No one immediately claimed responsibility for the assassination but suspicion quickly fell on Israel, which has vowed to kill Haniyeh and other leaders of Hamas over the group's October 7 attack on Israel.

Iran's Revolutionary Guards confirmed the death of Haniyeh and said it was investigating.

"We will make the terrorist occupiers regret the cowardly assassina-

tion; we will defend our honour," Iran's new President Masoud Pezeshkian said.

Iran's Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei said Israel had provided the grounds for "harsh punishment for itself" and it was Tehran's duty to avenge the Hamas leader's death as it had occurred in the Iranian capital.

At an event in Singapore, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken sidestepped a question on Haniyeh's killing, saying a ceasefire deal in Gaza was key to avoiding wider regional escalation.

"I'm not going to speculate on what impact any one event might have on that, I've learned over many years."

He told Channel News Asia that the US had neither been aware of nor involved in the killing.

The assassination, which took place less than 24 hours after Israel claimed to have killed the Hezbollah

commander it said was behind a deadly strike in the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights, appears to set back chances of any imminent ceasefire agreement in the ten-month-old war in Gaza.

"This assassination by the Israeli occupation of Brother Haniyeh is a grave escalation that aims to break the will of Hamas," senior Hamas official Sami Abu Zuhri told Reuters. He said Hamas would continue the path it was following.

Israeli Defence Minister Yoav Gallant said Israel was not trying to escalate the war but was prepared for all scenarios.

Qatar, which has been brokering talks aimed at halting the fighting in Gaza along with Egypt, condemned Haniyeh's killing as a dangerous escalation of the conflict. Egypt said it showed a lack of political will on Israel's part to calm tensions. China, Russia, Turkey and Iraq also condemned it.

AUG 7

H M meets UK PM Starmer, discusses ties

London, UK

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik met Keir Starmer, Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, in London on Tuesday.

During the meeting, His Majesty Sultan Haitham and Starmer reviewed the deep-rooted historical relations between the Sultanate of Oman and the UK, as well as means of consolidating areas of bilateral cooperation to serve the joint interests of the two countries' friendly peoples.

The two leaders also exchanged views on current developments on regional and international arenas and other matters of common concern.

The meeting was attended from the Omani side by Sayyid Badr Hamad al Busaidi, Foreign Minister, Dr Hamad Said al Afi, Head of Private Office, and Badr Mohammed al Mantheri, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to the United Kingdom.

From the British side, the meeting was attended by David Lammy, Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, Liane Saunders, British Ambassador to Oman, and several other officials.

Starmer was quoted by the British media as saying, "Thank you so much for making time for this visit so early into our government - we only formed a government four weeks or so ago. And so, to be able to host you here is really a privilege for me."

"We have a long, shared history between our countries - 400 years of friendship, very strong relations and I want to ensure that we strengthen even more."

AUG 19

Flight disruptions highlight infrastructure gap in Salalah

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Severe disruption of air traffic at Salalah Airport due to ongoing adverse weather conditions in Dhofar has raised concerns over the airport's ability to handle such situations effectively. This has prompted both Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) and Oman Air to issue statements addressing the challenges faced by travellers and the measures being taken to improve the situation.

CAA acknowledged the impact of the disruptions and confirmed that efforts are underway to enhance the airport's infrastructure. 'The authority confirms that it is working in coordination with partners to raise the efficiency of the landing system at Salalah Airport to enhance its ability to receive flights in similar weather conditions in the future.'

The authority also noted that while these improvements will re-



duce the likelihood of flight diversions, they cannot entirely eliminate the risks posed by severe weather conditions, including low visibility and high-speed winds - challenges faced by international airports, too.

The statement was issued following diversion of several flights from Salalah to other airports due to exceptional weather conditions. CAA emphasised the fact that

these diversions are part of precautionary measures implemented at airports to ensure passenger safety in line with established systems and regulations.

The authority also stressed the importance of airlines providing appropriate services to passengers affected by such disruptions and facilitating their arrival at their final destination in accordance with the

Passengers' Rights Regulations.

Oman Air issued a statement on Saturday acknowledging the flight delays. 'Due to temporary closure of Salalah Airport caused by adverse weather conditions, all of our scheduled flights between Salalah and Muscat are experiencing delays. We apologise for any inconvenience caused to our guests and are making every effort to minimise dis-

ruptions,' the airline stated.

Public reaction to the situation has been mixed, with some appreciating the safety measures while others raised concerns about the lack of immediate solutions to address the inconvenience faced by travellers.

Nasser al Maamari acknowledged the importance of passenger safety but questioned the plans in place to deal with such situations. "We understand that the safety of passengers is your priority. We are also aware of the weather conditions. But I have questions: What are the plans in this case? Do passengers have to wait for nearly 12 hours at the airport? Is it reasonable for an elderly person, a child or a person in a wheelchair to endure this waiting without there being a solution?" he posted on X.

Other citizens suggested alternative solutions, including diverting flights to nearby airports during such weather conditions.

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SEPT 4

Transport and IT sectors set for major Omanisation overhaul

Our Correspondent
Muscat

In a statement on Tuesday, Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology said that in cooperation with Ministry of Labour, it will nationalise 22 professions in the transportation, communications and information technology sectors from 2025 to 2027.

Initial targets for Omanisation in the transportation and logistics sector, commencing 2025, range from 20% to 50% with a phased increase planned annually until achieving 100%. Targeted roles span maritime, air and land transport, encompassing administrative, specialised and support positions, based on comprehensive workforce data analysis.

In the communications and information technology sector, the ministry aims for Omanisation rates between 50% and 100% by 2026, focusing on specific job categories.

In the communications and information technology sector, the plan specifies that by January 2025, jobs of general systems analyst, information systems network specialist and computer maintenance technician will be Omanised. By 2026, the positions of computer programmer, computer engineer and computer operator will follow. By 2027, website designer and operations analyst jobs will be Omanised.

The plan includes 14 professions in the transportation and logistics sector. Starting from September 2, 2024 jobs of commercial broker, forklift driver, marketing specialist, ship tying and securing worker, labour supervisor, loading and unloading labour supervisor, quality supervisor, new vehicle seller, quality officer, quality control manager, goods arranger and travel agent have been Omanised.

By January 2025, jobs of marine controller and ship traffic controller will be Omanised.

The ministry stated that the decision will accelerate the replacement and Omanisation efforts in the sectors it oversees.



SEPT 29

Oman regains S&P's investment grade rating after 7 years



Our Correspondent
Muscat

S&P Global Ratings upgraded its long-term foreign and local currency sovereign credit ratings on Oman to 'BBB-' from 'BB+' with a stable outlook on Friday. This reflects the continued strengthening of Oman government's public finances and marks a significant development in its economic history with the sultanate regaining its investment grade rating after a gap of seven years.

In its rating action commentary, S&P said it could further raise Oman's ratings over the next two years if reforms lead to steady growth in the sultanate's GDP per capita, supported by continued momentum in non-oil growth.

Measures to strengthen institutions that support economic diversification and development of domestic capital markets could positively impact the ratings, the agency added.

'The upgrade reflects the ongoing strengthening of the Omani government's public finances and the external deleveraging of many state-owned enterprises. Following significant deterioration in the balance sheet from 2015 to 2021, the government has implemented structural reforms that will allow it to return to a net asset position starting this year,' S&P stated.

The stable outlook on Oman's sovereign ratings balances the potential benefits of the government's fiscal and economic reform programme against the economy's structural susceptibility to adverse

oil price shocks.

S&P also observed that the sultanate has reorganised its government-related entities (GREs) sector to enhance operational efficiencies and improve financial positions. This supported a decline in total GRE debt to US\$33.8bn (30% of GDP) in June 2024, compared to a peak of US\$35.9bn (41% of GDP) at the end of 2021.

'We assume the government will continue gradually reducing its footprint in the economy - moving from owner to regulator - via asset sales to help develop the non-hydrocarbon private sector and attract foreign direct investment,' the agency said.

S&P expects the momentum of the government's fiscal and economic reforms to continue from 2024 to 2027.

SEPT 17

Oman rejects normalisation with Israel, demands ends of 'barbaric Gaza war'

Muscat

The 'barbaric war on Gaza' must stop immediately, H E Sheikh Khalifa bin Ali al Harthy, Undersecretary for Political Affairs in the Foreign Ministry, has said. In the same breath, he confirmed that Oman has no intention of normalising relations with Israel.

In an interview with Russia's state-owned news agency Sputnik, H E Harthy stated that recent normalisation between Israel and several regional countries has failed to advance the Palestinian rights, in-

stead enabled further abuses and delays. "The important issue now is not whether or not we normalise, but rather reaching a solution to the Palestinian issue and giving the Palestinians their rights."

He noted that Muscat is actively engaging with the international community and key regional players to de-escalate tensions and prevent further conflict, and clarified that "Oman is not directly communicating with Tel Aviv or mediating between it and Iran".

H E Harthy highlighted His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik's

commitment to Palestinian solidarity and support for ending attacks on civilians; urging the international community to uphold its responsibilities in granting Palestinians their right to an independent state with East Jerusalem as its capital.

H E Harthy reiterated Oman's call for Arab unity, achievable through strengthening the Arab League and regional organisations dedicated to joint Arab action. He acknowledged the Middle East's crucial role in international security due to its strategic location and his-

torical challenges.

Despite ongoing provocations from Israel, H E Harthy stated that Oman does not anticipate a major regional war, citing the prudence and rationality of the regional countries.

"Oman is working with global partners to prevent conflict," he said, adding that it insists on an immediate ceasefire, attributing regional tensions primarily to Israel's actions in Palestine.

He also criticised the current UN mechanisms for addressing the Palestinian issue, suggesting that

they have proven inadequate, particularly in light of the Ukrainian crisis. "The majority of countries in the world, especially the Third World countries, including Oman, demand a radical reform of the UN mechanisms."

On the status of Russia and China in international peace and security issues, H E Harthy asserted that these two countries "are pivotal global players and permanent members of the Security Council", and that they bear "significant responsibility for international peace and security".



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OCT 10

Muscat Daily's 15th anniversary



Our Correspondent
Muscat

As *Muscat Daily* marks its 15th anniversary on Thursday, it reflects on the journey of delivering timely, credible news across Oman. With over 3,500 editions, thousands of news stories and immeasurable impact on readers, it has built a strong connection with its audience. Several loyal readers, some of whom have been with the paper since its early days, share their experiences with *Muscat Daily* and their hopes for the future.

Iqbal Ali al Lawati, a subscriber since 2009, expressed his satisfaction with the paper's content and presentation. "I look forward to reading the paper every morning," he said, adding that what appeals to him the most is the "excellent news content, unbiased coverage and good language".

While he is happy with the overall quality, Lawati suggested inclusion of more photographs showcasing the country's diverse landscapes and culture. He also hopes that the paper will

eventually be available on weekends.

Narayanan Iyer, another subscriber since 2009, praised *Muscat Daily's* "elegant and stylish" design and extensive local news coverage. "The sports coverage is excellent, but I think there could be more focus on politics," he noted.

For Sanjay Saxena, subscriber since 2013, the paper's appeal lies in its straightforward and unbiased reporting. "I love the detailed news, which is always clear and to the point," he said. He complimented the front page design, describing it as "specific and colourful", and also appreciated the online edition.

A reader since 2017, Chandra Mohan highlighted *Muscat Daily's* balanced coverage of national and international news. He enjoys, in particular, the variety of content, which includes articles for children. "It covers all aspects of society."

Muscat Daily's punctuality – subscribers are assured of timely delivery to their doorstep every morning – is a distinguishing factor and commended by several readers including Vinod Raghavan. "It arrives early and I read it with my

morning cup of tea," he said.

He praised the feature articles for their inspiring stories but was critical of the coverage of India. "More human-interest stories from India would be a better fit," Raghavan added. Additionally, he's disappointed that *Muscat Daily* is not available on holidays.

Regular reader Musallam al Shukairi has been "consistently impressed with the quality and depth of reporting. Your team does an exceptional job of providing in-depth analysis and commentary on issues that matter most to the people of Oman".

He added, "I particularly appreciate the mix of online and print news offered by *Muscat Daily*. This allows me to stay informed on the latest developments while still enjoying the traditional experience of reading a physical newspaper."

Jill Fitz Simmons started reading *Muscat Daily* after relocating from Dubai in 2010. While acknowledging the paper's strong content, she expressed a desire for more breaking news and looks forward to seeing it continue to evolve.

OCT 13

Ghailani sets Asian record at world meet

Muscat

Omani freediver Omar Abdullah al Ghailani has made the sultanate proud by claiming a silver medal and setting a new Asian record at the 2024 CMAS 8th World Championship Freediving Depth held in Kalamata, Greece from October 2 to 13.

Conducted by Confédération Mondiale des Activités Subaquatiques (CMAS), the championship featured 160 divers from 49 countries, including Italy, France, Colombia, Mexico, Russia,



Poland and Indonesia.

Ghailani set a new Asian record in the Constant Weight FIM men's category by diving 107m. "It took me many years to set this Asian record," he said proudly, reflecting on the hard work and dedication that led to this achievement.

Speaking to *Muscat Daily* from Greece, Ghailani noted that this feat has come as the 2025 season approaches. His determination and focus propelled him to success and raise the Omani flag on the international stage.

OCT 21

Latecomers to be severely penalised

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Ministry of Labour (MoL) has introduced new regulations to manage complaints and grievances in the private sector. The move – under Ministerial Decision No 618/2024 issued by H E Dr Mahad bin Saeed Baowain, Minister of Labour – abides by the mandate laid out in Royal Decree No 53/2023.

For employers with 25 or more workers, the new rules require them to prepare a list of penalties and conditions to impose these. Employers are allowed to introduce additional violations and penalties after MoL approval. Enforcement of penalties is the responsibility of the employer or their legal representatives.

The penalties outlined include written warnings for minor violations, wage deduction of up to five days for repeated infractions, temporary suspension from work, and immediate termination without compensation for serious misconduct, as specified by the decision.

For employers with 50 or more workers, MoL mandates development of a formal system for managing complaints and grievances based on outlined procedures. Specific rules have been introduced to address employee tardiness. A worker arriving up to 15 minutes late without a valid reason will receive a written warning.

For further late arrivals, the following penalties apply: 5% deduction from daily wage for the second instance, 10% for the third and 20% for the fourth.

If an employee is late by 30 to 60 minutes without permission or an acceptable excuse, the first instance will result in 50% deduction from daily wage. For the second occurrence, 75% will be deducted and for the third instance, one full day's wage will be deducted. The fourth occurrence of tardiness will result in deduction of one and a half days' wages.

The new regulations cover penalties for misconduct including minor assault on colleagues, accepting bribes and sleeping during work hours. In these cases, wage deduction can range from one to five days, depending on the severity and frequency of violation. Dismissal is possible for repeated offences.

Employees found to be under the influence of alcohol or drugs during working hours may be dismissed without entitlement to end-of-service benefits. Smoking in prohibited areas will incur wage deductions, with repeat offenders facing potential dismissal.

Employers are required to notify workers in writing before any penalty is imposed and must give employees an opportunity to present their defence.

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NOV 12

Oman's first satellite OL-1 marks new era in space tech



Our Correspondent
Muscat

In a landmark achievement, Oman launched its first home-grown satellite - OL-1 - on Monday from China, marking the sultanate's official entry in the field of space technology.

Designed by Oman Lens, the satellite is the first Omani satellite registered internationally with the

Telecommunication Union and equipped with AI to advance remote sensing and Earth observation.

Launch of OL-1 from China is part of the sultanate's strategic push towards advanced technological development. Oman's first optical satellite with AI computing capabilities, it is the foundation of a planned constellation of satellites that will support the sultanate's data-driven national development initiatives.

Equipped for real time image capture and analysis, its sensors are engineered to monitor Oman's landscapes, infrastructure and natural resources with high precision.

In a post on X, the Embassy of Oman in China said OL-1 was 'successfully launched in China through strategic partnerships between Oman Lens, Star Vision Aerospace, and Mars Development and Investment Company'.

NOV 7

High earners to be taxed amid economic diversification drive

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman will soon implement a personal income tax targeting individuals with monthly earnings above RO2,500, according to Ahmed al Sharqi, Chairman of Majlis A'Shura's Economic and Financial Committee.

At the shura's annual media briefing on Tuesday, Sharqi confirmed that those earning over RO30,000 annually will be subject to tax under a new legislation, which is currently being considered by the State Council.

To gauge the potential impact of the proposed law, a comprehensive study considered both Oman's economic context and the need for diversified income sources. The tax aligns with the country's broader economic strategy under Vision 2040 aimed at reducing reliance on oil. "This shift is crucial for building a resilient economy," Sharqi said, explaining that the revenue will bolster development and social projects across the country.

In addition to discussing the tax, Majlis A'Shura presented its recent efforts, including recommending

over 29 amendments to various laws. It highlighted its legislative role, which includes evaluating, proposing and forwarding draft laws to the government.

Among its current initiatives is formation of a dedicated committee focused on addressing jobseekers' issue. This committee, tasked to align labour skills with market demands, is examining legislative and economic shifts affecting the workforce. Its efforts extend to assessing policies on vocational training to ensure jobseekers are equipped for Oman's evolving job market.

NOV 12

H M inaugurates military hospital



Muscat

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, the Supreme Commander, paid a Royal visit to Medical City for Military and Security Services on Monday and presided over the official opening of the Medical City Hospital for Military and Security Services.

Upon His Majesty the Sultan's arrival at Medical City, he was received by H H Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs and Chairman of the Board of Medical City for Military and Security Services, and Uday bin Hilal al Maawali, Head of Medical City for Military and Security Services. His Majesty the Sultan was also greeted by ministers, commanders and board members of the Medical City.

Following a speech by Maawali, His Majesty the Sultan witnessed a visual presentation on the progress of the medical sector and contributions of Omani doctors over time, as well as stages of development of the medical field in the sultanate up until the day His Majesty inaugurated this medical facility, which represents another national achievement for the Renewed Renaissance.

After that, His Majesty officially opened the hospital.

A film was screened before His Majesty the Sultan about the medical facilities and specialised departments of the hospital, as well as the added value it represents for the health sector in Oman.

His Majesty the Sultan also toured the hospital's departments and wings where he was briefed on the design. It was built to the highest technical standards to meet the needs of the medical services and integrated healthcare that it provides as per the vision of the Medical City for Military and Security Services and its national goals in line with Oman Vision 2040.

DEC 8

Oman crowned 2024 Socca World Cup Champions after thrilling penalty shootout

Muscat

In a keenly contested final of the Socca World Cup, Oman emerged champions defeating defending champions Kazakhstan in a dramatic penalty shootout on Saturday at a purpose-built stadium in Oman Automobile Association, Seeb.

The victory marked an important achievement for Oman considering it was the first time the tournament was hosted in the Middle East. The match ended in a 1-1 draw at full time, leading to a tense penalty shootout where Oman scored twice, while Kazakhstan managed only one goal.

Oman defeated Romania 4-1 in the semi-finals for a spot in the finals.

Forty teams clubbed into six groups - including US, Canada, Germany, Poland, France, England, Mexico, Argentina and South Africa - took part in the six-a-side football tournament from November 29 to December 7.

DEC 1

H M's Ankara visit forges stronger ties

Muscat

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik concluded his state visit to the Republic of Türkiye on Friday. A joint communique issued on His Majesty the Sultan's state visit underlined the deep-rooted ties between the two countries and their keenness to support cooperation in various fields of common interest, as well as boosting economic relations by augmenting the volume of trade exchange and encouraging joint investments.

The communique reads as follows: 'In response to an invitation by President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan of the Republic of Türkiye, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik made a state visit to the Türkiye on November 28-29.

'This is the first visit of its kind at the leadership level, reflecting the importance of the historical relations and close ties between the two countries.

'The meetings held between the two leaders underlined the deep-rooted ties between the two countries and their keenness to support cooperation in various fields of common interest.

'The two sides discussed prospects for developing bilateral relations, especially in the political, economic, military and defence fields, in addition to science and technology, education, cul-



ture, energy and tourism.

'The two leaders stressed the importance of boosting the economic relations between the two countries by augmenting the volume of trade exchange and encouraging joint investments. They also expressed their aspiration for the success of the 12th session of the Joint Economic Committee, scheduled to be held in Muscat in December 2024.

'During the visit, a number of agreements and memoranda of understanding were signed to

consolidate the legal basis for bilateral relations and enhance cooperation in various fields.

'The two leaders also exchanged views on the regional and international developments. They also stressed the importance of coordinating stances to back regional security and stability.

'They also stressed their commitment to working together to back peacemaking efforts and address regional and international challenges.

'His Majesty Sultan Haitham

bin Tarik extended an invitation to President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan to visit the Sultanate of Oman. President Erdoğan welcomed and accepted the invitation, looking forward to continuing the dialogue and boosting cooperation between the two countries.

'At the end of the visit, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere appreciation to the Turkish President and people for the warm welcome and hospitality extended to him and his accompanying delegation.'

DEC 4

Brussels hosts grand reception for H M Sultan Haitham on state visit

Brussels, Belgium

An official reception ceremony was held at the Royal Palace in Brussels on Tuesday for His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik on the occasion of his state visit to the Kingdom of Belgium.

As the motorcade of His Majesty the Sultan headed to the Royal Palace Square, it was surrounded by a group of motorcycles.

Before reaching the main square of the Royal Palace, a group of horse riders surrounded the parade. Then, a cavalcade of knights from the Royal Belgian Cavalry lined up on both sides of the path.

Upon His Majesty's arrival at the



Royal Palace, King Philippe Leopold Louis Marie, King of the Belgians and Queen Mathilde Marie Christine Ghislaine, Queen of the Bel-

gians were at the forefront of His Majesty the Sultan's welcoming party.

The Royal couple welcomed His

Majesty the Sultan, wishing him and his accompanying delegation a pleasant stay. Then, accompanied by the Belgian monarch, His Majesty the Sultan inspected the guard of honour.

After that, King Philippe Leopold escorted His Majesty to the dais of honour, where the Omani Royal Anthem and the Belgian Royal Anthem were played.

Then, the King and His Majesty the Sultan headed to the interior of the palace and posed for a commemorative photo in the reception area of the Royal Palace.

Afterwards, His Majesty the Sultan and King Philippe held a bilateral meeting.

Exploring economic collaboration

His Majesty the Sultan and Alexander De Croo, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Belgium, held an official session of talks at the Belgian Prime Minister's office, Le Lambertmont, on Tuesday.

The session discussed areas of the investment and economic cooperation, and means of promoting them to serve joint interests.

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